

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE  
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**



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# VET NEWS

July 2006

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

**July 10, 2006**

The quarterly Advisory Committee meeting will be held July 10th, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. in the Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office. Please try to have at least one representative from your organization in attendance.

Light refreshments will be served.



### TRANSFER OF KEYS TO VAN DRIVER Gary Baker, Lexington Co. Service Officer hands keys to Keith Billups, van driver

Lexington County veterans now have a van to transport them to Dorn VA Medical Center. The van was purchased through the Disabled American Veterans Transportation Network with donations from veterans organizations, the County and Town of Lexington, and individual contributors. Under the DAV van purchase program, the cost was \$12,500.

The van is titled to the Dorn VA Medical Center which provides insurance, fuel, and maintenance. Volunteers drive the van to transport those veterans who lack transportation to appointments at Dorn VA Medical Center.

For further information, call the Lexington County Veterans Affairs office at 803-785-8400, 605 West Main Street, Suite 101, Lexington, SC 29072.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR VAN/POV DRIVERS

**Need copy of current DRIVER'S LICENSE**

**Need copy of current AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE**

**Must view DRIVER SAFETY VIDEO  
If you are a DAV Van and/or POV Driver**

**Must sign SC Dept. of Public Safety Request  
for Drivers Information—Form MV-20**

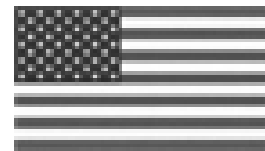
**Must have a VAN DRIVER'S PHYSICAL EXAM**

**Must complete Van Drivers' Questionnaire  
VA Form May 1991-10-0043A**

**Must complete a DAV VAVS Form 20**

## INDEPENDENCE DAY

On July 4, 1776, the signers of the Declaration of Independence boldly asserted that all are "created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." With these words, our forefathers formed a new nation and put forth a vision of liberty and democracy that would forever alter history. Every Fourth of July, Americans celebrate this pivotal moment in our history, which set into motion the development of a land of freedom and opportunity unequalled in the world.



**NOTICE: The Lexington County Veterans Affairs  
Office will be closed July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

**DEDICATION OF LEXINGTON COUNTY  
DISABLED VETERANS TRANSPORTATION VAN**  
June 19, 2006



The Lexington County Transportation Van for Disabled Veterans is now in service. The van is available for veterans who do not have transportation for appointments at Dorn VA Medical Center. Veterans needing transportation should set their appointments no earlier than 9:00 a.m. Call the VA office 3-4 days in advance at 803-785-8400 to arrange for a ride. Please have your address, address, phone number, and the last four digits of Your Social Security number when you call.

## VETERAN CUSTOMERS

- ◆ Lexington County, South Carolina is a large veteran center with a population of 24,085, fifth highest in the state.
- ◆ Total expenditures by the Veterans Administration in Lexington County, South Carolina for FY2004 were \$61,623,000 of which \$30,413,000 was compensation and pension payments, and \$27,076,000 was medical expenditures for 4,379 unique patients.
- ◆ The compensation and pension figure (\$30,413,000) is up from \$28,527,000 in FY2003, a 6.6% increase.
- ◆ In total expenditures (\$61,623,000), Lexington is third, behind only Richland and Charleston.
- ◆ Lexington (\$30,413,000) is fourth in the state in compensation and pension payments, behind Richland, Charleston, and Greenville.
- ◆ As for medical care, with 4,379 veteran/patients, Lexington is 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the state and the third highest in medical expenditures, \$27,076,000.
- ◆ These figures show that veterans and family members are utilizing their benefits, making for a healthier and better Lexington County.

## VETERANS SERVICES & BENEFITS

**You may be eligible for VA benefits if you are:**

- **a veteran**
- **a veteran's dependent**
- **surviving spouse, child or parent of a deceased veteran**
- **an active-duty military servicemember**
- **a member of the Reserve or National Guard.**

**If you are eligible for federal benefits, but never have applied, you still can. Let a professionally trained service officer help you. In fact, by turning to a professional to help you file a claim, the chances for approval are much better than if you go it alone.**

## ATTENTION NAVY VETERANS

When the FY'06 Defense Authorization bill is finally signed, sealed, and delivered, Navy veterans might be interested in this small item: The House version of the bill calls for "cooperative outreach to members and former members of the naval service exposed to environmental factors related to sarcoidosis."

Sarcoidosis is a chronic disease of unknown cause characterized by the enlargement of lymph nodes in many parts of the body and the widespread appearance of granulomas, or grainy tissue, produced in response to infection, inflammation, or the presence of a foreign substance.

This provision would obligate the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to conduct an outreach program to identify and find seamen who may have increased risk of sarcoidosis as a result of having been exposed to particles resulting from the removal of non-skid coating used on naval ships.

The Senate is expected to go along with this provision. (*The VVA Veteran*, May/June 2006)

## VA TO PROVIDE FREE CREDIT MONITORING

As part of the continuing efforts by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to protect and assist those potentially affected by the recent data theft that occurred at an employee's Maryland home, Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson announced that VA will provide one year of free credit monitoring to people whose sensitive personal information may have been stolen in the incident.

"VA continues to take aggressive steps to protect and assist people who may be potentially affected by this data theft," said Nicholson. "VA has conducted extensive market research on available credit monitoring solutions, and has been working diligently to determine how VA can best serve those who information was stolen.

"Free credit monitoring will help safeguard those who may be affected, and will provide them with the peace of mind they deserve," he added.

The Secretary said VA has no reason to believe the perpetrators who committed this burglary were targeting the data, and Federal investigators believe that it is unlikely that identity theft has resulted from the data theft.

The VA will solicit bids from qualified companies to provide a comprehensive credit monitoring solution. After VA hires a credit monitoring company, the Department will send a detailed letter to people whose sensitive personal information may have been included in the stolen data.

More information can be found at: [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov) or 1-800-333-4636 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (EDT), Monday-Saturday.

## ROSIE THE RIVETER

Rosie the Riveter was an icon representing millions of American women who traded aprons for overalls during World War II. The creation of our government's wartime propaganda, she was popularized by the media and romanticized the labor of millions of women who took on tough production jobs left vacant as men joined the armed forces.



Someone had to do the work, and the government needed an army of women to join the workforce immediately after the attack at Pearl Harbor propelled the nation into the war. One of the many slogans on "Rosie" posters was "Do the work he left behind." The women who went to work were called "production soldiers."

The most enduring image of Rosie was the poster created by artist J. Howard Miller. His defiant "Rosie" with her hair up in a red and white polka-dot bandanna flexes her bicep showing the muscle of the American woman. Boldly printed on the poster is the slogan, "We Can Do It!"

Soon, every segment of society saw women replacing men on the job. They drove buses, streetcars and bulldozers; and built ships and airplanes, carved timber out of forests; and, of course, became riveters. During the war, women swelled the workforce by 50 percent.

Over six million women entered the workforce between 1941 and 1945. Another three million volunteered with the Red Cross.

Many women who already had jobs changed to higher-paying ones during the war. In 1942, 600 laundries closed as their female employees left for higher wages elsewhere.

Victory gardens, tended by 16.5 million households, provided 40% of the fresh produce consumed on the homefront during the war.

One set of guidelines put out by the Department of Labor, advised women not to complain about hardships at home. Instead, writing cheerful news was an important part of the war effort, at it would do much to keep up morale among the troops. (Thom Wilborn, *DAV Magazine*, May/June 2006, pp. 28-29)

## BLUE STAR MOTHERS COLLECT DONATIONS

The Blue Star Mothers are continuing to solicit items to be sent to military serving overseas. Many individuals and groups have been making donations to the Blue Star Mothers. The group, however, has been funding the shipment of the large amounts of items personally or through some donations.

If you or your organization can help through donations of money to assist in shipping these packages it will be greatly appreciated.

Contact the Blue Star Mothers at 808-6485 or 206-6088 or contact the VA office at 785-8400.

## ASSISTED LIVING

A number of our veterans and widows are seeking housing assistance through various nursing or assisted living facilities. The VA office does not recommend facilities. We do maintain a listing of area facilities and literature from state approved agencies as well as others.

Veterans and/or widows whose finances meet VA criteria and who need the aid and assistance of another person or who are housebound may get financial help from the VA to reside in such a facility.

## TEAM OF EXPERTS WORKING TO BRING MIA TROOPS HOME

*American Forces Press Service, June 06, 2006*

**Hanoi, Vietnam** - Aging witnesses and more urban areas are making it harder to find remains or evidence of missing American servicemembers in Vietnam, but a select group of experts here works year-round to fulfill the U.S. military's pledge to leave no man behind.

The seven-member team -- four servicemembers and three federal employees -- of Detachment 2, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, has spent the past 15 years talking to witnesses, reviewing historical documentation and digging in muck in pursuit of a mission sacred to U.S. military members.

The headquarters of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command is at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. The unit works on many fronts to provide the fullest possible accounting of U.S. servicemembers missing from conflicts throughout history. Because Vietnam is the most recent conflict with large numbers of missing in action, most of the organization's successes happen here, Rutter said.

Several factors contribute to the JPAC's successes in Vietnam -- foremost among them is the team's close working relationship with the Vietnamese government. Detachment 2 has been in Vietnam since 1991, four years before normalized relations between the country and the United States. "We feel our history played a big role in helping relations (between the two countries) to the point where they are today," Rutter said.

"We couldn't do this without the cooperation of the Vietnamese," he said. "When I got here (two years ago), I was surprised at how much the cooperation is and what level they give us."

Still, he added, "we always want them to give us more -- more access to some of their archives, more access to some of the restricted sites."

Rumsfeld visited and had lunch with the unit's team members yesterday during his brief stay here. He also discussed the POW/MIA issue with national leaders.

Interagency cooperation among U.S. entities here is also vital to the team's success. "We don't have blinders on," Rutter said. "We have to reach out and touch a lot of people in a lot of different ways."

Some 1,805 U.S. military members are still officially missing in Southeast Asia; the vast majority -- 1,380 -- are believed to be in Vietnam. Fifty-four went missing in or over Cambodia; 365 in Laos; and seven in China. JPAC's Detachment 1 is in Bangkok, Thailand, and is responsible for operations in Thailand and Cambodia. Detachment 3 is in Vientiane, Laos.

The small Detachment 2 team has irons in many fires throughout Vietnam. The team currently is tracking 67 unique sites that are approved for "digs," high-tech archaeological missions conducted by "Joint Field Activities" using multifaceted experts and up to 100 local workers.

The team maintains a presence here and conducts active investigations throughout the year. Several times per year they organize Joint Field Activity missions. These ramped-up

teams come here on temporary duty for 33 days, conduct intensive investigations of individual sites, and do the actual searching for remains.

For the past several years, four such missions have been conducted per year. In 2007, three missions are scheduled, but are increased to 45 days each. "We're becoming more efficient," Rutter said.

Detachment 2 gets leads from archives that become available from the Vietnamese government, and witnesses who come forward with evidence they have found or remember from the period the servicemembers went missing. The team also gets leads from U.S. and Vietnamese veterans groups, Rutter said.

"Sometimes wreckage turns up when farmers are working fields," said William "Buddy" Newell, a former airman who's now a civilian employee permanently assigned to the team as a linguist. "Sometimes villagers recall seeing a parachute or burying remains."

No digs are scheduled unless the experts are fairly certain they will find remains or a crash site. Digs are expensive, disruptive, labor-intensive prospects, Rutter said. But careful initial work has led to a high success rate for actual digs.

A typical dig might include damming off and draining a rice paddy, then sectioning it off and using screen frames to wash away the mud and examine debris that's left behind, Rutter explained. He said local-national workers are hired to do much of the heavy labor, but an American expert examines debris left behind in every screen before it's declared rubbish.

The work often entails wading in mud and muck looking for even the smallest fragments of human remains or evidence of crash sites. "It is not fun duty; they don't come over here and have liberty," Rutter said. "They're out in the jungle, in the muck digging."

Team members look for physical evidence, often in the form of bone fragments and mechanical parts. An expert on Vietnam-era military equipment and a doctor of anthropology are part of every team that conducts a dig.

When human remains are found, they are placed in a transfer case that's covered with an American flag and handled from then on with all the honor and dignity due a fallen American servicemember. Honor ceremonies are conducted here and when the remains are repatriated to the United States.

An explosive ordnance disposal expert also accompanies each team. If unexploded ordnance is found, the U.S. EOD expert secures the site; then a Vietnamese team detonates or disposes of the ordnance. Rutter said the Vietnamese use these missions as training for their EOD forces.

After a site is exploited, the team compensates local individuals for rice that's lost from the digging and for the cost of returning the field to its original condition.

Despite successes -- U.S. experts have found and identified remains of more than 600 servicemembers since 1975 -- several factors in Vietnam are making the mission more difficult and adding a renewed sense of urgency recently, Newell said. Witnesses to events in the 1960s and '70s are aging, with their memories becoming cloudy, and dying. "The age of witnesses is a huge issue that we have," Newell said. "We've got to go do these interviews now."

## HEALTHIER VETS PROGRAM TACKLES OBESITY, DIABETES

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Health and Human Services have joined forces in a coordinated campaign to educate veterans and their families about way to combat obesity and diabetes.

Under the “HealthierUS Veterans” program, VA medical centers will promote nutrition and exercise with local groups in 40 communities that receive grants from HHS in a program called “Steps to a HealthierUS.” Overweight patients receiving VA health care may participate in weight loss programs tailored to their needs. They may also receive pedometers, diet advisories and “prescriptions” suggesting how much to walk—or, in the case of wheelchair users, how much to roll.

More information is available from your nearest VA medical center or on the Internet at: [www.healthierusveterans.va.gov](http://www.healthierusveterans.va.gov).

## DEPLOYMENTS STRESS FAMILY MEMBERS

An online survey of military families found that multiple deployments are causing them stress, and they want more communication from their loved ones’ units while overseas. Analysis of the 1,592 responses found that “when entering a second or third deployment, [families] carry the unresolved anxieties and expectations from the last deployment(s).”

The National Military Family Association (NMFA) coordinated the study, which was based on the Cycles of Deployment Survey conducted from April to September last year. NMFA released the results March 28.

Here are some of the findings:

- 77% of the respondents were military spouses.
- 75% were from enlisted families.
- 67% said they had no contact with the deployed member’s unit or unit network volunteer during the predeployment phase.
- 50% had a family member deployed at the time of the survey.

- 47% received “consistent support” from the military.
- 43% said the greatest challenge after the GI had returned was worrying if he or she would deploy again.
- 30% said their family member had been deployed between 13 and 18 months since January 2003.
- 17% said they received no family support.
- 14% were service members.
- 8% were parents of service members.

National Guard and Reserve families said their greatest stress is the length of deployments, with an average of 18 months from activation until the GI returns home. Many respondents indicated that the military should offer information and family support services even if the unit has deployed multiple times.

Don’t assume that because we’re in the fifth year of the global war on terror that families don’t need support. There are new spouses, new families. A consistent level of resources is critical. (*VFW Magazine*, June/July 2006, p. 13)

## G.I. CALL HOME

How many cell phones do you have sitting around the house after changing plans, carriers, and features? Now you can put those dust collectors to good use by donating them to Cell Phones for Soldiers, a non-profit organization that will take your discarded cell phones and sell them to a company that recycles them. The money from the phone sales is used to buy prepaid calling cards for American military personnel, allowing them to use a phone, say, at the Burger King in Baghdad or the KFC in Kandahar.

Cell Phones for Soldiers is the brainchild of teenagers Brittany and Robbie Bergquist of Norwell, MA, who heard about an American soldier who ran up a huge phone bill calling home from Iraq. For additional information on how your organization can set up a cell phone collection point, go to: [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com).

## APPEALS TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR

## VETERANS CLAIMS

It has been brought to our attention that private attorneys seeking to represent appellants before the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) on a fee basis have been contacting some accredited American Legion representatives looking for referrals. There is no need for an accredited American Legion representative to refer an appellant to a fee basis attorney. Staff attorneys from the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), consultant to The American Legion, review every American Legion (represented) appeal denied at the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA). When NVLSP determines that there is a meritorious appeal of a BVA denial, NVLSP will offer to represent the appellant before the CAVC at no cost to the appellant, or NVLSP and the Legion will refer the case to the Veterans Pro Bono Consortium.

NVLSP will represent the veteran/appellant only at the CAVC. If the case is remanded by the CAVC, The American Legion will resume its representation. NVLSP will be available to provide advice and guidance to the Legion representative after the CAVC remand. This process protects the appellant's right to receive all of his or her retroactive benefits. The appellant would not have to pay 20 percent of the retroactive benefits to an attorney.

It is against Legion policy and it is unlawful for an accredited Legion representative to accept money or any other form of compensation as part of their service to veterans and other claimants seeking VA benefits.

Call the Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office for more information at: 803-785-8400.

## STEAK COOKBOOK SUPPORTS THE TROOPS

Proceeds from a new cookbook created by the Weber grilling company will benefit four charities that assist Marines wounded in the line of duty and families of those killed in the line of duty.

The book, *Command of the Grill: A Salute to Steak*, includes steak recipes from Marines around the country as well as those Marines' stories. Tips and grilling advice are part of the collection, too.

To order a copy, visit [commandofthegrill.com](http://commandofthegrill.com). The books cost \$10 each; all proceeds benefit these charities:

- Wounded Warrior Project ([woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org)),
- Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund ([semperfifund.org](http://semperfifund.org)),
- Fisher House ([fisherhouse.org](http://fisherhouse.org)), and
- Marine Corps-Law Enforcement Foundation ([mclef.org](http://mclef.org).)

## VA HEALTHCARE STATISTICS FOR 2005

- 32% of all VA patients are Service Connected
- 68% of all VA patients have no Service Connected disabilities
- 84% of veterans Service Connected at 50-100% received care from VA
- 58% of veterans Service Connected at 30-40% received care from VA
- 41% of veterans Service Connected at 10-20% received care from VA
- 42% of the cost of VA health care is provided for Service Connected veterans
- 58% of the cost of VA health care is provided for Non Service Connected veterans

Average cost per patient is:

- \$10,263 for Service Connected at 50-100%
- \$4,486 for Service Connected at 30-40%
- \$4,345 for Service Connected at 10-20%
- \$7,155 for for Service Connected
- \$4,737 for all Non Service Connected
- \$5,515 for all patients

## AWARDS

Betty J. Carson, Veterans Affairs Clerk, was recently elected as Auxiliary President of Post 8738 for 2006-2007. She also won the First Place Legislative Award in District III for Post 8738 at the State Convention.

Barbara O'Connor, Assistant CSO, was recognized with a Shining Star for the third quarter of 2006 by Lexington County.

### REQUEST DD-214s ONLINE

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis has a new electronic method for veterans to obtain copies of their discharge papers. Officially known as *DD Form 214*, or DD-214s, the documents can be requested at <http://vetrecs.archives.gov/>. NPRC designed the new online system to provide better service on these requests by eliminating the record center's mailroom processing time.

Individuals other than veterans or their next-of-kin must complete *Standard Form 180*,

*Request Pertaining to Military Records*, which also can be downloaded from the Web site.

NPRC archives millions of military personnel, health and medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Records prior to WWI are housed at the National Archives in Washington, DC.

NPRC also stores medical treatment records of retirees from all services, as well as records for all dependents and other persons treated at naval medical facilities. Information from the records is made available upon written request (with signature and date) to the extent allowed by law.

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### JULY OUTREACH PROGRAM

July 5th	8-12	Batesburg-Leesville
(date changed due to holiday—July 4 <sup>th</sup> )		
July 11 <sup>th</sup>	9-12	Chapin
July 18th	8-12	Swansea

### OFFICE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Lexington Main Office:	785-8400
From Batesburg-Leesville:	332-8400
From Chapin:	941-0231

**These are toll-free calls**