



# Florida Veteran

## Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida, Inc.

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## Florida's 32nd Annual Vietnam and All Veterans Reunion

The date for the next Reunion is May 5th – May 12<sup>th</sup> 2019 at Wickham Park in Melbourne, Florida. The Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall will be at the park for viewing May 9th-May 12th. As most of you are aware, *this is the Nations largest Veterans Reunion*. Make sure to visit the Reunion Website at [www.floridaveteransreunion.com](http://www.floridaveteransreunion.com) for up to date information regarding the schedule of events, including the Wall escort the preceding Sunday, hotel listings, camping information as well as vendor applications.

Our 2018 executive board members are: Van Carter, President, Robert "Doc" Neitzel 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Ralph Earrusso 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Roberta Neitzel, Secretary, Jacque Earrusso, Treasurer and Big Al Diaz, Sgt of Arms.

### A few reminders to members of the coalition:

Nominations are being accepted for 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The floor will be opened at the October 13th general membership meeting at Daytona Beach Shores Hotel (formerly Lexington Inn & Suites) in Daytona Beach, Florida and will continue through the January Meeting to be held in Daytona Beach when the elections will be held. Installation of the Officers will take place that evening at the Annual Banquet and Awards Dinner.

Nominations are also being accepted for Veteran of the Year, Member of the Year, Organization of the Year and Business of the Year. **Nominations must be received no later than November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to be considered.** The Veteran of the Year will be voted on by prior recipients of this award. The

remaining three awards are determined by the Executive Board of the Coalition. **The nominations for these prestigious awards must be submitted in a written biography and submitted to Van Carter, President of the Coalition, to either the address listed on the front of the newsletter, or via e-mail to [spooky@ac-47.com](mailto:spooky@ac-47.com) or to Bob Neitzel, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President at [hdwizr7@aol.com](mailto:hdwizr7@aol.com) with a copy to Roberta Neitzel, Secretary at [hdwizr8@aol.com](mailto:hdwizr8@aol.com)**

The date and location of the January General Membership meeting will be announced at a later date. Additional information will be forthcoming on our website VVOF.ORG after the October meeting.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE 1<sup>ST</sup> VICE PRESIDENT

Another year is quickly coming to an end...where does the time go? As I write this message for our newsletter I unfortunately would like to begin with a very pressing issue to not only the Coalition, but to numerous other veterans' organizations throughout the country and yes, a vocabulary lesson. I begin with three words and their definitions:

- Membership** (noun) mem·ber·ship | \ 'mem-bər-, ship  
Describes the people who together make up a group or organization.  
: the state of belonging to or being a part of a group or an organization  
: the state of being a member  
: all the people or things that belong to or are part of an organization or a group

2. **Participation**(noun) par·tic·i·pa·tion | \ pär-,ti-sə-`pā-shə  
The action or state of taking part in something
3. **Comradery**( noun) com·rad·ery | \ `käm-,ra-d(ə-)rē  
The spirit of friendship and community in a group, like the *comradery* of soldiers at war who keep each other upbeat despite the difficulty of their circumstances

These three simple words and their definitions are extremely important as without them, we as an organization would not exist. Our membership and participation within the coalition is suffering like numerous other organizations throughout the Country. The VVA, Legion and VFW amongst others are enduring the same issue. I truly believe that without the first two vocabulary words, the third cannot not exist. Yes, we are all getting older and we are experiencing health issues, but our mission and meaning is just as important and viable as it was then.

#### **A little background and history of the State Coalition.**

The Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida, Inc., was organized in 1984 under the name Vietnam Veterans of Florida Inc. It was a coalition of independent Vietnam Veteran-oriented organizations to address issues affecting Vietnam Veterans and their families in the State of Florida and nationally. Since its inception the Coalition has grown to be inclusive and more open to all veterans organizations. In 2005 the membership of the Coalition voted unanimously to change the long established name to reflect that sentiment and to let others know we would be for **All Veterans.**

Cognizant of the need to promote awareness of issues and concerns unique to veterans, the Coalition serves as a single unified voice of our organizations with representation before the Florida State Legislature, the Florida Veterans Council and the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs

Conceived as a "Grass Roots" organization, the Coalition provides its member organizations the flexibility of retaining their own autonomous identity both as independent Chapters, and in affiliation with other Veteran organizations, while at the same time being able to benefit from an association dedicated to the concept of strength of numbers and unified action on issues.

Working together Member Organizations of the Coalition provide mutual support to each other for projects and programs, develop strategies and implement plans of action to address and resolve areas of common concern to all Veterans.

We as an organization have been trying to increase our numbers for some time now and I truly believe that we need to dig deep and determine a way to enlist the efforts of our younger brothers and sisters in arms. Yes, I am speaking of Desert Storm, OIF/OEF soldiers. We need to let them know that although they may be involved in their own organization(s) that we are here for them, that we are the ones that began the battle and we do not wish to have all our hard work and efforts be eliminated. After all, they are indeed the ones that should take the reins from us and continue forward when we are no longer able to fight the battle. They are the ones that will need to step up and make sure that generations of veterans after them will be educated and assisted through the VA process and that they will ALWAYS know that someone is there to watch over them. All I can do is ask that you return to your organization, discuss this issue and come back to us with your organizations thoughts and ideas how we can enlist the younger vets and put a plan into action. I would like to remind everyone that membership for the coalition is everyone's responsibility. Please take some of the Coalition tri-folds and hand them out to your friends or other organizations that you feel would benefit from being a part of our organization. Take a few minutes of your time to explain to them what we are all about and the benefits of being involved. End of vocabulary lesson.

The information we have obtained at the meetings throughout the year has been overwhelming (in a good way) and I would like to thank all that have attended and contributed to the discussions. I would also like to thank Florida Dustoff Association, The USA River Rats and The Vietnam Brotherhood for hosting our meetings this year. I know a lot of time and effort goes into hosting a meeting.

I would like to take a moment once again to stress the importance of disseminating the information to all members of your organizations that is provided by the Vietnam and All Veterans State Coalition at the General membership meetings or via e-mails. A good amount of this information contains pending Federal legislation that affects ***all veterans.***

There are numerous organizations that send care packages to the troops, but more so during the holiday season. I know that this is a busy time for all, but it only takes a moment or two of your time, while shopping for friends and family, to purchase a few extra items to send overseas. Let our Servicemen and Servicewomen be reminded that we support their efforts and sacrifices. Also please do not forget our children. Whether it be a child of a homeless veteran or a child whose family has hit hard times..it does not take much to pick up an extra gift to give a child a little happiness. Please donate to our transitional facilities or Toys for Tots throughout the State.

With Veterans Day approaching, I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for your service and hope that you partake in one of many events scheduled for this day and would also like to mention partaking in the Wreaths Across America event which is on December 15th. On behalf of the Vietnam and All Veterans State Coalition we wish you and yours a happy and safe holiday season and a very Happy New Year.

**Robert Neitzel**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Vice President**  
**Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida State**  
**Coalition**



## VVB NEWS

The Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard are HAPPY to say that they have a new home. Our new bunker is located at 2130 W. Kings St. in Cocoa. It is .7 miles west of Kay's BBQ and directly across the street from the Brevard County Schools Bus Garage. It is a perfect fit for us and we are now able to have all our stuff in one place once again after so many years. Thank you to all who worked on making it possible. An open house and awards ceremony are being planned so that everyone can come check it out.

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# FLORIDA DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION



**Dedicated Unhesitating Service To Our Fighting  
Forces**

***“So Others May Live”***

On behalf of The Florida Dustoff Association I would like to take a moment to say “Welcome Home.” The Florida Dustoff Association is comprised of Dustoff Medics, Pilots, Corpsmen, Donut Dollies, Med-Evacs and many whom themselves have been “dusted-off” from The Vietnam, The Gulf War and OIF/OEF. **ALL ARE WELCOMED AT DUSTOFF!!**

This year's officers are: Ron “Doc” Custer, President, Robert “Doc” Neitzel, Vice President, and Roberta Neitzel Treasurer, Nancy Church, Secretary and Doc Combs, Chaplin.

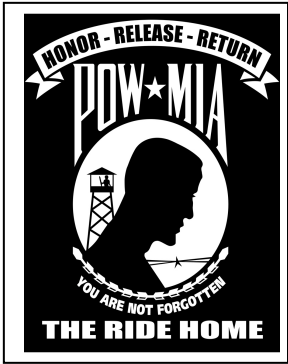
Florida Dustoff continues to send packages overseas to support our troops and also continues to sell military pot holders. All proceeds from the sale of these pot holders go directly to our efforts of supporting the troops. Once again, we will be participating in Wreaths Across America at the Edgewater/New Smyrna Beach Cemetery in Edgewater and have made donations this year to both Honor-Release-Return for The Ride Home honoring POWs and MIAs in Andersonville, The VVOF for Trunk or Treat in Edgewater and Wreaths Across America.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate this past year's recipients of awards in our organization: Member of the Year was Doc Custer, Certificate of Appreciation for Service to Dustoff - Ruari Voisey, Ralph and Jacque Earrusso, Steve Doan, Nancy Church, John Patton, Michelle Wakefield, Bobbi Jo Dino, Jerry Stickles, Rose Diaz, Big Al Diaz, Skip Aberns, Anthony Carter, Kiki and Van Carter. A plaque was presented to Florida Senator Dorothy Hukill. We also presented a plaque to the USA River Rats for Presentation of Colors at the January coalition meeting, as well as several members for their assistance during the meeting.

We are currently in the process of completing our website – [www.DUSTOFFFL.ORG](http://www.DUSTOFFFL.ORG), so please feel free to take a peek, but please remember, it is currently under construction.

**Robert Neitzel – Vice President Florida Dustoff Association**

**“WHEN I HAVE YOUR WOUNDED”**



**HONOR-RELEASE  
-RETURN, Inc.**

**3818 Litchfield Loop Lake Wales, Florida 33859**

[www.honorreleasereturn.com](http://www.honorreleasereturn.com)

In the everyday world of business, military, as well as local and federal government, we find a common thread that yields successful leadership. They *'inspect what they expect'*.

It is time to instill this expectation in the effort to account for America's Missing in Action/Unaccounted For. The goal: create accountability and efficiency amongst those who are responsible for the fullest possible accounting of America's Unaccounted For from all previous conflicts/wars.

#### **Expectations:**

**Declassification** – We **expect** declassification, without it, there is no closure of this Mission.

The Senate Select Committee (1991-92) noted in their 'Conclusion' that declassifying the files related to POWs or MIAs could have eliminated much of the controversy and that unnecessary secrecy breeds suspicion. In that same period; the President ordered the expeditious declassification of POW/MIA records from the Vietnam War and the Senate **unanimously** approved a Resolution calling for the declassification of POW/MIA material. Most of the records are still classified today. Senate Bill, S-120, has been introduced for the second time which literally spells it out, step by step, how to declassify without damaging National Security, without bias and providing punishment to those who do not comply. We believe the passage and implementation of the Declassification Bill is

the foundation to complete the task of accounting for America's missing.

**Data Base** – We **expect** the Data Base of all MIA cases, from which the Mission is derived, to be accurate and available to those working the issue as well as the Families. We have heard, many times, that the list of those unaccounted for is deceiving due to the number of deep-water losses included therein. Most of these deep-water cases are Naval and WW II but there are cases from all conflicts. To that point, we are not aware of the US Navy changing its policy in this regard: A sailor who goes down with their ship and is declared a casualty is not Missing or Unaccounted For, he is dead, KIA/BNR. The ship, no matter where it lay, is still US property and is classified as Hallowed Ground so that is their grave. (that is an International Maritime rule practiced by most Countries.). The List should be reviewed for such cases. Those that qualify should be recategorized to *KIA/BNR – Unrecoverable*. Families should be notified by the Casualty Service Office, the case placed on a separate list noting those who are classified as 'Unrecoverable'. Those remaining on the Active List for accounting should be prioritized by 'Possibility of Recovery'. NGO researchers should be openly allowed to be involved in the recategorizing process, recovery and accounting process. Confirmation that DNA samples for comparison are on file must be made. If not, genealogy work should be completed prior to field work on a specific case file from the Active List. With the Data Base list and the Declassification task completed - access should be available to all vetted and contracted NGOs, investigators, field recovery units and Primary Next of Kin (PNOK).

FYI – those who were buried as UNKNOWNs in US Military Cemeteries around the world, have been cleared to be exhumed. Recent rewritten policy/rules indicate the need for a percentage of up to 60% of assurance of identification before exhuming remains. With advancements in DNA technology, DPAA leadership has publicly stated recently that there will never be an 'UNKNOWN' again. A priority for the researchers as the Databases are evaluated is the **Last Known Alive Cases**. As mentioned in the historic events section, Last Known Alive lists were prepared during the war and prior to the repatriation of POWs during WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. As the databases for each war are examined and evaluated from the date of the incident for those still unaccounted for, researchers must investigate the previous lists of Last Known Alive personnel as well as all the data pertaining to them to develop a comprehensive and accurate list of Last Known Alive military personnel. Once the extensive research has been completed, proposals to repatriate these individuals or retrieve their remains must be developed for presentation to the President of the United States.

**DNA** – America should **Expect** the world's leading identification laboratory to use the most efficient and accurate means of identifying recovered service member remains. This scientific process has been available since the mid- 1950's – six plus decades- but only in the last few decades has it been available/used in the Accounting

Mission mostly as a 'Second Opinion' tool. At one point technology could only compare samples to the female side of the family, (mt-DNA?), then it expanded to both male & female (nu-DNA?) and now the capacity to go all the way out to 2<sup>nd</sup> /3<sup>rd</sup> cousin/nieces/nephews, male/female exists. This new level of technology has greatly increased the ability to identify accurately. WW II unaccounted for – it is next to impossible to find a Mother/Aunt/Grand Mother still living to compare samples with but Grand or Great Grandchildren can now be used with the latest methods of DNA testing. DPAA should make the DNA test a first task and standard measure in identification. We are not aware of many family members who care about archeological or forensic evidence. They just want to know – 'is that my Grandpa?' DNA is effective as well as efficient and if DPAA starts with DNA testing, the time to finalize an identification should be reduced dramatically having a significant impact on Operational Budget as well as the number of closed cases achieved per year.

**Budget** – We **expect** DPAA to be exempt from budget cuts and reductions. The DPAA budget should include the complete costs of the accounting effort to include; allowances for the Navy to carry equipment to SE Asia or the Air Force to fly remains of Unknowns from France to the CIL in Hawaii. These are hidden costs that should be part of the DPAA budget. **Military payroll** – while working for the DPAA, the active duty military payroll should be included in the DPAA budget. Public/Private contracts (NGOs) should be better utilized and have a larger percentage of the total operational/payroll budget.

**Personnel** – If those holding positions in DPAA cannot meet or exceed the goals they agreed to at employment, they should step down or **expect** to be relieved of their duties without delay. The last DoD IG report and the last GAO report noted the dysfunctional management that was also noted in the Cole report from 2012. It was recommended that an investigation be opened into the 'boondocking trips' authorized by leadership and executed by middle management. The terms "reimbursement", "charges", "termination", "court" were mentioned but we don't see where anything was ever initiated. During the interim period between DPMO/JPAC & DPAA (2014-2015) it was noted by PACT, that much of the then DPMO & JPAC senior leadership were due to retire or transfer out (which may have been an attempt to satisfy the 'suggested investigation' but the personnel are still there, and in some cases, at equal or higher levels of authority. The overall lack of results of the new agency reflect the retention of those managers who were at the heart of the noted infractions. It is said the definition of insanity is: *doing the same thing over and over again while anticipating different results!* DPAA needs a major change in personnel. Management in DPAA needs new vision, energy and dedication to mission completion. The organization must be goal oriented and pro-active, with an elevated level of integrity.

**Goals** – We **expect** an end date to this mission and believe it should be within twenty years or sooner. Any endeavor must have an established date by which

completion is expected and achievement of specific goals that are measurable. DPAA and its predecessors were never designed or intended to go on in perpetuity. But, that is exactly what has occurred and continues today. It is being run as though there is no required deadline, and the funding is limitless. The accounting activity is about to enter in to the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of government employees. These folks have closed approximately 12% of the cases noted by DoD, (82,500 divided by 93,500 = 12%). Whatever you believe to be the number of years we have been actively engaged in accounting, 20, 30, 40 years, multiply that number by 8.33 to anticipate the number of years at the current rate of production. The answer ranges from 166.6 years – 333.3 years until they close this mission. (Think about this number for a moment – 166.6 years' times \$112,000,000 per year (budget) = \$18.6 Billion). With proper goals, funding, leadership, declassification achieved, we should expect to close this mission in twenty (20) years if not sooner.

The Goal of 3500 cases closed per year times twenty years, equals 70,000 cases closed. But, remember – our current number – 82,500 - contains between 30 – 50 thousand deep water cases according to DPAA. So, we probably only have between 32,000 -52,000 cases that need to be resolved. That equates to 10-15 years at 3500 closed cases per year.

(recent communications, 1 June Conference call notes released 23 June 2017, from DPAA states 48,431 unaccounted for, are now noted as Unrecoverable, 34,096 are noted as 'possibly' recoverable).

**The six Expectations:** Declassification, Database, DNA, Budget, Personnel, and Goals are tied to the original nine points issued by Secretary of Defense Hagel and the DoD IG's eleven points. We do not wish to imply that these six Expectations are the only points for action, but they are the foundation needed to complete the mission of accountability in a timely and fiscally responsible manner. It is time for those with oversight responsibilities: House Armed Services Committee, Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense, Under-Secretary of Defense (Policy), to "**inspect what they expect**" and to provide the leadership as well as the tools to make the DPAA and its mission a success.

**Respectfully and on behalf of the Board of  
Directors,  
Jim 'moe' Moyer  
National Co-Chairman  
HONOR-RELEASE-RETURN, Inc.**



The Vietnam Brotherhood Inc. a Florida chartered Non Profit Corporation but with members Nationally, is committed to provide assistance to Vietnam Veterans and their families as well as work with all other Veterans and their families in the local communities as needed.

Should you have any questions about The Vietnam Brotherhood or like additional information please contact the CEO, Van Carter at [spooky@ac-47.com](mailto:spooky@ac-47.com).

## **VA steps up fight against plan to extend benefits to 'blue water' Vietnam vets**

Veterans Affairs leaders are increasing their efforts to sideline legislation that would extend disability benefits to "blue water" veterans from the Vietnam War, saying the move would set a problematic precedent for future complaints.

"We know it is incredibly difficult to hear from Blue Water Veterans who are ailing and ill, and we have great empathy and compassion for these veterans and their families," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie wrote in a letter to the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee last week.

"However, we urge the committee to consider the scientific evidence, impact on other veterans, and costs associated with this legislation."

The legislation, passed overwhelmingly by the House in June, would grant presumptive exposure status to nearly 90,000 veterans who served in ships off the coast of Vietnam during the war.

Veterans who served on the ground or on ships traveling inland waterways are already given that presumption of exposure to Agent Orange, fast-tracking their disability claims for a host of cancers and rare illnesses connected to the chemical defoliant.

Advocates have argued that individuals who served on the seas just a few miles away deserve the same treatment. But VA officials have argued that the scientific-based methods they use on such cases doesn't back up the blue

water veterans requests. In their letter last week and at a Senate hearing last month, they argued the presence of Agent Orange on those ships "cannot reasonably be determined" and the presumption of exposure should not be automatically granted.

Veterans who develop the illnesses can receive medical treatment from VA regardless of their benefits status, and can still file to prove their sickness is connected to their military service.

But the elderly veterans say VA has systematically denied any connection between their health and the chemical exposure for decades, even as they develop health problems that mirror veterans who served on shore.

Wilkie also argued that the proposed funding for the resulting influx of new claims — a new fee of VA-backed home loans — is unfair for other veterans and insufficient to cover the expected costs.

House officials had estimated the new fee would generate about \$1.1 billion over 10 years, enough to pay for the blue water benefits. But Wilkie in his letter estimates the cost to be closer to \$5.5 billion, including thousands more veterans who could also receive eligibility and additional costs for staff to handle the claims.

"The changes proposed in this legislation will have a greater effect beyond what we believe Congress intends," Wilkie wrote.

"The creation of a new statutory presumption that is not adequately supported by scientific evidence will encourage increased pressure on both Congress and VA to create and expand additional presumptions under a similarly liberal approach."

Wilkie's stance is at odds with his predecessor, former VA Secretary David Shulkin, who last fall stated that the blue water veterans "shouldn't be waiting any longer" for a solution and said that a reasonable decision on the issue "will not be guided by scientific evidence" because of the decades that have passed since the potential exposure.

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee officials have not made any public announcements on when the legislation may move ahead. House Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member Tim Walz, D-Minn., called the latest VA opposition to the issue unacceptable.

"Now, Blue Water Navy veterans who have been stuck waiting for 40 years could be left waiting even longer," he said. "Our nation owes it to these veterans to get this done. "I will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers to make sure that happens, even if we have to drag the administration along kicking and screaming to do so."

If Congress fails to pass any legislation on the issue this year, VA could still be forced to award the benefits to blue water Vietnam veterans based on an ongoing lawsuit in

federal court. Arguments on that proceeding aren't expected to move forward until later this year.

## 2018 Florida Legislative Session Legislative Session

The 2018 Florida Legislative Session concluded on March 11, 2018. Two veteran-related bills were signed into law by Gov. Rick Scott. Both took effect July 1, 2018.

**Senate Bill 100 - Identification Card and Driver License Fees for Veterans;** The bill eliminates the \$1 or \$2 fee a veteran must pay to have the word "Veteran" displayed on an identification card or driver license issued by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV). The bill also expands the forms of identification that a veteran may present to the DHSMV as proof of veteran status for the purpose of receiving the "Veteran" designation on an identification card or driver license to include: A veteran health identification card issued by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; and a veteran identification card issued by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to the Veterans Identification Card Act of 2015. Additionally, the bill prohibits tax collectors from charging a veteran the \$6.25 service fee for driver license services rendered pursuant to ch. 322, F.S., upon presentation of specified documentation proving that the individual is a veteran.

**House Bill 29 - Military and Veterans Affairs** - The Don Hahnfeldt Veteran and Military Family Opportunity Act: Generally, the bill provides allowances for military members, veterans, and their spouses. The bill eases professional licensing fees and requirements for certain military members, veterans, and their spouses, including: For the Department of Health (DOH) professional licensees, granting current DOH fee waivers for dentists, and providing an affirmative defense in certain unlicensed activity actions; For the Department of Business and Professional Regulation professional licensees, expanding license renewal fee waivers; For the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services professional licensees, expanding current initial licensing fee waivers and creating renewal fee waivers; For the Office of Financial Regulation mortgage loan originators and associated persons licensees, creating an initial licensing and renewal fee waivers; For the Department of Financial Services professional licensees, relief from pre-licensure insurance coursework requirements, and expanding initial licensure fee waivers; and For the Department of Education (DOE) licensees, creating certain initial fee waivers, granting a temporary certificate in education, establishing a pathway for veteran officers for certification as a school principal.

The bill specifies that laws and rules regulating apprenticeships and approved apprenticeship agreements do not invalidate any special provisions for veterans, minority persons, or women, and requires the DOE to lead

and coordinate outreach efforts to educate veterans about apprenticeship and career opportunities.

The bill allows Junior Reserve Officer Training instructors to participate in the Florida Teachers Classroom Supply Assistance Program.

The bill gives students who are children of an active duty member who is not stationed in this state, but whose home of record or state of legal residence is Florida, priority for attendance in the Florida Virtual School.

The bill designates March 25 every year as "Medal of Honor Day" and allows classroom instruction related to the values of the recipients of the Medal of Honor to meet certain instructional requirements on character development and the contributions of veterans to our country.

Lastly, the bill makes expands and clarifies the process for obtaining veteran training grants and instituting a veteran entrepreneurship program through Veterans Florida in the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Note: House Bill 75 was also signed into law, which allows Florida state colleges to waive fees for active duty members using military tuition assistance.

## Florida Veterans Support Line Expands Statewide at 1-844-MyFLVet

With a veteran population of more than 1.5 million in Florida, Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is pleased to announce the Florida Veterans Support Line, 1-844-MyFLVet, has expanded to every county in Florida.

Florida has the third largest veteran population in the nation. Through a simple phone call to 1- 844-MyFLVet, Florida veterans who are struggling with issues like PTSD, substance abuse, relationship troubles and personal finances can connect confidentially to emotional support and community resources, 24 hours a day.

As part of the statewide expansion of the Florida Veterans Support Line, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay created a revolutionary billboard appearing near MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. "Stitches of Duty" was stitched entirely of actual military gear donated by veterans.

"For service members, the billboard lets us know there are people who understand our struggle and there is somewhere we can reach out to for help," said U.S. Army Combat Medic and billboard contributor, Kari Padilla. "The donated items are so important to us as service members, and parting with them is our way of showing the community we're still here and we still need help."

When a veteran calls 1-844-MyFLVet, they will speak with someone who is trained to provide immediate emotional support. Calls are answered by a network of local, non-profit organizations throughout the state, including those that also answer calls for the 2-1-1 system in Florida.

Veterans can also be referred to both VA and non-VA resources, including non-profit organizations, community programs and local government services. Help is available regardless of discharge status. A list of the organizations answering calls to the Florida Veterans Support Line can be found at: <https://flvetsupportline.squarespace.com/about>.

"We are proud to have piloted the Florida Veterans Support Line in Tampa Bay, and now, based on the statewide need and positive impact of this service on our veteran community, we are thrilled to expand the resource statewide. Thanks to funding by the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, we will be able to more broadly serve those who have so bravely served our country," said Clara Reynolds, President & CEO of Crisis Center of Tampa Bay.

"We pride ourselves on being the most veteran-friendly state through our support of the more than 1.5 million veterans that reside in Florida. We are honored to support this initiative as part of our goal to ensure Florida veterans receive their earned services, benefits and support," said Steve Murray, communications director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. For more information about the Florida Veterans Support Line, visit [www.MyFLVet.com](http://www.MyFLVet.com).

About Crisis Center of Tampa Bay: The mission of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is to ensure that no one in our community has to face crisis alone. The organization is the community's gateway to help, hope, and healing, and is Tampa Bay's elite provider of crisis and trauma services. Responding to more than 160,000 requests for help each year, the nonprofit agency offers a range of evidence based programs designed to meet community needs:

- Gateway Contact Center (2-1-1: suicide prevention, crisis counseling, and information and referral services)
- Corbett Trauma Center (trauma counseling and sexual assault survivor services)
- TransCare (9-1-1 emergency and mental health ambulance services, medical van transportation)

For more information regarding the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, please visit [www.crisiscenter.com](http://www.crisiscenter.com).

## **A person born on Sept. 11, 2001, can now enlist to fight in the war that day spawned**

Military policy requires an individual to be at least 17 years old — with parental consent — to enlist in any branch of the armed forces.

So, while the nation commemorates the 17th anniversary of one of the worst days in U.S. history, today also marks the first day that someone born on or after Sept. 11, 2001, can enlist to fight in the seemingly eternal war the tragedy spawned.

Nearly 7,000 service members have been killed in the war on terror, and just last year, the annual total of war zone deaths climbed for the first time in six years as the U.S. increased its footprint in Africa, continued its support of

operations in Syria and Iraq, and maintained a presence of 14,000 troops in Afghanistan.

One outcome of the 17-year conflict, aside from the inevitable frustration that comes from fighting a prolonged stalemate which seems to yield more cliches than tangible results ("Mission Accomplished," "turned the corner," "pivot," etc.), has been the public's waning interest in military service.

A recently published report by the Office of People Analytics designed to gauge the appeal of military service among 16- to 21-year-olds shows that, as of fall 2017, interest in joining the military is at its lowest point in 10 years.

Staff Sgt. Kirk Wagner, a Marine Corps recruiter, told Military Times the perpetual conflict presents recruiting challenges the military has never had to deal with before. The war is "a big sticking point," Wagner said. "A lot of families, that's all they know of the Marine Corps. So, we try to get out there and promote, you know, yes, we were at war for 17 years. Yes, the Marine Corps did what America needed it to do. However ... we do a lot of humanitarian missions."

Finding other angles to promote military service is extraordinarily difficult with the ever-present elephant in the room. Data compiled in this poll of nearly 5,000 respondents reinforce just how tough of a sell the military currently is.

Public interest in military service surged following 9/11 and at the genesis of the Iraq war. Nearly a quarter of all young men polled following the attacks indicated that a future of military service was likely. That number stood at only 15 percent last fall, while women in this age bracket reported just a 7 percent likelihood that they would join the military's ranks.

Numbers broken down by age, meanwhile, show that current interest in military service plummets between the ages of 16 and 19, with 17 percent of 16-year-olds reportedly considering enlistment, compared to just 7 percent of 19-year-olds.

In terms of race and ethnicity, nearly 20 percent of African Americans in the aforementioned age bracket consider military service likely, compared to 14 percent of Hispanics, 8 percent of whites and 8 percent of Asians.

The Army, Navy and Air Force drew the most interest in the fall 2017 data, with 7 percent of respondents indicating those branches would be their likely destination. The Marine Corps, meanwhile, was chosen by 5 percent. Interest in joining the Marine Corps surged to 10 percent following the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Additional analysis in the report breaks down military interest based on other factors such as economic conditions, parental influence, ability to find a job, educational opportunities and more.



No matter how the numbers are broken down, however, they universally paint a dire picture of a military struggling to appeal to its most significant target demographic.

The lack of tangible progress over the course of 17 years is spreading war fatigue like wildfire.

Army Col. Rob Manning, a Pentagon spokesman, recently said officials believe “chaos and progress can coexist” in war-torn Afghanistan.

“That’s exactly what we feel is happening,” he said. It appears much of the rest of the country disagrees.

## **Watchdog report: The VA benefits backlog is higher than officials say**

The benefits backlog at Veterans Affairs is worse than leaders there have acknowledged, according to a new investigation from the department’s top watchdog.

In a report released Monday, the VA inspector general found tens of thousands of benefits cases omitted or ignored by department officials that “significantly understated the number of claims awaiting decisions for over 125 days.”

Investigators estimated that the reported backlog only covers about 79 percent of relevant cases, with a host of others misclassified, mistakenly excluded and, in some cases, only acknowledged as overdue after the files had finally been processed.

In response, VA officials said they are “reviewing how best to supplement or adjust reporting on the rating-related backlog.” New training and standards are expected to be put in place by the end of this year.

The VA claims backlog was a major scandal during President Barack Obama’s administration, as frustrations grew over the slow pace of VA’s ability to handle an ever-growing number of disability claims.

The backlog — the number of ratings cases that took more than 125 days to complete — swelled to more than 611,000 in March 2013 before being drawn down to about 70,000 in September 2015. Officials at the time credited a combination of more staff hires, new processing systems and new electronic medical records for the drop.

Former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki had made a public pledge to bring the backlog down to zero before 2016, but officials later acknowledged that was an unrealistic and potentially problematic goal. Some claims take longer than four months due to complexity or updated paperwork.

The backlog has hovered between 70,000 and 100,000 cases each week for most of the last three years, even as

the total number of claims applications have continued to rise. Last week, the backlog was 86,001 cases, according to VA records.

But the inspector general, citing a review of cases from the first six months of 2016, said about 63,600 overdue cases that required ratings decisions were left out of those records for unclear reasons, and nearly 10,000 more were incorrectly recorded by staff.

In some instances, VA staffers acknowledged lengthy waits on cases only after the files were finalized months later.

The report found that while the average days pending for basic disability claims now sits at less than 90 days, other more complex cases are taking more than 200 days to complete.

VA officials said much of the claims backlog rules and oversight has remained unchanged since 2009, and officials are reviewing other potential updates by the end of the year.

The full report is available on the VA inspector general’s website.

## **CECIL FIELD POW/MIA MEMORIAL**

Cecil Field POW/MIA Memorial, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to establish a National Memorial here in Florida that will serve as a historic and key destination site for the nation. Prosser, Inc. has created a site design for the National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum complex. Their innovative design will incorporate the more than 82,000 still Missing in Action since World War II. The memorial site, located at the former Naval Air Station Cecil Field, was originally dedicated on September 11, 1973 and currently consists of markers and associated trees for each of the 16 POW/MIA pilots (Hero’s Walk and Freedom Trees) stationed at NAS Cecil, a pavilion, a stage area, a starburst metal display of aircraft, a granite base seal of NAS Cecil Field and a chapel (Chapel of the High-Speed Pass). This property was given to the City of Jacksonville when Cecil Field was decommissioned in 1999. Since then, the existing memorial has been forgotten. However, the nonprofit organization was given a lease by the Jacksonville City Council and the Mayor’s office, and given the rights to develop, expand and maintain the 26-acre property. The organization is currently in the process of refurbishing the chapel back to its original use as a military chapel. The next steps include construction of the National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum.

The original “Vietnam War Memorial” at Cecil Field was originally dedicated by the families and service members who wanted to ensure these brave men would never be FORGOTTEN. Trees were planted for each pilot and

markers added with engravings. A driving force behind establishing the memorial was Mary Hoff, wife of MIA pilot LCDR Michael G. Hoff. Along with other spouses and family members, they assisted in making the memorial a reality. Mary was also instrumental in developing the universal symbol known as the POW/MIA flag. Besides the American flag, this is the only other flag authorized to fly over the White House and the only other flag that can fly on the same pole as the American flag. Undoubtedly, this flag has become a very important symbol for the POWs and MIAs, their families and friends, and the enduring cause that they will never be FORGOTTEN.

Phase I of the Cecil Field POW/MIA Memorial is underway with planning and design. The Chapel restoration is making great progress - the interior has been repaired and repainted, the entrance doors have been restored, and the naval aviator and naval flight officer wings have been placed back on the exterior. One of the next steps in Phase I is the Benefactor Plaza. Bricks will be placed along the Benefactor Plaza as shown in the Phase I site plan which may be located on the website <https://www.powmiamemorial.org/>. Bricks can be purchased "in honor of" or "in remembrance of" a family member/friend, or can be purchased with the donor's name. The bricks will be for any and all patriots - those who have or are currently serving in any branch of the U.S. armed forces, those that serve our country in other capacities, and those donors who are enabling us to establish this memorial to honor all our former Prisoners of War and NEVER FORGET those still Missing in Action.

For additional information regarding the sale of brick or to purchase a brick, please go online to the following link <https://www.powmiamemorial.org/support-the-memorial/memorial-brick-campaign/>

## **Lawmakers reach deal on next year's VA, military construction budget**

Congress could finalize the Veterans Affairs and military construction budgets in coming days after a conference committee released a compromise funding plan late Monday night, following two months of halting negotiations. The plan calls for nearly \$209 billion in total VA spending in fiscal 2019, a more than 6 percent boost for the department's budget and the first time it has topped \$200 billion. The VA budget has nearly quadrupled over the last 17 years, pushed higher not only by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but also expanded benefits for those who served in earlier conflicts.

Discretionary spending alone amounts to \$86.5 billion of that total, also an all-time high.

Debate on the funding package — which also includes the full-year appropriations for the Department of Energy, the

legislative branch and a few other agencies — had been stalled since July over a gap of \$1.7 billion in VA spending related to upcoming changes in community care programs. Democrats had pushed to lift spending caps and include the extra money as new spending, but House Republicans and White House officials roundly rejected that idea. They insisted that with the rapid growth of VA spending in recent years, the money to cover the difference should come from existing accounts.

In the end, the money was moved without adding to the appropriations total, a decision that will alienate some Democrats but is expected to appease much of the Republican majority in both chambers.

The VA budget includes \$71.2 billion in medical care services, including \$8.6 billion for mental health care, \$7.5 billion for homeless veterans treatment, \$589 million for traumatic brain injury programs and \$206 million for suicide prevention outreach.

Much of that was already approved as an advance appropriation earlier this year. Lawmakers included \$76 billion in advance appropriations for fiscal 2020, to prevent possible future government shutdowns from disrupting veterans care.

Lawmakers also set aside \$1.8 billion for VA construction projects next year and \$2 billion for infrastructure repair throughout the VA system.

On military construction, the compromise bill includes \$10.3 billion, a 2.4 percent increase from fiscal 2018 spending levels.

Of that, \$1.6 billion is set aside for military family housing projects, \$465 million for Guard and Reserve facility improvements, and \$352 million for military medical facilities work.

The compromise bill also includes language to prohibiting the closure of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station and blocking any plans to house military detainees at bases within the United States. That topic had been a friction point with President Barack Obama's administration, but has not been an issue since President Donald Trump was elected.

Lawmakers are expected to vote on the appropriations package later this week. Congress has until the end of September to finalize all of its government spending bills or face a possible partial government shutdown.

# **Marine gunny who kept his men alive at Hue City is one step away from receiving the nation's highest award for combat valor, the Medal of Honor.**

Article dated January 30, 2018

"We'd all be dead if it wasn't for the gunny," said a former Marine private first class who served under Medal of Honor nominee retired Sgt. Maj. John Canley.

Canley's actions during the battle of Hue City, Vietnam, in 1968 have him one step away from receiving the nation's highest award for combat valor, the Medal of Honor.

The former private first class, John Ligato, and others who served under Canley, then a gunnery sergeant during the infamous battle, have led a nearly 13-year effort to upgrade Canley's Navy Cross to the Medal of Honor.

A formal recommendation for that upgrade is now on President Donald Trump's desk.

Facing nearly impossible odds, then-Gunny Canley's undersized company with the 1st Marine Division headed into Hue City at the outset of the Tet Offensive.

"I don't know if you know the actual odds going in," Ligato told Marine Corps Times Tuesday. "The intel was off. They told us for several days there was only an undersized company of NVA [North Vietnamese Army], and historians have later determined that number at 10,000 NVA."

The city was completely under enemy control when Canley's unit entered the city, and the company commander was injured early in the fight.

"We didn't have any officers at the time because the company commander was seriously wounded right away, and I basically took charge," Canley told Marine Corps Times Tuesday.

From Jan. 31- Feb. 2, 1968, gunny kept his men alive by "sheer will," Ligato said.

Canley rarely slept during the battle, and was seen repelling multiple attacks almost single-handedly on his unit's position.

He was "literally charging machine gun positions with law rockets and hand grenades" on several different occasions, Ligato recounted.

Canley said, "For a leader, basically the only thing you're thinking about is taking care of your people and defeating the enemy."

Canley's efforts saved the lives of many of his men. "He's a national treasure," Ligato said.

Canley will be in attendance at Tuesday night's State of the Union on Capitol Hill. The retired Marine will be there as a guest of Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., who helped Canley and his men spearhead through bureaucratic red tape that left the gunny's upgrade in limbo for more than a decade.

On Monday, President Trump signed a bill lifting a five-year time restriction on awarding the Medal of Honor, allowing the upgrade to proceed.

Secretary of Defense Mattis still has to present the award and citation to Trump so that it can be signed and awarded to Canley.

"My love for the Marine Corps was leading Marines in combat and training Marines in that order," Canley said.

## **Watchdog report sounds alarm over military aviation readiness**

A government watchdog report released this week is the latest to sound the alarm over the Air Force and Navy's fleet of aging aircraft, vital planes that are often in no shape to fly.

The Government Accountability Office report surveyed five Air Force and seven Navy types of planes between Fiscal Years 2011 and 2016.

"The Air Force and Navy are operating many of their fixed-wing aircraft well beyond their original designed service lives and therefore are confronted with sustainment challenges," the GAO reports.

It found that nine of 12 aircraft fell short of availability goals in 2016. Availability overall declined for half of the planes from 2011 to 2016.

While the report points out ongoing problems dogging a variety of planes, the Pentagon opted to keep the actual number of afflicted aircraft out of the public eye, GAO reports.

"Specific details regarding aircraft availability and not mission capable status for maintenance, supply, and both maintenance and supply were omitted because DOD deemed this information as sensitive (i.e., For Official Use Only)," the report states.

When aircraft availability goals are not met, everything from training to operations suffers, according to the GAO. "The Air Force and Navy share a variety of sustainment challenges, including the age of their aircraft as well as

maintenance and supply support issues,” the report states. “The Departments of the Air Force and Navy spend tens of billions of dollars each year to sustain their fixed-wing aircraft, which need expensive logistics support, including maintenance and repair, to meet goals for availability.”

The services are implementing plans to improve the number of aircraft available at a given time, according to the GAO.

Flush with cash as a result of increased defense spending, military leaders say that they’re embarking on a “readiness recovery.”

Spearheaded by Defense Secretary James Mattis, the initiative seeks to reverse the degradation of all types of vehicles and gear brought on by a relentless operational tempo in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks and several years of reduced budgets.

How that will play out remains to be seen.

Navy and Marine Corps aviation leaders report promising signs of a turnaround but it might take years to regain the readiness rates the services once reported.

Less than a year ago, the head of Naval Air Forces, Vice Adm. Troy Shoemaker, told Congress that only half of the services F/A-18 Super Hornet jets were flyable, and that just a third could be counted on to “fight tonight.”

The GAO survey looked at the Air Force’s B-52 Stratofortress, C-17 Globemaster, E-8C Joint Stars, F-16 Fighting Falcon and F-22 Raptor.

On the Navy side, GAO assessed the AV-8B Harrier, C-2A Greyhound, E-2C Hawkeye, E-2D Hawkeye, EA-18G Growler, F/A-18 Hornet and F/A-18 Super Hornet.

While not all the aircraft faced the same problems, all 12 suffer delays in depot maintenance and a loss or impending loss of manufacturers or supplies, the GAO report states.

## **Big changes to the GI Bill transfer policy, explained**

While the Pentagon has placed new, stricter restrictions on GI Bill transfers for most active duty service members, in recent days it’s actually made transferring GI Bill benefits easier than ever before for wounded warriors.

Active-duty troops who have earned a Purple Heart for wounds in combat are now allowed to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their family members whenever they want.

As of Sept. 5, there’s no more six-year waiting period or requirement that they serve in the military for an additional term — changes that have advocates for wounded

warriors thanking the Pentagon and Defense Sec. Jim Mattis, a former Marine general.

“This change is consistent with Sec. Mattis’ longtime support of our nation’s combat wounded,” René Bardorf, senior vice president of government and community relations at Wounded Warrior Project, said in an email.

DoD announced the new policies for wounded warriors in the face of blistering criticism of its new GI Bill transfer policy. That policy, announced in July, will end transfer eligibility for service members who have been in the military longer than 16 years, beginning next year. In addition, it immediately barred troops who were unable to sign on for another four years from transferring their benefits. This included service members who could not continue their military service for medical reasons.

DoD’s new wounded warrior policy not only exempts the group from those changes — it also removes a long-standing requirement that they serve at least six years before transferring benefits.

“It’s the right thing to do by our wounded warriors,” American Legion spokesman Joe Plenzler said in an email, adding that the group had discussed its concerns with the Pentagon and is encouraged to see the change.

That’s a notable contrast from the American Legion’s reaction to the initial policy. The group criticized the Pentagon for implementing a major policy change without consulting the Legion or other advocacy groups.

Legion was far from alone in its disapproval.

The July GI Bill transfer restrictions have been hotly contested by lawmakers and veteran advocates. In a letter to Mattis last month, dozens of House representatives from both political parties called the policy “unacceptable” and called on the secretary to “swiftly reverse” the decision.

Upon announcing the exemption for Purple Heart recipients Wednesday, the Pentagon emphasized Mattis’ commitment to wounded warriors. Stephanie Miller, director of accessions policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, said in a statement, “Sec. Mattis has been clear, we must recognize the sacrifices these service members have made.”

This victory for combat-wounded service members comes a year after President Trump signed into law the Forever GI Bill, which significantly expanded GI Bill benefits for veterans, reservists and surviving military family members. Among many provisions included in the legislation was a portion that granted the full amount of benefits for Purple Heart recipients, regardless of how long they had served in the military.

“On that, our message was simple: If you took an enemy bullet or shrapnel for this country, you have met the service requirement — period,” said Aleks Morosky, national legislative director of Military Order of the Purple

Heart, one of the organizations that lobbied for the Forever GI Bill.

He said in an email that while the organization doesn't support "reducing or removing benefits from any veteran," he is grateful that the Pentagon's new GI Bill transfer rules won't apply to Purple Hearts.

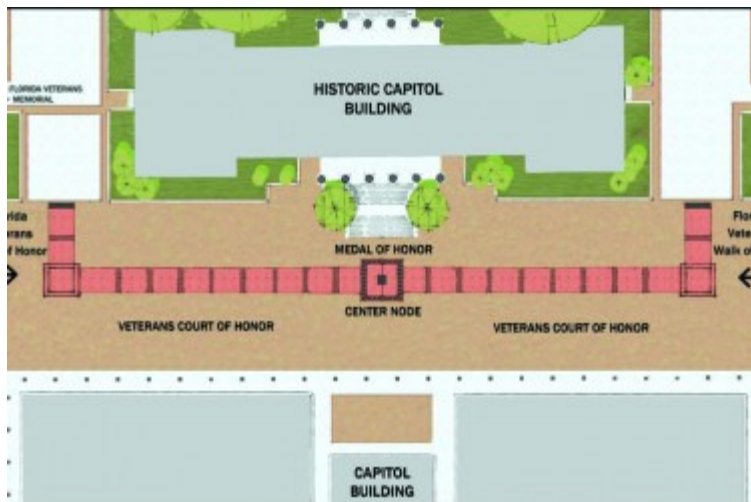
"For those wounded veterans who will become newly eligible for transferability, the impact is huge," he said. "Quite frankly, it could be the difference in whether or not their spouse or child is able to get their education without incurring a large amount of debt, or even at all. We anticipate that this decision will be extremely popular with MOPH membership and we are grateful to Secretary Mattis for this decision."

## Florida Veterans Walk of Honor

On November 12, 2014, Governor Scott placed the first memorialized engraved brick into the Florida Veterans Walk of Honor.

The Florida Veterans Walk of Honor measures 12 feet wide by 500 feet long, and connects both the old and new Capitol buildings, the House and Senate Buildings and the future home of the Florida Veterans Memorial.

The Walk of Honor will consist of engraved bricks which are being offered to veterans, families and friends of veterans. The proceeds from the sale of the engraved bricks will go to the Florida Veterans Foundation to help further the Foundation's mission to Serve, Support and Advocate for our Florida Veterans. To order your brick, go to their website <http://www.floridaveteransfoundation.org/florida-veterans-walk-of-honor> and download the [Walk of Honor Brick Order Form](#) or to submit online, click the Walk of Honor image in the sidebar to open the [online brick order form](#).



### Walk of Honor Brick Order

There are presently 1.5 million veterans residing in the State of Florida. Your engraved brick will be placed on a first come, first serve basis. Therefore, the first 25,000 engraved bricks will be

the ones placed in the Florida Veterans Walk of Honor at our State Capitol.

- Florida Veterans Medal Of Honor – \$200.00
- Florida Veterans Walk of Honor – \$150.00
- Florida Veterans Court of Honor – \$125.00

## Wreaths Across America Launches 2018 Campaign

**THIS YEARS CEREMONY WHICH IS TAKING PLACE DECEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup> THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY**

**REMEMBER** *our fallen U.S. veterans.*

**HONOR** *those who serve.*

**TEACH** *your children the value of freedom*

*Volunteers Will Place 225,000 Holiday Wreaths at Each Veteran's Head Stone in Arlington National Cemetery; Wreaths to Travel from Maine to Virginia via Convoy of 50 Long-Haul Tractor-Trailers*

Wreaths Across America goal is to honor every veteran buried at Arlington National Cemetery. This year the organization's National Remembrance Ceremony at Arlington will take place on Saturday, Dec.16, 2017. During the day, thousands of volunteers will place a holiday wreath and hold a brief moment of silence at each veteran's head stone — 225,000 in total. To fulfill its mission, Wreaths Across America seeks to significantly expand sponsorships and wreath donations by mid-November.

Wreaths Across America is a non-profit organization founded in 2007 by the Worcester family, owners of the Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, Maine. The wreath-laying effort began with a simple act of patriotism when co-owner of the Worcester Wreath Company, Morrill Worcester, donated 5,000 evergreen wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery in 1992. Today, the annual pilgrimage from Maine to Arlington National Cemetery is known as the world's largest veteran's parade with 50 long-haul tractor trailers from major sponsors making the week-long journey. "It is our great honor to place a holiday wreath on every head stone at Arlington to ensure that all of those buried on this hallowed ground are uniquely acknowledged and remembered for sacrificing their lives to protect our freedoms," said Karen Worcester, executive director, Wreaths Across

America. "For this reason, we are committed to coordinating this parade, creating and distributing the wreaths and securing the logistical support necessary to successfully execute an event of this scale. Our hope is that veterans across the country will view this event as a symbol of the American people's profound appreciation."

The parade will stop at schools, monuments, veterans' homes and communities along the way to remind people how important it is to remember, honor and teach — in keeping with the organization's mission to teach younger generations about the value of their freedom and the importance of honoring those who sacrificed so much to protect those freedoms.

**This year, including the effort at Arlington, Wreaths Across America will distribute 400,000 wreaths nationwide**, providing support for memorials in all 50 states, including special services at Valley Forge Military Academy, Pearl Harbor, Bunker Hill, Charleston Naval Shipyard, and a wreath for every victim of 9-11 in New York City, the Pentagon and Shanksville, Pa.

***Currently, there are 33 cemeteries throughout the State of Florida that partake in this event.***

**To make a donation to this program, for more information, or to locate a local ceremony to participate in, their web address is:**  
<http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org>

### **History of Wreaths Across America**

Morrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, was a 12 year old paper boy for the Bangor Daily News when he won a trip to Washington D.C. His first trip to our nation's capital was one he would never forget, and Arlington National Cemetery made an especially indelible impression on him. This experience followed him throughout his life and successful career in business, reminding him that his good fortune was due, in large part, to the values of this nation and the Veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for their Country.

In 1992, Worcester Wreath found themselves with a surplus of wreaths nearing the end of the holiday season. Remembering his boyhood experience at Arlington, Worcester realized he had an opportunity to honor our country's Veterans. With the help of Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, arrangements were made for the wreaths to be placed at Arlington in one of the older sections of the cemetery, a section which had been receiving fewer visitors with each passing year.

As plans were underway, a number of other individuals and organizations stepped up to help. James Prout, owner of local trucking company Blue

Bird Ranch, Inc., generously provided transportation all the way to Virginia. Volunteers from the local American Legion and VFW Posts gathered with members of the community to decorate each wreath with traditional red, hand-tied bows. Members of the Maine State Society of Washington, D.C. helped to organize the wreath-laying, which included a special ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The annual tribute went on quietly for several years, until 2005, when a photo of the stones at Arlington, adorned with wreaths and covered in snow, circulated around the internet. Suddenly, the project received national attention. Thousands of requests poured in from all over the country from people wanting to help with Arlington, to emulate the Arlington project at their National and State cemeteries, or to simply share their stories and thank Morrill Worcester for honoring our nation's heroes.

Unable to donate thousands of wreaths to each state, Worcester began sending seven wreaths to every state, one for each branch of the military, and for POW/MIAs. In 2006, with the help of the Civil Air Patrol and other civic organizations, simultaneous wreath laying ceremonies were held at over 150 locations around the country. The Patriot Guard Riders volunteered as escort for the wreaths going to Arlington. This began the annual "Veterans Honor Parade" that travels the east coast in early December.

The annual trip to Arlington and the groups of volunteers eager to participate in Worcester's simple wreath-laying event grew each year until it became clear the desire to remember and honor our country's fallen heroes was bigger than Arlington, and bigger than this one company.

In 2007, the Worcester family, along with veterans, and other groups and individuals who had helped with their annual Veterans wreath ceremony in Arlington, formed Wreaths Across America, a non-profit 501-(c)(3) organization, to continue and expand this effort, and support other groups around the country who wanted to do the same. The mission of the group is simple:

Remember. Honor. Teach.

In 2008 over 300 locations held wreath laying ceremonies in every state, Puerto Rico and 24 overseas cemeteries. Over 100,000 wreaths were placed on veterans' graves. Over 60,000 volunteers participated.

December 13, 2008 was unanimously voted by the US Congress as "Wreaths Across America Day".

In 2014, Wreaths Across America and our national network of volunteers laid over 700,000 memorial wreaths at 1,000 locations in the United States and beyond. We were able to include ceremonies at the

Pearl Harbor Memorial, as well as Bunker Hill, Valley Forge and the sites of the September 11 tragedies. We accomplished this with help from 2047 fundraising groups, corporate contributions, and donations of trucking, shipping, and thousands of helping hands. Our goal of covering Arlington National Cemetery was accomplished in 2014 with the placement of 226,525 wreaths.

The wreath laying is still held annually, on the second or third Saturday of December. Our annual pilgrimage from Harrington, Maine to Arlington National Cemetery has become known as the world's largest veterans' parade, stopping at schools, monuments, veterans' homes and communities all along the way to remind people how important it is to remember, honor and teach.

Wreaths Across America also conducts several programs to honor our Veterans, including our popular "Thanks a Million" campaign which distributes cards to people all over the country to give Veterans a simple "thank you" for their service. We participate in Veterans' events throughout the year, and have a Veteran liaison on staff to work with local Veterans organizations.

WAA is committed to teaching younger generations about the value of their freedoms, and the importance of honoring those who sacrificed so much to protect those freedoms. We offer learning tools, interactive media projects, and opportunities for youth groups to participate in our events. We also work to create opportunities to connect "the Greatest Generation" with the "Generation of Hope". The inspirational stories of our World War II Veterans must be passed on to the leaders of the future.

Wreaths Across America would not be successful without the help of volunteers, active organizations and the generosity of the trucking industry. We thank them for working with us to remember the men and women who served our country, honor our military and their families, and teach our children about our freedom and those who protect it.

**WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA**

## What is a VETERANS' WREATH?

*A veterans' wreath is a symbol of HONOR, RESPECT and VICTORY.*

**10 BALSAM BOUQUETS** = **10 SPECIAL QUALITIES**  
comprising each veterans' wreath      that our veterans embody

1. THEIR FAITH IN GOD
2. THEIR LOVE for ONE ANOTHER
3. THEIR STRENGTH, WORK ETHIC, & CHARACTER
4. THEIR HONESTY & INTEGRITY
5. THEIR HUMILITY, SELFLESSNESS, & MODESTY
6. THEIR AMBITIONS & ASPIRATIONS
7. THEIR OPTIMISM for AMERICA
8. THEIR CONCERN for FUTURE GENERATIONS
9. THEIR PRIDE in CARRYING OUT THEIR DUTIES
10. THEIR HOPES & DREAMS THAT DIDN'T ALWAYS COME TRUE, BUT LEFT THEM WITH NO REGRETS.

**Evergreens = LONGEVITY & ENDURANCE**

**Red Bow = GREAT SACRIFICE**

**Forest Scent = PURITY & SIMPLICITY**

**Circular Shape = ETERNITY**

“THIS YEAR, WHEN YOU PLACE A WREATH ON A VETERAN'S GRAVE, you will know it is not just a wreath. It's your personal gift to an American hero, and you'll swell with pride and have a tear in your eye knowing you've done something very, very special. God bless our veterans and God bless America.” —MERRILL WORCHOVER, FOUNDER OF WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

**REMEMBER, HONOR AND TEACH. Don't say "I should have." Say "I did."**

**MAKE YOUR OWN**  
Order our DIY wreath kit at [bit.ly/DIYWreath](http://bit.ly/DIYWreath)

**WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA**  
WreathsAcrossAmerica.org

**OVER 900 LOCATIONS NATIONWIDE**

- See more at:  
<http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/about/history/#sthas.h.JcGklqB6.dpuf>

# Military Addressing Tips

## *Make sure your mail reaches our troops*

Our troops look forward to receiving your letters and packages. That's why it's important to make sure your mail gets there, to the right person, in the right place.

The Department of Defense has issued the following guidelines for addressing your mail to military and civilian personnel deployed overseas

1. **Use the service member's full name.** The Department of Defense cancelled the [Any Service Member program](#) so mail must be addressed to someone specific.
2. **Include the unit and APO/FPO/DPO** (Air/Army Post Office or Fleet Post Office) address with the nine-digit ZIP Code™ (if one is assigned). [Click-N-Ship®](#) customers should be advised that the Postal Service and the Military will continue to add and update valid APO/FPO addresses for your online labels.
3. **Include a return address.**
4. **For packages, print on one side only** with the recipient's address in the lower right portion or print a postage-paid label online with [Click-N-Ship®](#). (Please note that ZIP Codes 093XX and 964XX are currently unavailable for electronic labels)

### What special precautions should I use when packaging overseas military mail?

Following these precautions will safeguard your package on the way to its final destination:

- 1 Place the mailing address inside the parcel on a separate piece of paper.
- 2 Use a box that is constructed to conform to the contents you are sending.
- 3 Ensure the weight of the items in the box is evenly distributed.
- 4 Add packing material on the inside if any portion of the box sags or is easily depressed.
- 5 Use packaging tape for wrapping the outside of the box. Do not wrap with string.
- 6 Cross out or cover excess markings or printing to prevent your box from being misssent.
- 7 Enclose all personal hygiene items, such as deodorant, lotion, or shampoo, in a sealable bag.
- 8 Place all perishable items, such as cookies, chips, etc., in a plastic container.
- 9 Do not mail liquids of any kind, especially carbonated drinks, which can explode during transit.

### Military Care Package Mailing Kit

Since Priority Mail service supplies are the packaging of choice for families preparing care packages for service members overseas, the USPS has created a "Mili-kit" based on the items most frequently requested by the **military**.

The kit contains:

- Three (3) each of flat rate boxes O-FRB1 and O-FRB2
- Two (2) each of Cube boxes OBOX7
- Address labels - Label # 228: 8 each
- Address labels - Label # 106-A: 1 each
- Customs FORM 2976-A: 8 EA.

- Customs FORM Envelope 2976-E: 8 EA.

To order the kit, call 800-610-8734. Guidelines for packing, addressing, and shipping items to U.S. troops can be found at [usps.com/ship/apo-fpo-guidelines.htm](https://usps.com/ship/apo-fpo-guidelines.htm). [Click here](#) to order flat-rate boxes featuring the "America Supports You" logo.

1. Choose your language ("1" is English, "2" is Spanish).
2. Choose option 1 (it states it is for Express Mail service, Priority Mail or Global Express Guaranteed).
3. When you reach a live agent, request "**CAREKIT04**."
4. Please allow 7-10 days for delivery.

**Note:** These are free supplies, postage must be affixed.

Additionally, you can find guidelines for packing, addressing, and shipping items to U.S. troops at [www.usps.com/supportingourtroops/](https://www.usps.com/supportingourtroops/).

### Holiday Dates for Military Mail Calculated for December 25, 2018

Military Mail Addressed To and From	Priority Mail Express Military Service (PMEMS) <sup>1</sup>	First-Class Mail Letters and Cards	Priority Mail	Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL) <sup>2</sup>	Space Available Mail (SAM) <sup>3</sup>	Standard Post
APO/FPO/DPO AE ZIPs 090-092	Dec-16	Dec-11	Dec-11	Dec 4	Nov-27	Nov-6
APO/FPO/DPO AE ZIP 093	N/A	Dec-4	Dec-4	Dec 4	Nov-27	Nov-6
APO/FPO DPO AE ZIPs 094-098	Dec-16	Dec-11	Dec-11	Dec 4	Nov-27	Nov-6
APO/FPO/DPO AA ZIP 340	Dec-16	Dec-11	Dec-11	Dec 4	Nov-27	Nov-6
APO/FPO / DPO AP ZIPs 962-99	Dec-16	Dec-11	Dec-11	Dec 4	Nov-27	Nov-6



## **INTERESTED IN JOINING THE COALITION?**

There are many benefits to join the Vietnam and All Veterans State Coalition. A voice of many is heard above a voice of one. The coalition meets quarterly at various locations in the State of Florida and we discuss and disseminate information pertaining to veterans and their benefits. **We also are represented on the board of the Florida Veteran's Council which helps determine policies in the State**

To obtain information regarding joining the coalition either as an Organization, or an individual, please visit our website at [VVOF.ORG](http://VVOF.ORG).

**If you or your organization is already a member of the coalition, and there has been a change in officers, please immediately advise the coalition of these changes, including mailing addresses, e-mail addresses and telephone numbers so we may keep you up-to-date with all pertinent information.**

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<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

All inquiries, questions or comments may be directed to the President, Vice President, Secretary or Treasurer. All articles printed in our newsletters are strictly the opinion of the submitter and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida State Coalition or its member organizations. Updated September 17, 2006

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**NEWS PLEASE EXPEDITE**