



Chattanooga Area Veterans Council

Serving veterans and their organizations of Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama

June CAVC Meeting and Location

Chattanooga Area Veterans Council will hold its regular quarterly meeting on 12 June, 11:30 am, at American Legion Post 95 in East Ridge. A light lunch will be offered beginning at 11:00 am. Representatives from various veteran service organizations will be on hand to provide information updates. Ideally every member organization will have a person attend who will provide input and bring back information to be disseminated to their membership.

The CAVC leadership would like to thank American Legion Post 95 for their accommodation.



Military Retiree Appreciation Day

Military Retiree Appreciation Days have been scheduled for the following military installations:

Fort Campbell, KY. One day only, Saturday, September 19, 2015

Redstone Arsenal, AL. Three days:

Thursday, September 24, 2015 Golf Tournament.

Friday, September 25, Medical Screening.

Saturday, September 26, Information exchange (i.e. VA, Tricare for Life and Benefits update).

Retirees from all branches of the US Armed Force are welcome.

8th Annual Criminal Justice Seminar

The Chattanooga-Hamilton County NAACP will be hosting the 8th Annual Criminal Justice Seminar to be held June 6th at the Chattanooga Choo-Choo Imperial Ballroom from 8:30 AM to 2:00 pm. Through public advocacy, workshops, presentations, and forums, the Seminar strives to shed light on how legal issues, social challenges, and advents in the legal system effects the social welfare, upward mobility, and life sustaining options of average everyday citizens. Trust in the law, faith in the legal process, and hope for a better tomorrow are all key elements of allowing justice to live throughout our community. The necessity of this event is also meant to be a way we can help address many of the legal grievances and complaints we receive on an annual basis as well. Previous speakers have included Vincent Southerland of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Clarence Cox III, V.P. of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement, and Robert Rooks who then served as NAACP National Director of Criminal Justice, and several Department of Justice officials. On this year we will highlight the theme: Know Your Rights. Central to this theme is the NAACP's National Report to end Racial Profiling. Our ultimate goal and objective on this occasion will be to educate the community and foster dialogue that may help to identify safe and effective ways law enforcement and the general public may interact and engage with one another. As part of this goal, we will help to detail the proper techniques, procedures, and constitutional rights that all parties must adhere to throughout this societal discourse. We will also examine some of the ways our criminal justice and legal processes can be more effective and productive.

For more information please contact: Eric A. Atkins, Secretary and event coordinator, at Phone: (423) 320-8598 or via email: atkinse3@hotmail.com.

A Soldier's Journey Home

A huge contingent of individuals from many different states converged on Ringgold Georgia to build a house for SGT Jason Smith, a severely injured Soldier. For many, this concluded years of volunteering and years of volunteering without having an organization dedicated to helping these Soldiers. As soon as the build ended in Ringgold last week, many of the volunteers have been working to put together an official affiliation and building the foundation of what is hoped to be the finest organization of its kind. "A Soldier's Journey Home" has been born.

During this short period of time, their web page has been registered, their email created and their officers are now in place. Now what is needed is help to get the word out to let everyone know that they have entered the next level. "A Soldier's Journey Home is dedicated to helping wounded soldiers" - If you have any questions or want to become actively involved please contact Mike Fitzpatrick at 502-803-5499 or via email at asoldiersjourneyhome@gmail.com .



CAVC Executive Board

Billy Hewitt, Chairman	423-894-3568
Mickey McCamish, Chairman-Elect	423-394-0024
Alan Syler, Vice-Chairman	423-855-6876
Patty Parks, Immed. Past Chair.	423-326-0839
Mark Parks, Treasurer	423-326-0839
Carol Laing, Secretary	423-309-1457

VA Website Update

Veterans will soon be able to log in to just one website to manage their benefits, apply for doctors' appointments, and determine their eligibility for programs. Tom Allin, the first chief veterans experience officer at the Veterans Affairs Department, said in an interview with Federal Times the website will go live around May 20, but will first be open to around 50 veterans to help beta test the navigation, fonts and organization of the new portal. By the end of the year, all veterans will be able to use Veterans.gov to manage more than 350 benefit programs without having to switch websites, call multiple numbers or file large amounts of redundant paperwork. The goal? A single unified digital experience that makes it easier for veterans to get the benefits they deserve, according to Allin.

The Veterans Affairs Department has been pushing to improve customer service under the current VA secretary Bob McDonald. Allin is spearheading many of the customer service issues that veterans deal with every day. "The two biggest initiatives that I am focused on right now is to try to make everything we do more consistent and number two, make it easier," Allin said. Once veterans register, the website will automatically know their eligibility levels for different programs and will tailor their experience using that information, according to Allin. The website will also notify the veteran of various programs they are eligible for but are not using. "The goal will be that veterans will eventually be able to get everything taken care of online with a single sign on. They will be able to add a dependent, change their address, schedule an appointment or check on their claim status and get everything done online in a seamless way versus what they are doing today across multiple websites," Allin said.

While the website will begin as a "wireframe" the VA will add new functions to it monthly, until they have a working model that serves veterans in an easy-to-understand and streamlined way, Allin said. The VA is integrating more than 200 different databases across the agency in order to gather information related to military service, contract information, demographics and how they are currently using VA services in order to make sure the agency at every level has the information they need to provide good customer service, Allin said. [Source: FederalTimes | Andy Medici | May 05, 2015]

21 Steps at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Some things you may not know about the guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: The 21 steps taken on each traverse of the walk alludes to the twenty-one gun salute which is the highest honor given to any military or foreign dignitary. The guard then hesitates for 21 seconds after his about face before his return walk. His gloves are moistened to prevent his losing his grip on the rifle. He carries the rifle on the shoulder away from the tomb. After his march across the path, he executes an about face and moves the rifle to the outside shoulder. The guard is changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5' 10" and 6' 2" tall and his waist size cannot exceed 30". He must commit 2 years of life to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb, and cannot drink any alcohol on or off duty for the rest of his life. He cannot swear in public for the rest of his life and cannot disgrace the uniform or the tomb in any way. After two years, the guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn. The guard must obey these rules for the rest of their lives or give up the wreath pin. The shoes are specially made with very thick soles to keep the heat and cold from their feet. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoe in order to make the loud click as they come to a halt. There are no wrinkles, folds or lint on the uniform. Every guard spends five hours a day getting his uniforms ready for guard duty.

In 2003 as Hurricane Isabelle was approaching Washington, DC, our US Senate/House took 2 days off with anticipation of the storm. On the ABC evening news, it was reported that because of the dangers from the hurricane, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend the assignment. They respectfully declined the offer, "No way, Sir!" They said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment, it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person. The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930.



VA Claims Processing Update

Troubled by delays in handling of veterans claims, a bipartisan group of senators is seeking a wide-scale independent review of the Department of Veterans Affairs for mismanagement and changes to improve budgeting and speed up applications. A report released 6 MAY by nine senators acknowledged recent efforts by the VA to reduce disability and pensions claims backlogs but said it wasn't enough. Pointing to the VA's worst performers such as the Philadelphia regional office, they were announcing legislation that would require the Government Accountability Office to investigate all 56 regional offices for problems. It was the latest sign of congressional concern that recent findings of mismanagement at the Philadelphia VA — including neglected mail, manipulation of dates to make old claims look new, and alteration of quality reviews — might point to a broader, department-wide problem. Sen. Dean Heller is co-chair of the Senate's VA backlog working group. VA offices nationwide are suffering from poor management, he said, proving "it is time for an overhaul of the entire system."

Sen. Bob Casey the other co-chair, said he too was worried that problems were not isolated to Philadelphia. "It's simply unacceptable to have a veteran with a disability wait hundreds of days for their claim to be resolved," he said. The VA says there are 161,000 disability and compensations claims on backlog, defined as pending over 125 days. That's down from a peak of 611,000 in March 2013. But the VA inspector general has questioned the accuracy of the data. Based on a review of VA records, the Senate report said the 10 worst-performing regional offices as judged by wait times were Baltimore; Jackson, Mississippi; Reno, Nevada; Philadelphia; Los Angeles; Chicago; Oakland, California; Indianapolis; Boston; and St. Petersburg, Florida. As of April, the VA's inspector general had documented doctored data or other problems at five of the 10 offices.

The report calls on the IG to determine whether claims processors should be held to deadlines and calls on the department to beef up manager training, complete an updated assessment of staffing and budget needs within six months, and keep Congress informed about its transition to an electronic claims systems. Allison Hickey, the VA's undersecretary for benefits, has said she does not believe problems in Philadelphia are "systemic" but more likely a case of misunderstood policies. Delays in compensation claims prompted veterans groups to seek changes last year before attention shifted to problems at the Phoenix VA medical center. The VA ultimately found that patient waits and falsified records in its health network were "systemic". [Source: The Associated Press | Hope Yen | May 06, 2015 ++]

Military Pay & Benefits Update

The Pentagon for the first time has offered a detailed response to a slate of proposed military pay and benefits reforms, flatly rejecting the idea of overhauling the military health care system but giving a cautious green light to fundamentally changing military retirement benefits. After a three-month review, the Defense Department bluntly dismissed the controversial idea of scrapping the Tricare health system in its current form and instead providing military dependents with private-sector health insurance similar to federal civilian employee benefits. On the issue of military retirement, DoD "generally agrees there are merits to a blended retirement" system that would shrink the size of the current pension but create 401(k)-style investment accounts that would for the first time provide a retirement benefit to troops who serve less than 20 years, according to a Pentagon memo obtained by Military Times.

But in the 10-page memo sent to the White House this week, the Pentagon stopped short of endorsing the proposed retirement plan, saying it will continue to "carefully consider" the commission's proposal and promising to "complete a detailed and holistic evaluation" by the end of July. For now, lawmakers on Capitol Hill appear to be putting the retirement reform proposal on a fast track, and the Pentagon's position signals that it will offer no significant opposition to the changes under consideration. The Pentagon memo to the White House, signed by Defense Secretary Ash Carter and dated April 27, was followed on Thursday by a formal statement from President Obama directed to Congress summarizing the military's recommendations. The official DoD views came three months after the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission recommended an array of controversial changes. The military's views likely will have a strong influence on Congress as it considers changes to laws affecting military pay and benefits.

Specifically, the proposed retirement system would reduce the size of the current pension for career troops by 20 percent. At the same time, the military would begin offering all troops contributions to individual investment accounts that they would own after completing two years of service. The contribution would be at least 1 percent of basic pay for all troops, even if they invest nothing themselves, and a dollar-for-dollar match up to an additional 5 percent for troops who agree to contribute their own out-of-pocket money. The proposal also would create a new lump-sum retention pay for troop who serve at least 12 years and agree to remain in uniform for an additional four years. Congress is making two significant changes to the commission's retirement proposal. For one, it is scrapping the suggestion that troops should have the option of receiving a large part of their retirement benefit in a lump-sum cash payment at

the time of retirement rather than in monthly pension checks. In addition, Congress wants to offer government contributions to the individual investment accounts for every year of service; the commission proposed halting those contributions after 20 years.

The new system would be mandatory for all new troops. Today's service members would be grandfathered under the current system, but would be permitted to opt into the new benefit. Some analysts suggest the proposed benefit would be more lucrative in the long run if individual troops make good investment decisions and the stock market continues to rise. Critics say the proposed plan puts troops at risk for making bad financial decisions. Congress created the compensation commission two years ago amid concerns about rising military personnel costs. At a time when defense spending is capped under the federal law known as sequestration, the top brass worries that those growing manpower accounts could erode the military's ability to invest in modern weapons and high-tech research. But the rejection of the health care proposals will significantly reduce the prospect of cutting long-term per-troop military personnel costs. The compensation commission said its health care reform plan would save the Pentagon \$6 billion a year. DoD also commented on several other proposed changes to military pay and benefits:

Commissaries: The Defense Department "supports the general premise of consolidating" the commissary and exchange systems but declined to offer any clear recommendation on the matter. Defense officials will continue to study the issue and provide a recommendation in July.

Education benefits: DoD does not support a proposal to restrict veterans from simultaneously receiving some GI Bill housing stipends and unemployment insurance. That may be viewed as "penalizing service members" who are taking classes to improve their employment prospects, according to the memo.

Veteran's health care records: DoD rejected the commission's call for the Veterans Affairs Department to create health care records for all current active-duty service members. Instead, military officials want to press ahead with their ongoing effort to create an interoperable system of health care records between the two agencies.

GI Bill: DoD agrees that the Montgomery GI Bill should be eliminated and all service members consolidated under the more generous Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Survivor Benefit Plan: DoD supports changes to the current Survivor Benefit Plan that would increase the benefit by eliminating part of the current offset for spouses receiving certain benefits from VA.

Space-A: DoD supports a proposal to expand military dependents' eligibility for no-cost "Space Available" travel on military aircraft.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | April 30, 2015]

VA Claims Backlog

Baltimore tops a list of the slowest VA offices for responding to veterans disability claims, while Providence, R.I., is at the opposite end of the spectrum, processing claims almost five times faster, according to a new report from a Senate working group. The report, released 6 MAY, was prepared by the bipartisan group VA Claims Backlog Working Group, and endorsed by the group's five Republican and four Democratic senators, who also proposed legislation based on the findings to improve veterans' education about the claims process and increase interagency cooperation.

The backlog is a problem Congress has been grappling with for decades, yet about 188,000 claims — roughly 40 percent of all ongoing claims — have been pending more than 125 days. As the VA has reduced their claims backlog, the backlog of appeals has grown, leading critics to claim the VA is simply denying more claims so they can be marked as resolved and dealing with them on appeal instead. The problem was put back in the spotlight with a recent VA Inspector General's report that revealed employees at the Philadelphia VA Regional Office were ignoring boxes of correspondence related to claims — sometimes for years.

In response to Stripes' questions, the VA released a fact sheet about the appeals process and did not directly address the report or criticism that they are denying appeals in order to improve backlog numbers. The statement said they are focused on the goal of eliminating the backlog by the end of 2015. VA gets credit in the report for making improvements in claim processing but criticism for not going far enough.

The report also pointed the finger at other federal agencies, especially the Department of Defense, for slow responses to VA requests for records crucial to processing claims. The group recommends a 30-day deadline for agencies to respond to such requests and create liaisons to work between the agencies on claims.

Among the recommendations of the report are providing increased education to veterans on the claims process, improved transparency and accountability for VA managers, and better interagency cooperation to share records necessary to process claims.

[Source: VA Claims Backlog Working Group 2015 Report | Stars & Stripes | Heath Druzin | May 6, 2015 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana

The House rejected a proposal 30 APR to allow doctors at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals to discuss the use of medical marijuana with patients. Rep. Earl Blumenauer's amendment to the first fiscal 2016 appropriations bill of the year, which funds the VA and military construction projects, failed narrowly by a vote of 210-213. Medical marijuana is legal in more than 30 states and the District of Columbia. But VA doctors are prohibited from completing patient forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding medical marijuana to treat conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A 2012 VA report found nearly 30 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD or depression.



Lawmakers from both parties argued veterans should at least be able to receive recommendations from their doctors about the drug's merits. They stressed the amendment wouldn't force doctors to recommend medical marijuana or authorize marijuana possession at VA facilities.

"Why in the world would we give a drug that is addictive, that is prohibited under Schedule I, that is not accepted for any specific mental disease or disorder and enhances psychosis and schizophrenia, why are we going to give that to our veterans, especially those with PTSD? That is just absolutely insane," said Rep. John Fleming, a physician. Blumenauer offered the same amendment to the VA appropriations bill last year. It was defeated by a vote of 195-222, a much wider margin than Thursday's. Marijuana legalization advocates interpreted the close vote as a sign lawmakers don't view the issue as politically risky as in the past. "While it's disappointing that the House just voted to continue a senseless rule that prevents doctors from treating military veterans with a medicine proven to work for a number of serious conditions, the fact that we came so close is a good sign of things to come," Marijuana Majority Chairman Tom Angell said in a statement. [Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | April 30, 2015].

A Tribute to Vietnam Veterans

A tribute to Vietnam veterans was part of the Memorial Day Service at National Cemetery this past Memorial Day. The tribute honoring Vietnam Veterans was a collaboration of four Commemorative Partners:

- Chattanooga Area Veterans Council
- Chattanooga National Cemetery
- Chickamauga Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution
- John Sevier Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution

The team set up a tent with tables provided by the SAR and the National Cemetery near the cemetery amphitheater where the memorial service was conducted. It contained posters of the Road to War and a large map of Vietnam blown up by CAVC from the Commemoration web site. Veterans were asked to put a map pin on the spot where they served. The DAR representatives gave out the Lapel Pins to Veterans and the bumper stickers and buttons to Vets and family members.

The memorial service speaker, Mickey McCamish, retired Navy Captain, Chairman Elect of CAVC and a Vietnam Veteran, spoke of his service and the great personal disappointed of his treatment after the war. He reiterated the pledge to never again allow another generation of veterans to be treated so dishonorably. The National Cemetery and the SAR posted their commemorative flags at the front of the Amphitheater. RADM Long, a past chairman of CAVC and a Vietnam Veteran, gave a short presentation about the Commemorative Program and our goal to shake hands and thank every veteran in the area over the next three years.

The event was deemed to be highly successful and meaningful to the veterans and their families. The map pinning was a huge hit. Vets lined up to put their pin in the map. It got them to open up and talking about where they were and what they did. We highly recommend this activity at future events.



Representatives of the four participating partners - L to R: RADM Noah Long, CAVC Rep., Ms. Susan Harris, DAR Commemorative Committee Chairman, Ms. Deborah Kendrick, National Cemetery Director and Mr. Terry Siler, President SAR Chapter.



Veterans gather around the map to pin the location of where they served in Vietnam or the surrounding waters.



DAR member Joy Duke gives a veteran a lapel pin and bumper stickers while thanking him for his service.



Vietnam Veteran studying the Road To War posters.

ATTENTION: ALL MILITARY WOMEN & VETERANS*Army, Navy, Marine, Air Force & Coast Guard Active, Reserve, Guard, Retired, Veteran**Join us:
For the Chartering of**As an
Official Unit of***10:30-12:30
Saturday
20 June 2015****At SHONEY'S****2318 Shallowford Village Dr (I75/Exit 5), Chattanooga
Meeting Room in back of Dining Room****Shoney's Breakfast Buffett is available through 11am when Luncheon items are
introduced. Shoney's also offers a military discount**

Originally established in 1979 as "WAVES National" by three U.S. Navy WAVES, the organization served as an outreach to women of the sea services by assisting them in the transition from military back to civilian life.

In keeping with changing times, members voted at the 2014 National Convention to open the organization to ALL women who have honorably served in ANY branch of the United States Military and to rename the organization "Military Women Across the Nation" with the following mission:

- ★ Keep all military women, past and present, informed of current benefits associated with their military service
- ★ Keep female veterans connected while preserving our common history
- ★ Provide opportunities for women in tomorrow's armed forces through networking, socialization, and service with and for other female veterans

WAVES National/Military Women Across the Nation is classified by the United States Internal Revenue as a 501.c19 non-profit veteran service organization.

Please RSVP to Patty Parks at (423) 326-0839 or pattyjoparks@yahoo.com

Hope to see you there!

Membership is NOT required to attend this function. Family, friends & children are welcome.

Nearby Hotels:

Comfort Inn & Suites, 423-899-5151, 2341 Shallowford Village Dr, Chattanooga TN 37421
 Hilton Garden Inn, 423-308-4400, 2343 Shallowford Village Dr, Chattanooga TN 37421
 Sleep Inn, 423-894-5333, 2351 Shallowford Village Dr, Chattanooga, TN 37421
 Hampton Inn, 423-855-0095, 7013 Shallowford Rd, Chattanooga, TN 37421
 LaQuinta, 423-855-0011, 7017 Shallowford Rd, Chattanooga, TN 37421