



The Alabama Veteran

“Proudly Serving America’s Finest”

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SPRING 2009

IMPORTANT DATES

- May 10 - Mother’s Day
- May 16 - Armed Forces Day
- May 25 - Memorial Day
- June 14 - Flag Day/
Army’s Birthday
- July 4 - Independence Day
- July 10 - SBVA Meeting

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Legislation nearing for first State Veterans Cemetery

Alabama is closer to having the first state veterans cemetery following a decision by the State Board of Veterans Affairs to authorize a state veterans cemetery program. The program’s future, however, is now in the hands of the State Legislature.

At a state VA board meeting in January, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Clyde Marsh proposed the veterans cemetery program to board members. The plan includes a proposal to locate the cemetery in southwest Alabama, which has a high underserved veterans population.

After hearing the plan, the board unanimously gave Commissioner Marsh the authorization to develop the program for the state veterans cemetery.

“The initial requirement that we need is authorization from the board to, in fact, proceed with a state cemetery, then we will require approval by the legislature to establish a law via a bill that would allow us to build and operate such a cemetery,” said Marsh.

Marsh said legislation is also required before the VA will grant federal funds for the construction of the cemetery, that is estimated at \$7.6 million.

State Rep. Randy Davis of Daphne, and Sen. Hank Sanders of Selma, have introduced legislation that will allow

the ADVA to apply for the federal grant and other sources of funding and assistance for the construction and maintenance of the cemetery.

House Bill 301 and Senate Bill 389 for the state veterans cemetery program were introduced in both Houses in February. The bills have received favorable committee reports and are ready to go to the House and Senate floor for a third reading and passage.

The state veterans cemetery will be built on 103 acres of land that the Baldwin County Commission has offered to the ADVA. The property is located north of Spanish Fort and near the Historic Blakeley State Park.

An estimated 71,000 veterans from eight counties live within 75 miles of the proposed location for the state cemetery.

The VA’s National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has agreed there is a need for a veterans cemetery in southwest Alabama, and in February, the administration approved ADVA’s pre-application for the federal grant.

If the legislation passes this session, the ADVA can move forward with securing the federal funds for the design and construction of the cemetery.

Marsh said the state veterans cemetery will extend the honor of burial to a significant number of veterans who have earned this benefit.



Commissioner's Corner - W. Clyde Marsh

I am delighted to convey that the state of our agency is good and continues to improve despite some personnel shortages as well as an economy that is in a significant downturn.

As with most state agencies, under these circumstances the ADVA must literally do more with less. I am particularly pleased, however, at how well department personnel have stepped up to the plate with a primary focus of caring for and helping our veterans and their families.

Many county veterans service officers have assumed additional itinerate office responsibilities, meaning more veterans to assist and more claims to file. In many cases, administrative support personnel have also stood up to take on more office responsibilities and information dissemination to keep the veterans throughout our county offices on an even keel. As the old saying goes, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going," and I believe this succinctly describes the ADVA and our employees who are proudly serving America's finest.

Although the state veterans homes tend to generate more interest for the media, it is our board members, elected officials and the county veterans service offices where the rubber meets the road for veterans' services and assistance.

Obviously, our state veterans homes deal with the most elderly veterans with some in declining health. This, by nature, requires strict oversight and focused nursing and medical care. It is also an area that is rife with emotion, remorse, guilt and frustration on many fronts. This formula can lend itself to grievances that at times are reported in newspaper features and television exposes. The ADVA understands this is a by-product of providing long-term care.

Our dedicated professionals at the three state veterans homes can stand tall knowing they are providing the benefit of the best possible care our nation and state can offer to our deserving veterans.

I am also pleased to announce the recipients of the first annual ADVA employee awards. This program was designed to show a small token of appreciation to those employees that are doing creative things to improve the conditions for veterans, enhance the image of the department, and generally going above and beyond what is required

of them in the performance of their job on a routine and consistent basis. The 2009 ADVA award winners are:

Veterans Service Officer of the Year

Cindy Michaud, Lee County VSO

Administrative Support Assistant of the Year

Kathy Floyd, Marshall County ASA

Commissioner's Excellence Award

Sean Law - Houston County VSO

Darrell Smith - Acting Director of Claims

I congratulate this year's award recipients for a job well done. I also regret that the ADVA has a limited number of awards to present, because I know there are many more employees who deserve recognition. However, the department's region managers will continue to nominate VSO's and ASA's annually in accordance with the ADVA awards program guidelines.

As our nation prepares for a potential swine flu pandemic, we must remain vigilant and take precautionary measures to protect ourselves, our families and the veterans we serve. Our military and emergency management training dictates that we should always prepare for the worse and hope for the best. I am confident that the Center for Disease Control (CDC), state health and emergency management organizations are taking the appropriate measures to protect our population - non-veterans and veterans alike. I want to stress caution and a common sense approach during this period of susceptibility. Consider reducing your interaction at public gatherings; take precautions to avoid catching or spreading germs by covering your mouth when sneezing or coughing; wash your hands more frequently with a hand sanitizer; and see a physician if you develop flu like symptoms.

In closing, I encourage our veterans advocates in the ADVA to keep up the good work, and to remember that you are making a difference in someone's life.

Around the State

Veterans Day at the Legislature

At the opening of the State Legislative session on Feb. 19, 2009, legislators took time to recognize and honor Alabama Veterans by hosting the inaugural "Veterans Day at the Legislature."

Sen. Lowell Barron arranged a "Veterans' Day at the Legislature" to give state lawmakers the opportunity to thank Alabama Veterans for their service. In addition to recognizing those who have served in uniform, the Senate passed several bills to honor veterans, including authorizing the display of POW-MIA flags at state buildings, parks and rest areas; exempting retired soldiers from license taxes and registration fees for one car; allowing spouses of retired military personnel or reservist to receive the distinctive tag for retired military; and streamlining the payment process for residents in state veterans homes.

"These bills are our contribution to you, but they pale in comparison to the contributions you have made to us and our country," said Sen. Barron. "We stand here in the freest nation on earth, not by accident, but by will, determination, hard work and sacrifice of the outstanding men and women in our armed service. You are the shining examples of what makes America so great."

The passage of bills by the Senate is in addition to veteran legislation passed earlier in this year's session. The Senate Democratic Caucus also expanded the education benefits under the Alabama G.I. Dependents' Scholarship program for children and spouses of those killed, disabled or missing in action in line of duty.

The education bill gives eligible dependents of veterans free tuition, fees and books at any state-supported college, university or trade school for five years, an increase of one year over current Alabama law.

"This was the first time in my tenure we have had a veterans day in the Legislature," said retired Navy Rear Adm. Clyde Marsh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. "It was a reflection of tremendous respect and concern by our elected representatives. Above all, good legislation was passed to improve conditions for the veterans of Alabama. We owe a debt of thanks to Sen. Barron for arranging the day and leading efforts on the senate floor."

During the session, the Senate Democratic Caucus also passed legislation creating a new car tag for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan. The bill passed the Senate and goes to the House for vote.

The Ft. Payne Times Journal contributed to this article.



Volunteers Sought for Veterans Golden Age Games

The Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center is seeking volunteers for its National Veterans Golden Age Games, to be held in Birmingham June 1-5.

Military veterans 55 years or older who receive health care at any VA medical facility are invited to compete. Competitive events include swimming, bicycling, golf, shot put, discus, 10-meter air rifle, table tennis, dominoes and more.

Each event has seven age categories, and veterans with visual impairments and those who use wheelchairs may compete in visually impaired or wheelchair divisions. Volunteers are needed to help with events, entertainment and awards.

For more information contact Jeffrey Hester, VA coordinator, at 205-558-4744 or Patricia Fetzer, donation and volunteer coordinator, at 205-933-4396.

VA will add new centers in 2009

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will add additional Community-based Veterans Centers beginning in the fall of 2009.

The VA will locate one of the new Vet Centers in Alabama's Madison County. When the center opens next year, military combat veterans in the area will have more access to readjustment counseling and other services. The new Alabama facility will be one of 39 new Vet Centers nationwide added to 232 that VA operates now. Three Veterans Centers in Alabama are located at Birmingham, Mobile and Montgomery.

Services are available at no cost to veterans who experienced combat during any war era. Veterans can locate a Community-based Veterans Center in their area by calling the VA's toll free service number at 800-827-1000, or on the internet at www2.va.gov/directory/.

Around the State



Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Clyde Marsh extends his gratitude to Doris Norred for her husband's service and heroism during WWII.

WWII Veteran hero honored with the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor

GREENVILLE, Ala. – Almost sixty-six years after leading a dangerous, but successful, B-26 bombing mission over Sicily in 1943, the U.S. Air Force posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor to World War II Veteran Capt. William S. Norred of Pine Apple, Ala.

Lt. Gen. Allen G. Peck, Commander of Air University in Montgomery, presented the award to Capt. Norred's wife, Doris Norred, at a ceremony April 13, 2009, in Greenville.

Capt. Norred was awarded the DFC with Valor for heroism while participating in aerial flight during WWII. On June 15, 1943, while serving as both a flight leader and formation commander of a B-26 squadron, he was leading a mission over Rizzo Airdrome in Sicily when his plane was damaged by intense anti-aircraft fire. Masterfully keeping his B-26 under control, Capt. Norred led his formation through evasive action and completed a devastating bombardment of his target. Shortly thereafter, 12 enemy fighters attacked the unescorted bombers, but Capt. Norred skillfully outmaneuvered them and five of the hostile aircraft were destroyed.

Peck said the DFC with Valor was not given out lightly. He cited the criteria for the award for heroism must involve voluntary action in the face of danger and be well above

the actions performed by others engaged in similar flight operations.

"Capt. Norred exemplified the Air Force's core values of integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do," said Peck. Peck added that the award represented "justice delayed, but justice done in the end".

Joining Peck at the ceremony was retired Navy Rear Adm. Clyde Marsh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. "Capt. Norred was an American Airman with a mission to fly, fight and win. He was faithful to his proud heritage, upheld the tradition of honor, and left a legacy of valor," said Marsh.

Before Capt. Norred's death at the age of 91 last year, the Butler County Veterans Service Office in Greenville contacted the Air Force with a request to review his service records to determine his eligibility for the DFC. On Dec. 10, 2008, the Air Force honored Capt. Norred for his heroism in WWII by approving the award.

On behalf of the city, Greenville Mayor Dexter McLendon, presented Mrs. Norred with a Certificate of Memory for her husband's bravery and service to his country.

Doris Norred summed up her and her family's appreciation for her husband's award with two words – "thank you".



Capt. William S. Norred's WWII uniform, medals and photos of him in service were displayed at his Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor ceremony.

Around the State

Toy Drive Brings Cheer to Children of Deployed Troops

More than 2,100 children throughout Alabama received toys for Christmas through the 2009 toy drive organized by Governor Bob Riley's office and the Hoover Fire Department.

Each year for the last five years, the Governor's Operation Grateful Heart program and the Hoover Fire Department teamed up and collected donated toys and distributed them to children who had parents serving in the military away from home at Christmas.

"This effort brings joy to children all across Alabama. Many wake up on Christmas morning missing their mom or dad because they're called away to protect America. Others belong to families that are going through tough times," Governor Riley said.

Among the groups that helped collect donated toys this year were the Alabama Department of Children's Affairs, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, AIDT and the Group Mourning to Morning.

Volunteers from Maxwell Air Force Base, the Sunshine Center, the Family Guidance Center in Montgomery and the Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives worked at the State Capitol to organize the donated toys and made sure they got to the right children.



Gov. Bob Riley and members of the Hoover Fire Department were on hand at the State Capitol in Dec. 2008 to thank organizations for donating Christmas toys to some 2,100 children of military families in Alabama.

VA Clinic opens in Childersburg

Federal officials opened a new veterans clinic in Childersburg in February that serves veterans from five counties: Talladega, Coosa, Clay, Calhoun and Tallapoosa.

Approximately 35,000 veterans live in that area, and until now, many of those seeking medical care had to travel to Birmingham for treatment.

The new Childersburg clinic has 10 exam rooms and is capable of supporting two primary-care teams, each consisting of a physician, nurse and clerk. The clinic also provides mental health support and lab services.

Birmingham VA Medical Center director Rica Lewis-Payton says it's important to provide medical services in the communities where veterans live.

Veterans at Tut Fann hail work of the Patriot Guard

The Patriot Guard rode into Huntsville Feb. 6, 2009, but this time showing smiles instead of tears.

The residents at Tut Fann Veterans Home honored the motorcycle troop with a plaque and a party to say thanks for the guard's work with fallen Soldiers and Veterans.

"The recognition is nice, but it's not why we do it," said Gary Smith, a rider with the Patriot Guard.

Smith said riding with the troop is a tough job, but it's important to honor the fallen.

He estimated there are several hundred riders in North Alabama with a core group that's able to attend most functions.

"We want to be a barrier between protest groups and grieving families," Smith said. "We believe Soldiers should be honored."

Smith, a Desert Storm Veteran and retired Army sergeant, has been with the Patriot Guard for about a year and a half.

He said the Feb. 6 ceremony was "another opportunity to come visit with the residents at Tut Fann.

"We appreciate the recognition today, but always remember, it's not about us, it's about you," he told the Veterans.

The inscription on the plaque presented to the Patriot Guard read, "You joined us in happy times, you helped us through sad times, and you will go with us at the end of our time. A better friend could not be found."

"You guys are our heroes," Smith said to the residents.

Huntsville Times Staff Writer Victoria Cumbow contributed this story.

Around the State

Fifth Annual Blue Star Salute planned for Memorial Day



MONTEVALLO - Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom will be honored during the Fifth Annual Blue Star Salute this Memorial Day at The American Village in Montevallo on May 25, 2009.

Considered as the state's largest Memorial Day event, the theme for the 2009 Blue Star Salute is *Duty, Honor, Country*.

The day of remembrance for our nation's fallen will begin with an Honors Ceremony at the Alabama National Cemetery, which is located just south and adjacent to The American Village. The ceremony begins at 9 a.m. and will include a memorial wreath laying, rifle salute and the solemn playing of Taps.

After the Honors Ceremony, the day's events at The American Village will begin at 10:30 a.m. with a music prelude by the Alabama National Guard's 151st Army Band followed by the keynote address by Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, Chief of the U.S. Army Reserve.

Alabama's wounded warriors will be honored and a "Gold Star Salute" will pay tribute to Alabama's Fallen Heroes with a Wreath Laying Ceremony.

Throughout the day, The American Village will perform reenactments that will take the public back in time to some of America's most historical moments that led to, protected and preserved our nation's liberty. To commemorate the Memorial Day's theme, the public will hear an oration of General Douglas MacArthur's famous "Duty, Honor, Country" speech he eloquently delivered to the cadets at West Point on May 12, 1962.

For more information about the 2009 Blue Star Salute, go to www.bluestarsalute.org.

National Cemetery in Montevallo becomes hallowed ground

MONTEVALLO - The sounding of Taps and the tune of "Amazing Grace" briefly replaced the sound of bulldozers for the consecration of the veteran cemetery in Montevallo on April 9, 2009.

Clergy from various denominations conducted rites over a 12-acre tract that holds space for 1,000 caskets and 1,000 in-ground cremations.

When finished, the Alabama National Cemetery is expected to have enough burial space for 50 years. The first burials are scheduled to begin next month.

The consecration was an important and sacred step toward that date, said Quincy Whitehead, the cemetery's director.

"It's becoming a reality," said Bob Barefield, who heads the Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery, a volunteer group that provides support for cemetery activities such as the consecration.

"There is a lot of interest in burials at the cemetery," Whitehead said.

Chad Richmond, a retired Army major who lives in Pinson, said having a cemetery in Montevallo will make things easier for families of veterans in this part of the state.

This will be Alabama's third national cemetery. The others are in Mobile and near Phenix City. With the cemetery in Mobile not taking any more burials, families have had to go to Fort Mitchell in Phenix City to reach the nearest one, Richmond said. "We just didn't have a cemetery anywhere close."

U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus, who spoke at the ceremony, said it was fitting that the consecration took place on the day after the start of Passover, the day before Good Friday and close to Easter Sunday.

"They all share common themes of sacrifice and faith," Bachus said.

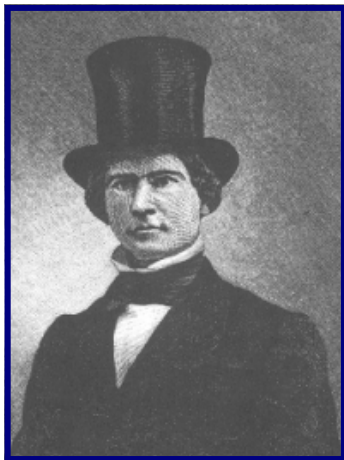
Bachus said he tells people the cemetery is a demonstration of our love toward veterans. "Alabamians have answered the call to defend our country in great numbers." Bachus added that the cemetery is also a reminder of the cost to preserve freedom.

Contributed by Malcomb Daniels, Staff Writer, Birmingham News

VA Extra

Poem Honors Nation's Fallen - Theodore O'Hara's "Bivouac of the Dead"

Although stanzas from Theodore O'Hara's elegiac poem, "Bivouac of the Dead," are inscribed on iron tablets found throughout some of the oldest units of this country's national cemeteries, there is little public recognition of this poet-soldier and his long-lived literary contribution to the memorialization of fallen troops. O'Hara's military service bridged the period from the Mexican War, whose action inspired the poem, to the Civil War, which led him to places where some of the first cemeteries were created. An elegy, or elegiac poem, expresses feelings of melancholy, sorrow or lamentation—especially for a person or persons who are dead. It may seem unusual that verse written about heroes of the relatively remote Mexican conflict was appropriated for the Civil War more than a decade later, but



"Bivouac" had captivated the attention of a patriotic nation and would continue to do so for decades to come. Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs (1816-92) recognized its solemn appeal and directed that lines from "Bivouac" grace the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery.

O'Hara was born in Danville, Kentucky, on February 11, 1820; thereafter his Irish Catholic family moved to Frankfort, Kentucky. Comfortable and able with academic study, his education was punctuated by accolades for his writing and ora-

tory skills, which prompted O'Hara to study law. By 1845 he was employed at the U.S. Treasury in the nation's capital. As a captain promoted to brevet-major, he saw combat in the Mexican War (1846-48), including the Battle of Buena Vista; he served again in the conflict with Cuba (1850-51) until suffering an injury at the Battle of Cardenas. For the next decade O'Hara's career returned to one of words, and he served as editor of the *Mobile Register*, *Louisville Times*, and *Frankfort Yeoman*, sequentially. Volunteering for active duty again in the Civil War, O'Hara served in the Confederate Army as a colonel in command of the 12th Alabama Regiment, and subsequently saw action at Shiloh and Stones River in Tennessee. After the war, he briefly took up residence in the vicinity of Guerrytown (Barbour County), Alabama, but he soon fell ill and died on June 6, 1867. Described as a handsome bachelor, O'Hara spent his life traveling from place to place and never owned a home. This itinerant lifestyle of journalist and soldier may have masked frequent bouts with depression and an addiction to alcohol, according to some accounts. Upon his death at age 47, O'Hara's body was initially buried in Columbus, Georgia.

Although O'Hara wrote "Bivouac" as a remembrance of the many casualties suffered by the Second Kentucky Regiment of Foot

Volunteers who fought at the Battle of Buena Vista, the verses was produced as part of the dedication ceremony of Foot Volunteers who fought at the Battle of Buena Vista, the verse was produced as part of the dedication ceremony for a monument erected to these men long after the confrontation. The battle of February 22-23, 1847, saw 4,759 Americans under the command of General Zachary Taylor repulse an estimated force of 18,000 Mexicans led by President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. More Americans fell at Buena Vista—267 killed and 456 wounded—than any other battle in the war, which concluded with the United States compensating Mexico for the ceded Texas, and New Mexico and California becoming U.S. territories.

The fallen American officers were buried in the state cemetery at Frankfort, Kentucky, on July 20, 1847, at the behest of an eager public and state legislature that pushed for their reinternment in native soil. This gathering was reportedly attended by 20,000 persons, but it did not include O'Hara, as he did not return to the city until fall 1848. That same year, the Kentucky legislature appropriated \$15,000 for a military monument in the state cemetery, to be inscribed with the names of significant battles and the citizens who fell in them. The banded Italian marble shaft was erected in 1950. Although it is wishful history that O'Hara may have read "Bivouac" as part of the dedication of the military memorial, this has not been documented. He did, however, read the poem four years later as part of a eulogy for the reinternment of Major William T. Barry and General Charles Scott in the same cemetery.

While O'Hara was editor of the *Mobile Register* in 1858, "Bivouac" was published in that newspaper in what is considered the original form; two years later it appeared in the *Louisville Courier* with the explanatory introduction: "Lines written at the tomb of the Kentuckians who fell at Buena Vista, buried in the cemetery at Frankfort." O'Hara apparently changed words throughout the verse quite frequently, and different versions of it appeared at different times. He removed the names of specific locations, for instance, to elevate the work as a more pure elegy. The single-largest change shortened the poem from 12 stanzas to nine stanzas by omitting the sixth, seventh, and eighth stanzas, and reconstructing the fifth one. The shortened variation is the one used by Ranck (1936), with the approval of the poet's sister, but the original longer version is the one found in Holt (1992), *A Promise Made* (2000), and it is the one most often cited today.

Pursuant to a resolution by the Kentucky legislation aimed at returning the "ashes of her brave," O'Hara's body was removed from Georgia to the "state military lot" in his home of Frankfort, and on September 15, 1874,

VA Extra

O'Hara continued from page 7

was reinterred there along with the remains of fellow officers from the Mexican War. His grave is marked by a tablet bearing the relief of a sword and scabbard encircled by a wreath of oak and laurel, appropriately located at the base of the Kentucky military monument of 1850. The reinternment included a reading of "Bivouac of the Dead" by Maj. Henry T. Stanton, a friend of the poet-soldier who observed, "O'Hara, in giving utterance to this song, became at once the builder of his own monument and the author of his won epitaph."

Before "Bivouac" found its way into the designed landscapes of the national cemeteries, it may have had as its forbear crudely fabricated versions placed informally on the transitional landscape of the battlefield-turned-burial ground. According to one early O'Hara biographer, Kentucky historian George Ranck, "One stanza of it was inscribed upon a rude memorial nailed to a tree upon the battlefield of Chancellorsville. Another was engraved upon a military monument at Boston, Massachusetts, and still another adorns a memorial column that marks the place where occurred one of the most bloody contests of the Crimean War." By 1890, one visitor to a number of cemeteries observed: "Quotations from this one poem are repeated over and over, at the gateways and on painted boards at the turns of the avenues among the graves. In Antietam cemetery one might pick up and put together almost the entire production from these inscriptions."

The most frequently quoted passage of "Bivouac" is the quatrain at the conclusion of the first stanza: "On Fame's eternal camping-ground/Their silent tents are spread/That Glory guards, with solemn round/The bivouac of the dead." Use of the verse on McClellan Gate at Arlington and other national cemeteries may have been by order of Quartermaster General Meigs who was responsible for construction related to national cemetery development including the gates and superintendents' lodges.

The cast-iron tablets were fabricated at the War Department's Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois, in 1881-82.

Although many observers recognize the verse, the name of the poet is less familiar—and this may have been a deliberate obfuscation on the part of Meigs. The iron plaques provided to the national cemeteries do not credit any author for "Bivouac." The most logical explanation is that since O'Hara fought on the Confederate side, it would be unseemly to record his name in the cemeteries occupied by Union dead. The popularity of the verse, however apparently led many visitors to inquire about the source of the poetry.

Literary Significance

In contrast to the poem's anonymous expression in the national cemeteries, O'Hara was credited with its authorship over repeated appearances in the popular literature of the late 19th and 20th centuries. In 1875, Ranck described the limitless popularity of "Bivouac" nearly a quarter-century after it was written: "The hold of this elegy upon the popular here grows stronger and more enduring. It is creeping into every scrap-book (sic); it is continually quoted upon public occasions." The poem was a favorite in

the press over the years, borne out by its inclusion in publications such as *Littell's Living Age* (1866), *Library of Poetry and Song* (Bryant, late 19th century), *Our Children's Songs* (Harpers), and *The Century* (1890), as well as finding its way onto Decoration Day post cards of the early 20th century.

One rare public disagreement with "Bivouac" is articulated in *The Century* magazine (1890) by writer Rossiter Johnson, who had political objections to the poem's origin because it celebrated "volunteer soldiers who had lost their lives in an unholy war, that with Mexico." Remarking that "a stroll through any of our national cemeteries will suggest the idea that the War Department has official knowledge of but one elegiac poem," he proposed that the government expand its literary references to more appropriate occasions and poets—many of whom fell in battle during the more righteous Civil War. Among his recommendations for alternative martial literature originating in the Civil War experience were: Henry Howard Brownell's "Bay Fight," Benjamin F. Taylor's "Cavalry Charge," Edmund Clarence Stedman's "Gettysburg," Reverend Samuel P. Merrill, "Dirge for a Soldiers," as well as works by lesser-known poets such as Theodore P. Cook and Michael O'Connor.

"Bivouac of the Dead" is one of two great elegiac poems for which O'Hara is remembered, and in a literary context it has been compared to Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Psalm of Life," William Collins' "How Sleep the Brave," and Charles Wolfe's "The Burial of John Moore." According to Ranck, O'Hara was America's first "elegiac poet of acknowledged genius."

The endurance of "Bivouac" through most of the 20th century is evidenced by its inclusion in anthologies and poetry collections. Today, this verse is found on McClellan Gate, 1879, the original entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, and in Antietam National Cemetery. The National Cemetery Administration today features the first stanza of "Bivouac of the Dead" in all existing cemeteries as well as national cemeteries under development.

"Bivouac of the Dead"

First Stanza

*The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldier's last tattoo;
No more on life's parade shall meet
That brave and fallen few.
On Fame's eternal camping-ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And Glory guards, with solemn round,
The bivouac of the dead.*

News to Use

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Post 9/11 G.I. Bill Effective August 1, 2009

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is the most comprehensive education benefits package since the original GI Bill was signed into law in 1944. Individuals who are eligible for the new benefit may begin using the benefit August 1, 2009, for training that begins on or after that date.

Basic Eligibility

Only active duty service performed after September 10, 2001, may be considered for determining eligibility for this new benefit. To be eligible, a service member or veteran must have served at least 90 aggregate days on active duty. However, individuals honorably discharged for a service-connected disability who served 30 continuous days after September 10, 2001, may also establish eligibility.

Basic Benefits

The maximum basic benefit provides the cost of tuition and fees, not to exceed the most expensive in-state undergraduate tuition at a public institution of higher learning in the state you are attending school; monthly housing allowance equal to the basic allowance for housing payable to an E-5 with dependents, in the same zip code as the school; and yearly books and supplies stipend of up to \$1,000 per year.

The maximum basic benefit is earned after serving an aggregate of 36 months of active duty service or after 30 days of continuous service for those individuals who were discharged for a service-connected disability. Individuals serving between 90 days and 36 months of aggregate active duty service will be eligible for a percentage of the maximum benefit.

The percentage level ranges from 40% of the basic benefit for those whose service is between 90 days and 6 months to 90% for those who served between 30 and 36 months. For example, an individual with 5 months of qualifying service could receive 40% of the tuition benefit, 40% of the monthly housing allowance, and a maximum of \$400 books and supplies stipend.

For those individuals entitled to the maximum tuition and fee benefit and whose tuition and fees exceed the highest in-state undergraduate tuition at a public institution (i.e. graduate training or training at a private institution), the amount payable is equal to the highest in-state undergraduate tuition at a public institution, unless benefits under the Yellow Ribbon provision apply.

Individuals will generally receive 36 months of full-time education benefits. This should allow an individual to receive benefits for a four-year undergraduate degree based on a nine-month academic year, however, individuals may continue to receive benefits for approved training at an institution of higher learning (degree granting institution), including graduate training, provided they have remaining entitlement.

News to Use

GI Bill continued from page 8

If eligible for more than one VA education program, individuals are limited to a maximum of 48 months of benefits. Those individuals transferring to the Post-9/11 GI Bill from the Montgomery GI Bill (chapter 30) will be limited to the amount of their remaining chapter 30 entitlement. Individuals will remain eligible for benefits for 15 years from the date of their last discharge or release from active duty of at least 90 continuous days.

The monthly housing allowance is equal to the military housing benefit rates of an E-5 with dependents. The housing allowance is based on the location of the school and will be sent directly to the veteran for each month of enrollment in school training at more than half time. Individuals on active duty, anyone training at half time or less, and those solely pursuing distance learning are not eligible for the monthly housing allowance. The maximum yearly books and supplies stipend is \$1,000 and will be paid proportionally for each quarter, semester, or term attended in a school year. Payment will be made to the individual during each term he or she is enrolled.

The Yellow Ribbon Program

The Yellow Ribbon Program provision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows institutions to enter into an agreement with VA to fund tuition costs above the highest in-state undergraduate tuition rate. VA will match each additional dollar that an institution of higher learning (IHL) contributes toward an eligible student's tuition cost, up to 50 percent of the difference between the tuition and fees covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the total cost of tuition and fees.

For more information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, call your county veterans service office, or visit the VA Website at www.gibill.va.gov.

Central Alabama Veterans Health Care Service improves patient appointment reminder

Veterans in central Alabama will soon see an improved change to the way they are reminded of their VA medical appointments.

The Central Alabama Veterans Health Care Services (CAVHCS) has redesigned an essential aspect of its patient appointment reminder process that will eliminate letters, save money, and is user friendly and informative for the veteran.

The new CAVHCS Patient Reminder Notice is a post card design with a color map of the VA facility; the facilities address, phone number and Website information. The notice also includes directions to the clinic inside the VA medical facility with specific information about the veteran's appointment.

In an April 2 letter, CAVHCS Interim Director Shirley Bealer, said the new Patient Reminder Notice is just one way CAVHCS is improving services for Alabama veterans.

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National VA Update

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki

Fellow Veterans,

My name is Ric Shinseki, and I am a Veteran. For me, serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs is a noble calling. It provides me the opportunity to give back to those who served with and for me during my 38 years in uniform and those on whose shoulders we all stood as we grew up in the profession of arms.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has a solemn responsibility to all of you, today and in the future, as more Veterans join our ranks and enroll to secure the benefits and services they have earned. I am fully committed to fulfilling President Obama's vision for transforming our department so that it will be well-positioned to perform this duty even better during the 21st Century. We welcome the assistance and advice of our Veterans Service Organizations, other government departments and agencies, Congress, and all VA stakeholders as we move forward, ethically and transparently, so that Veterans and citizens can understand our efforts.

Creating that vision for transforming the VA into a 21st Century organization requires a comprehensive review of our department. We approach that review understanding that Veterans are central to everything VA does. We know that results count, that the department will be measured by what we do, not what we promise, and that our best days as an organization supporting Veterans are ahead of us. We will fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for "...him, who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by redesigning and reengineering ourselves for the future.

Transforming any institution is supremely challenging; I know this from my own experience in leading large, proud, complex, and high-performing organizations through change. But the best organizations must be prepared to meet the challenging times, evolving technology and, most importantly, evolving needs of clients. Historically, organizations that are unwilling or unable to change soon find themselves irrelevant. You and your needs are not irrelevant.

Veterans are our clients, and delivering the highest quality care and services in a timely, consistent and fair manner is a VA responsibility. I take that responsibility seriously and have charged all of the department's employees for their best efforts and support every day to meet our obligations to you. Our path forward is challenging, but the President and Congress support us. They have asked us to do this well—for you. Veterans are our sole reason for existence and our number one priority—bar none. I look forward to working together with all VA employees to transform our department into an organization that reflects the change and commitment our country expects and our Veterans deserve.

Thank you and God bless our military, our Veterans, and our Nation.

Eric K. Shinseki



"We will fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for "...him, who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan..." by redesigning and reengineering ourselves for the future."

National VA Update

President's 2010 Budget Request Strongly Supports VA Programs

WASHINGTON—President Obama's first proposed budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expands eligibility for health care to an additional 500,000 deserving Veterans over the next five years, meets the need for continued growth in programs for the combat Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, and provides the resources to deliver quality health care for the Nation's 5.5 million Veteran patients.

The 2010 budget request is a significant step toward realizing a vision shared by the President and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki to transform VA into an organization that is people-centric, results-driven and forward-looking.

"Our success must encompass cost-effectiveness," Shinseki said. "We are stewards of taxpayer dollars, and we will include appropriate metrics to accurately gauge the quality of our care and the effectiveness of our management processes."

If accepted by Congress, the President's budget proposal would increase VA's budget from \$98 billion this fiscal year to \$113 billion for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, 2009. This is in addition to the \$1.4 billion provided for VA projects in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The 2010 budget represents the first step toward increasing funding for VA efforts by \$25 billion over base-line during the next five years. The gradual expansion in health care enrollment that this would support will open hospital and clinic doors to more than 500,000 veterans by 2013 who have been regrettably excluded from VA medical care benefits since 2003. The 2010 budget request provides the resources to achieve this level of service while maintaining high quality and timely care for lower income and service-disabled veterans who currently rely on VA medical care.

The new budget provides greater benefits for veterans who are medically retired from active duty, allowing for the first time disabled military retirees to keep their full VA disability compensation along with their retired pay. The President's budget request also provides the resources for effective implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill—providing unprecedented levels of educational support to the men and women who have served our country through active military duty. The new budget will support additional specialty care in such areas as prosthetics, vision and spinal cord injury, aging, and women's health. New VA Centers of Excellence will focus on improving these critical services.

VA Suicide Prevention Hotline credited with 2,600 "Saves"

As the military deals with a record number of suicides among active-duty forces, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki reminded Veterans and their families that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has an extensive array of services to help Veterans in distress.

"I urge Veterans and their loved ones to take advantage of our suicide-prevention program," said Shinseki. "Help for these heroes is a phone call away."

Since July 2007, VA has operated an around-the-clock suicide-prevention hotline that has received about 100,000 calls and has been credited with rescuing over 2,600 people. The number for VA's suicide prevention hotline is 1-800-273-TALK.

In addition to operating the suicide-prevention hotline, the VA has trained medical workers in suicide prevention, created suicide prevention coordinators at each medical center, and given primary care clinics responsibility for mental health screening.



The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Transportation, along with the Department of Defense, are combining forces to develop short and long-

term approaches to reduce motor vehicle crashes and their consequences among veterans, particularly those returning from the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Veterans' Safe Driving Initiative will involve both an information campaign and a strategic research plan.

Key target audiences for this information will be veterans, their families, VA health care and other staff, veteran service groups, state governments, and the business community, especially businesses related to automobiles and motorcycles.

The strategic research plan will identify priority needs for a long-term reduction in crashes. Experts in transportation safety, veterans' health and medical care, and public health are developing the strategic plan.

For more information on the VA's Safe Driving Initiative, go to www.safedriving.va.gov.

National VA Update

Tammy Duckworth confirmed for VA Post

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Senate on April 23, 2009, confirmed former Iraq war helicopter pilot Tammy Duckworth's nomination as an assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Duckworth will direct the Office of Public Affairs and Intergovernmental Communications. Among other things, the Illinois National Guard major will oversee VA's public affairs operations, as well as programs for homeless veterans.

"President Obama and America's Veterans now have Tammy Duckworth as their advocate and champion," U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said in a statement. "I know Tammy will bring the same level of commitment to the VA that she has shown in fighting for her country and representing Illinois Veterans."

Duckworth was injured when the Blackhawk helicopter she was piloting over Iraq was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade in 2004. In the attack, she lost her left leg and her right leg has since been amputated. She spent months recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, facing multiple surgeries, extensive rehab and continuous upgrades of her prostheses.

In 2006, Duckworth was appointed director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs.

Defense Centers of Excellence opens outreach centers for psychological health and traumatic brain injuries

WASHINGTON - The Defense Center of Excellence has opened a 24-hour outreach center to provide information and referrals to military service members, veterans, their families and others with questions about psychological health and traumatic brain injury.

The new center can be contacted around the clock, 365 days a year, by phone at 866-966-1020 and by e-mail at resources@dcoeoutreach.org. Calls are toll-free.

The outreach center can assist with everything from routine requests for information about psychological health and traumatic brain injury to questions about symptoms a caller is having, to helping a caller find appropriate health care-resources.

"We're providing 24/7 support to assist callers with questions regarding psychological health and traumatic brain injury," said Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton, M.D., director of DCoE. "Getting the best possible information and tools, hassle-free, will empower and strengthen warriors and their families to successfully manage what can be confusing and challenging circumstances."

"If we need to research a questions, we'll do the leg-work and quickly reconnect with callers," Sutton added.

More information is available at www.dcoe.health.mil

UA's Nursing School joins VA's Nursing Academy

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 five of the country's finest nursing schools.

The University of Alabama Nursing School is one of the five programs that is partnering with the VA's Nursing Academy.

With these new partnerships, the VA Nursing Academy will expand the number of collaborations between the department and nursing schools from 10 to 15.

"The expanded role of the Department of Veterans Affairs in the education of nurses will ensure the department has the nurses needed to continue our world-class health care for Veterans," said Dr. Linda D. Johnson, director of VA Nursing Academy. "The VA Nursing Academy

expands the teaching faculty, improves recruitment and retention, and creates new educational and research opportunities."

Five nursing schools will form new partnerships with five VA medical centers and join the VA Nursing Academy this year.

The VA Nursing Academy is a virtual five-year pilot program with central administration in Washington. It expands learning opportunities for nursing students at VA facilities, funds faculty development of VA staff for additional faculty positions to competitively selected school partners.

The VA's five-year, \$59 million program began in 2007 and today includes 10 partnerships with nursing programs from across nation.

National VA Update

VA Announces Recovery Spending Includes \$250 Payment to Eligible Veterans

WASHINGTON—The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will spend more than \$1.4 billion as part of President Obama's economic recovery plan to improve services to America's Veterans. VA's internet site—www.va.gov/recovery—provides current information about VA's work to deliver its portion of Recovery Act funds into the economy to benefit Veterans.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) enables the VA to improve medical facilities and national cemeteries, provide grants to assist states in acquiring or constructing state nursing homes and extended care facilities, and to modify or alter existing facilities to care for Veterans.

VA will dedicate ARRA funds to hire and train 1,500 temporary claims processors to speed benefits delivery to Veterans and pursue needed information technology initiatives for improved benefits and services. Funds will also be used to oversee and audit programs, grants, and projects funded under ARRA.

As part of the President's Recovery plan, VA will also make one-time payments of \$250 to eligible Veterans and survivors to mitigate the effects of the current economy. These payments will be issued as early as June 2009. VA estimates \$700 million in payments will be made to eligible beneficiaries as part of this measure.

To be eligible for the \$250 payment, VA beneficiaries must have received compensation, pension, dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), or spina bifida benefits at any time between November 2008 and January 2009. Also, beneficiaries must reside within the United States or Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, or the U.S. Virgin Islands. No application is necessary. VA will use its existing payment records to determine eligibility for the \$250 payment.

Beneficiaries will receive their payments the same way they receive their monthly VA benefits—either by direct deposit or mail. VA will inform beneficiaries and the public when releasing the payments. This payment is not countable in determining eligibility for VA pension or parents' DIC. The payment is tax-free.

Medical Journal Praises VA Electronic Health Record

WASHINGTON - A recent study in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* singles out the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for its successful implementation of a comprehensive system of electronic health records.

The study's authors, led by Dr. Ashish K. Jha of Harvard University, noted that VA's use of electronic health records has significantly enhanced the quality of patient care. They also found that only 1.5 percent of U.S. hospitals have comprehensive electronic health records; adding VA hospitals to the analyses doubled that number.

"VA hospitals have used electronic health records for more than a decade with dramatic associated improvements in clinical quality," the study's authors wrote.

VA clinicians began using computerized patient records in the mid-1990s for everything from recording examinations by doctors to displaying results of lab tests and x-rays. Patient records are available 100 percent of the time to VA health care workers, compared to 60 percent when VA relied on paper records.

The authors of the NEJM article are the latest to praise VA for its technology and commitment to patient safety. In 2006, VA received the prestigious "Innovations in American Government" Award from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government for its advanced electronic health records and performance measurement system.

IMPORTANT USDVA NUMBERS

- Education (GI Bill): 1-888-442-4551
- Health Care Benefits: 1-877-222-8387
- Income Verification and Means Testing: 1-800-929-8387
- Life Insurance: 1-800-669-8477
- Mammography Helpline: 1-888-492-7844
- Special Issues - Gulf War/Agent Orange/Project Shad/Mustard Agents and Lewisite/Ionizing Radiation: 1-800-749-8387
- Status of Headstones and Markers: 1-800-697-6947
- Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD): 1-800-829-4833

"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive how the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country.".....George Washington