

# Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

*In Service to America*



## Meeting Notice

16 March, '11

### Elks Lodge

5555 W. Good Hope Rd.

Board Meeting 6 p.m.

Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday each month. You are also invited to join members for conversation and discussion after the meeting.

Chapter web page :

National web page: [www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)

## GET INVOLVED

### HELP WANTED - SALES

Your help is needed now to sell raffle tickets for our Chapter Raffle.

We will raffle a Dell Laptop, a 32" HDTV with Blue Ray player, and a GPS at our May 18 meeting.

Proceeds will be donated to Dryhooch

Contact Kent Draper

### HELP WANTED - KITCHEN

Tuesday Evenings Chapter 324 makes sandwiches for Bingo players at the Elks Club. This work funds much of the Chapter giving.

Contact Pat Moore

### HELP WANTED - SOLICITATION

May 8, May 9 - Miller Park Orange Blossom Sales  
The Brewers allow solicitation before the games.

This effort could generate thousands of dollars for the chapter. The more volunteers soliciting, the more money we bring in.

Work is followed by a tailgate party.

Contact Ron Coppersmith

## Future Meetings

2011

20 April, 18 May,

15 June, 20 July, 17 August, 21 September,

19 October, 16 November, 21 December

## Chapter 324 Officers

President -

Vice President - Pat Moore 354-2533

Secretary - Dennis Symanski 453-3600

Treasurer - Kent Draper 963-0375

Director - Pat Ciofani 332-7734

Director - Ron Coppersmith 262-255-2832

Director - John Morgan 871-9274

Leadership Positions Available

## CHAPTER ELECTIONS

will be held April  
20, 2011

*Nominations are open for*  
**MEMBERS OF THE**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS,**  
*as well as the offices of*

**PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT,**  
**SECRETARY, TREASURER**

Nominations may be made at the monthly meeting or,  
contact Pat Moore or Dennis Symanski  
You may nominate yourself.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Milwaukee Chapter 324**  
**February 16, 2011**

Meeting Called To Order At 7:03 pm By Vice President Pat Moore.

A Moment of Silence was observed for our brothers and sisters no longer with us and for all POW/MIA's and their families.

Pledge of Allegiance

Prayer

Self-Introductions – Dennis Szymanski, Pat Ciofani, Bob Rugg, Ron Coppersmith, Kearney Bennet, Paul Javins, John Zutz, John Morgan, Kent Draper, Pat Moore, George Banda, Joe Herbert.

Minutes of the January 19, 2011 meeting reviewed and accepted.

Treasurer's Report submitted by Kent Draper.

Communications – Thank you letters received from Veteran's for Peace and Stand-Down for donations.

#### COMMITTEE REPORTS

VVA Membership – Joe Herbert – 135 -140 members.

Allied Veterans Update – Joe Herbert

Volunteering at the VA – Kent Draper will write checks to Hank Kulesza and Bob Laske to help pay for expenses in their volunteer efforts.

Fund Raising – Kent Draper – VVA 324 Raffle benefiting the Dry Hootch is underway – Drawing will be held on May 18th – Contact Kent for tickets to sell.

#### OLD BUSINESS

Tuesday Bingo – Thanks to all who have been showing up to help – We can always use more help.

Pizza Party at the Doms – Event has been tabled for now – Looking at possibly a Brewer pizza party or holding off until next football season.

By Laws – In Progress – First draft almost ready to present to the Board.

Food Drive – Big Success – Raised enough in donations and food to supply a full months needs – Moved and passed to donate an additional \$100.

#### NEW BUSINESS

Nomination of Officers – Nominations were opened for candidates for our April Elections –Stepping forward to run so far are Paul Javins for president, Pat Moore for vice president, Kent Draper for treasurer, Dennis Szymanski for secretary, Pat Ciofani and Ron Coppersmith for board of directors – Nominations will continue to be open up until the elections in April – Please consider stepping forward and running for a position.

Memorial Day Parade May 30th – We have accepted an invitation to participate in the May 30th Memorial Day Parade in downtown Milwaukee – Please try to keep this date open and consider walking in this event as we honor our fallen brothers and sisters.

Brewers Fund Raisers – We have received 3 dates to sell our Orange Blossoms at Miller Park – May 8 & 9 and Aug. 4 – Please keep these dates open and plan on helping – Details will follow.

For the good of the chapter

Adjournment - 7:50.

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## **HIGHGROUND WORK WEEKEND - APRIL 21 - 23**

Hundreds of volunteers bring their energy and talents together to make this a welcome home for all veterans and visitors. Enjoy the company of good friends and share in the satisfaction of a job well done. Whether you come for one day or all four; your help is needed and appreciated.

Local restaurants and businesses generously support our volunteers by providing snacks and lunch; so please call ahead and let us know you are coming so we can give them an accurate count.

See the project list <http://thehighground.org/newsletter/documents/spring-newsletter-2011.pdf> (page 10)

# War's other casualty: Suicidal thoughts plague returned veterans

by BERNARD A. LUBELL □ Feb 17, 2011

<http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=178771>

Suicide among veterans is not a simple discussion. With veterans making more than half the calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline since 2007, does the adage of the “ultimate sacrifice” need to be revisited?

More than 134,000 people made calls to the lifeline last year. Of those callers, 61 percent identified themselves as veterans, while 7 percent identified themselves as a friend or family of a veteran.

This means that nearly three-fourths of calls made to the lifeline were related to veterans' issues.

“What we don't really know is the relationship between the people who are really going to kill themselves and the population who calls,” said Dr. Dean Krahn, chief of the mental health service line at the VA in Madison, Wis.

The relationship may not be known, but the need is salient.

The Department of Veteran Affairs partnered with the lifeline in 2007 to provide these services for veterans. By dialing “1” after calling 1-800-273-TALK, veterans are routed to a lifeline that caters to their specific needs.

But the lifeline was only established in 2004, a few decades after Steve Nelson and others like him returned home from Vietnam.

For 35 years, Nelson never spoke about his war experiences. Instead, he found solace with drugs and alcohol to dull the memories magnified by his post-traumatic stress disorder.

“I'm so fortunate because I've gotten a lot of help and support from my family so I really feel good now,” said Nelson, who lives in Chicago.

But that wasn't always the case for Nelson.

He remembers searching for his 19-year-old friend, Nick, the father of a newborn baby, the morning after an attack in Vietnam. He found his friend dead, lying on the ground, his body cold and dismembered.

“I found his body in pieces—and he was my friend,” said Nelson, his voice breaking.

Although Nelson is now in good spirits—and five years sober—he previously considered suicide as an option to “disappear.”

While the stories of all veterans are unique, there is a general uniting thread: returning from combat leaves you changed. Some veterans can cope;

others cannot. Some have suicide ideation, or suicidal thoughts, and others attempt suicide.

One doctor who works with veterans' mental health issues at Hines VA Medical Hospital in suburban Chicago said the transition to civilian life is difficult.

“One thing that our service men and women are not always good at,” said Thomas Nutter, assistant chief of mental health, “is reaching out for help when they come back.” And some veterans end up taking their own lives.

It's the old maxim: the ultimate sacrifice is losing your life while fighting for your country. But with the VA reporting nearly 11,000 non-fatal suicide attempts and about 700 completions in 2009, the definition of the ultimate sacrifice may need to be revisited.

Calls made by veterans to the lifeline have been increasing by about 20,000 each year.

“Part of it is the education and the efforts of the VA,” Krahn said. “Part of it is probably a jump in suicide ideation, but I'm sure it's not a 100 percent jump.”

But only half of veterans seek out Veterans Health Administration services, provided by the VA, which means that these numbers are likely higher, according to Kristen McDonald, suicide prevention coordinator at the VA Healthcare Center in Palo Alto, Calif.

For the other half not seeking care through the VHA, finding reliable data is difficult.

“What we're finding is that veterans getting care from [the VA] are less likely to attempt suicide,” McDonald said. There is preliminary evidence suggesting that veterans ages 18 to 29 who use VA health care services, compared to veterans who don't, have decreased suicide rates, according to McDonald. This decrease translates to about 250 lives per year.

In the same vein of outreach, the VA created an awareness campaign for mass-transit lines in 2008 to help veterans and their families learn about the toll-free crisis lifeline. In late 2010, Chicago became one of the 11 cities in which the campaign was expanded. Advertisements for the lifeline could be found on CTA buses and El platforms around the city.

The Army's Health Promotion Risk Reduction

**Continued on next page**

## **Suicide continued**

Suicide Prevention Report published in July details Army suicide prevention programs.

“One of the lessons we learned when we further expanded our efforts was that the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach does not work,” said Col. Christopher Philbrick, deputy director of the Army’s Health Promotion Risk Reduction Task Force in Washington, D.C.

“Every suicide is an individual circumstance—the causes behind them and the impacts to make a choice that most don’t consider to be a rational action are fraught with all kinds of twists and turns.”

A holistic approach to mental health, including resiliency training and understanding risk factors are cornerstones of the report. The four pillars of the prevention program are education, reducing stigma, providing resources and involving families.

The report also addresses the misconceptions associated with seeking help as a veteran or soldier.

“It’s the perception that if they notify someone from their organization that they will be stigmatized,” Philbrick said. “A good portion of those have the perception that if they get hold of their military branch they will not receive the support I believe they should.”

The typical non-active duty suicide is committed by a young, white male junior enlisted soldier, according to the report.

“Certainly going to war can be difficult for your mental health,” said Krahn, at the VA in Madison. “Seventeen percent come back with post traumatic stress disorder and others come back with [similar rates of] depression, and a chunk of both of those drink heavily. All three of those increase your suicide risk.”

Gunshot wounds are the most frequent cause of death in these suicides, according to the report.

Nutter reads the chart of each patient who has committed suicide before he writes up an issue brief that is sent to the central VA office in Washington.

“It’s tricky to know if we have an accurate count of suicides because not everybody walks in and says their family member committed suicide,” Nutter said.

“I think in general the support our vets get when they return home is much, much improved over previous conflicts.”

The services available to veterans now are of higher quality and in more abundance than they were

post-Vietnam, Nelson said. There was no such thing as PTSD until much after Vietnam, he said.

Nearly 700 soldiers committed suicide while in Vietnam, according to a spokesman for the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration Commission.

While no data is publicly available, estimates of suicides committed by Vietnam veterans, depending on the source, range from 2,000 to 300,000.

“The hardest part for everybody to deal with is that lots of people care a lot about this group of people who have risked their lives for us,” Krahn said. “So we all are sort of desperate for a single, simple answer and it’s very unlikely that it’s a single, simple answer. And so I think one of the great risks is that instead of sticking with this project probably for months, years and decades, we’ll get into fights with each other about ‘we invested in this why isn’t it fixed?’”

As for Nelson, the Vietnam veteran, he now donates his time, peer counseling in Chicago neighborhoods as well as counseling other veterans in their time of need.

“I’m able to have the strength to help other people,” he said, “and I love doing that.”

## **The Perks of Being Over 60...**

1. Your supply of brain cells is finally down to manageable size.
2. Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can’t remember them either.
3. Your joints are more accurate meteorologists than the national weather service.
4. People call at 9 PM and ask, “Did I wake you?”
5. People no longer view you as a hypochondriac.
6. There is nothing left to learn the hard way.
7. Things you buy now won’t wear out.
8. You can eat dinner at 4 P.M.
9. You can live without sex but not without glasses.
10. You enjoy hearing about other peoples operations.
11. You get into heated arguments about pension plans.
12. You have a party and the neighbors don’t even realize it.
13. You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.
14. You quit trying to hold your stomach in, no matter who walks into the room.
15. You sing along with elevator music.
16. Your eyes won’t get much worse.
17. Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off.
18. You can’t remember where you read this list.

# Silver Star Recipient A Reluctant Hero

by Rachel Martin February 22, 2011

<http://www.npr.org/2011/02/22/133847765/silver-star-recipient-a-reluctant-hero> NPR

The idea of being a hero doesn't really sit well with Leigh Ann Hester, so having an action figure modeled after her is, in a word, surreal. The doll, decked out in Army fatigues, an M4 rifle and small Oakley sunglasses, is supposed to be a tribute to Hester, a sergeant in the Army National Guard who received the Silver Star in 2005 for valor during a firefight in Iraq. "The action figure doesn't really look a whole lot like me," she says. "The box is better."

Hester has had a hard time seeing herself in any of the hero stuff that has been made of her — and there has been a lot: paintings, posters, even a wax figure on permanent exhibit at the Army Women's Museum in Fort Lee, Va.

Leigh Ann Hester, now a police officer in the suburbs of Nashville, Tenn., is the first female soldier since World War II to receive the Silver Star medal for valor in combat.

When Hester enlisted with the National Guard in the spring of 2001, she had been selling shoes at the local Shoe Pavilion near her home in Nashville, Tenn. The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, happened right before she left for basic training. She remembers the drill sergeants telling her and the other recruits that they would be the ones to go to war. And that's exactly what happened. In July 2004, Hester was ordered to Iraq.

On the ground in Baghdad, Hester was assigned to a military police unit; the job was to protect critical supply routes.

"Basically, we would go out in our Humvees and we would clear the route for [improvised explosive devices] or insurgents before the convoys would start coming through," Hester says.

Roughly once a week, her team would actually escort a convoy on these roads.

According to the Pentagon's policy, women are not allowed to be assigned to units where their primary mission is to "engage in direct combat on the ground." Hester wasn't in an artillery or infantry unit. She was a military police officer in the National Guard assigned to protect convoys.

But in counterinsurgencies like Afghanistan and Iraq, a routine patrol can turn into ground combat in an instant. And in Hester's case, getting shot at was the routine. "I can't tell you how many times our squad got blown up," she says. "I mean, it's more than

I can count, probably. I mean, it was nothing for us to get shot at every other day or more."

She remembers one day in particular. It was a Sunday morning around 9 a.m. She and her team were taking a convoy on a road east of Baghdad. They got 3 miles down the road and started hearing gunshots and explosions. The vehicle in front of hers started to turn onto a side road. "As soon as they started to make that turn, they got a direct hit with [a rocket propelled grenade]. Bam! I was like 'Oh God, are they OK?'" Hester recalls.

Three members of Hester's team were shot and wounded. Dozens of insurgents were firing on them. Hester's squad leader, Staff Sgt. Timothy Nein, grabbed her and told her to follow him. They ran toward the insurgents' trench line, took up position and started firing.

The whole thing lasted about 45 minutes. When it was over, everyone in her unit had survived.

By any definition, it was a major firefight — direct ground combat — exactly what women are NOT supposed to engage in, according to the Pentagon's combat exclusion policy.

Hester and Nein were both awarded Silver Stars for their actions that day. Hester keeps hers in a box in her closet at home. It's a big gold star with a little silver star in the middle of it.

The Silver Star is the third-highest decoration in the U.S. military for valor. (The Medal of Honor is the highest, followed by the Distinguished Service Cross.) A handful of Army nurses were awarded Silver Stars back in World War II for evacuating a hospital under enemy fire. Hester is the first woman to win the award since then — and the only woman to get it for engaging in direct combat with the enemy.



# Sign Up Now With Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 324

Anyone can join! Membership Options:

**Vietnam Veterans** (A copy of your DD214 must be included):

- Individual Member - 1 year \$20 • Individual Member 3 year \$50 • Life Member \$250
- Life Member Installment Plan (\$50 Deposit; \$25 per month for 8 Months)

**Anyone Else:**

- Associate Member - 1 year \$20 • Associate Member 3 year \$50 • Associate Life Member \$250
- Associate Life Member Installment Plan (\$50 Deposit; \$25 per month for 8 Months)

**Please Print**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Membership # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to help Chapter 324 by donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to VVA324 and mail with this application to:  
VVA Chapter 324 - Membership, PO Box 18631, Milwaukee, WI 53218

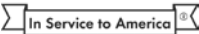


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