

# Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

*In Service to America*



## Meeting Notice

18 July, 2018

**Elks Lodge 5555 W. Good Hope Rd.**

**Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.**

**Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.**

**Future Meetings: 2018**

NO AUGUST MEETING

19 September, 17 October, 21 November,

19 December

Chapter web page: [www.vietnamvetschapter324.com](http://www.vietnamvetschapter324.com)

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

## Chapter Officers

**President:** Pat Ciofani [rezmel\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:rezmel(at)sbcglobal.net)  
414-702-7734

**Vice Pres:** Oliver Williams [w.oliver96\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:w.oliver96(at)yahoo.com)  
414-358-4416

**Secretary:** Dennis Symanski [dski06\(at\)hotmail.com](mailto:dski06(at)hotmail.com)  
414-453-3600

**Treasuer:** Pat Moore [irishpatat\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:irishpatat(at)sbcglobal.net)  
414-354-2533 Cell: 414-731-6029

**Director:** David Titter [d.titterat\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:d.titterat(at)sbcglobal.net)  
414-870-7012

**Director:** John Morgan [asa600\(at\)aol.com](mailto:asa600(at)aol.com)  
414-871-9274

**Membership:** Joe Herbert Joe's a Luddite  
414-873-7341

**Newsletter:** John Zutz [john\(at\)zutz.org](mailto:john(at)zutz.org)

John is listed in the phone book - good luck findinn one

## VA Vet Choice: Months-long Appointment Delays to Continue

Leo Shane III, MilitaryTimes, June 4, 2018

Patients using the Veterans Affairs Choice program to avoid long wait times at department medical centers may still face months-long delays before seeing a doctor, according to a new report from the Government Accountability Office released 4 JUN.

And researchers say recently passed reforms to VA's community care programs won't fix those lengthy waits without dramatic improvements in data collection and monitoring of those outside care appointments.

The findings come just two days before President Donald Trump signed into law the \$52 billion veterans policy measure (dubbed the VA Mission Act) which includes a consolidation and overhaul of separate and sometimes competing outside care programs. Work is expected to take another year before the new single program is operational.

The replacement system will mean an end to the VA Choice program, a controversial measure approved by Congress in 2014 with the goal of more quickly getting veterans into physician's offices.

Veterans who face a wait of more than 30 days are eligible for the Choice program, but critics have complained that the system is overly bureaucratic and still places limits on veterans' access to private-sector

doctors at taxpayers' expense. The new GAO research says that Choice participants can face waits of up to 70 days to receive care, due to bureaucratic requirements and deadlines. Officials there said VA's decision not to put stricter timelines for patient requests lead to an average of 51 days for veterans to receive care in late 2016. "Delays in care have been shown to negatively affect patients' morbidity, mortality, and quality of life... VA lacks assurance that veterans are receiving care from community providers in a timely manner."

VA officials have said they have improved those program delays over the last year, but also insisted that fixing the system will require a complete overhaul of the community care offerings. The report recommends new wait-time monitoring systems for the outside appointments and including better timeliness requirements in future program guidelines. VA officials in a response letter agreed with most of the findings, and said they will be incorporated in their work over the coming year. The new legislation Trump is expected to sign into law the week of 4 JUN includes \$5.2 billion to keep the Choice program operational into early 2019. Department officials have said the program funds roughly 30,000 appointments a day.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Milwaukee Chapter 324**  
**June 20, 2018**

**Meeting called to Order at 7:00 pm by President Pat Ciofani**

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

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Attendance** – Dennis Szymanski, Pat Ciofani, Oliver Williams, Patrick Moore, John Morgan, David Titter, Janice Dahlke, John Zutz

**Minutes of the May 16, 2018 meeting reviewed and approved**

**Treasurer's Report** – Pat Moore - \$4389.95 balance in our checking account

**Communications** – Daughters of the American Revolution would like us to provide a speaker for their November 12<sup>th</sup> luncheon

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Fund Raising** – July 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> at Miller Park

**Website** – Contact Pat Moore to post items of interest

**OLD BUSINESS**

**State VVA Meeting Update** – Pat Ciofani

**July 4<sup>th</sup> Wawautosa Parade**

**South Milwaukee Parade** – July 18<sup>th</sup> – 11am

**NO AUGUST MEETING**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Moved and passed to donate \$250 to the Lao/Hmong – American Veterans Memorial Fund in Sheboygan**

**Adjournment** – 7:45

## **Securely Access VA Medical Images & Reports Online**

Vantage Point | April 30, 2018

VA recently released a new online feature through the My HealtheVet portal that allows Veterans to access their medical images and associated study reports online. Called VA Medical Images and Reports, the feature allows Veterans with a premium account to view, download and share copies of their radiology studies, such as X-rays, mammograms, MRIs and CTs, from the VA Electronic Health Record (EHR).

“With VA Medical Images and Reports, patients have the option of obtaining their images and reports online, eliminating the need to visit a VA facility to acquire a copy of their information,” said VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This feature aligns with VA Blue Button’s concept, which simplifies patient access to their personal health information by allowing them to retrieve it securely online.”

Veterans can view a list of accessible radiology studies, which are available in My HealtheVet, three calendar days after the study report has been verified. When a request for a specific study is completed, Veterans can view a lower resolution thumbnail copy of the images and the associated radiology report online, or download a zip file that contains the report and diagnostic quality images.

For studies with large files, Veterans can choose to receive an email notification when the download request is complete. To view diagnostic quality (Digital Imaging and Communication in Medicine or DICOM) images, Veterans may install a free medical image viewer on their computer to view DICOM image files. The images and reports may be copied to a CD, DVD, USB flash drive, or any portable drive of their choice to share with providers, both outside of VA and across VA settings of care.

## **VA Hospital: IG Identifies 140 Hospitals with Staff Shortages**

VFW Action Corps Weekly | June 15, 2018

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) for VA released its annual occupational report 14 JUN. This year, the OIG included shortages for all staff, clinical and non-clinical. The OIG inspection determined that all VA medical centers it reviewed were experiencing staffing shortages. The most commonly cited challenges to staffing are a lack of qualified applicants, non-competitive salary, and a high staff turnover.

The five positions with the highest staffing shortages are psychiatry, human resources management, primary care, psychology and medical technologists.

# McCain's Brain Cancer: Possible Agent Orange Connection

by Charles Ornstein, ProPublica, and Mike Hixenbaugh, Houston Chronicle, July 27, 2017

When Amy Jones' dad, Paul, was diagnosed with glioblastoma last month, she wondered whether it might be tied to his time in Vietnam.

Then, last week, when Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., also a Vietnam veteran, was diagnosed with the same aggressive brain cancer, Jones searched online for glioblastoma and Vietnam vets. She soon learned the disease is one of a growing list of ailments that some Vietnam veterans and their relatives believe is caused by exposure to Agent Orange, the toxic herbicide sprayed during the war.

"Honestly, it's not easy to even admit that this is happening, let alone to even talk about it," said Jones, whose 68-year-old father has had surgery to remove a brain tumor and now is receiving radiation treatments. "It's only been six weeks. It's such a devastating diagnosis."

McCain's diagnosis comes as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is under increased pressure to broaden who's eligible for Agent Orange-related compensation. During the war, the military sprayed millions of gallons of the herbicide in Vietnam to kill enemy-covering jungle brush, and in the process, may have exposed as many as 2.6 million U.S. service members — including McCain.

News of his illness has prompted Amy Jones and others to call on the VA to study a possible connection between their loved ones' Agent Orange exposure and glioblastoma.

Under current policy, the agency makes disability payments to veterans who develop one of 14 health conditions, but only if they can prove they served on the ground in Vietnam, where the chemicals were sprayed. Veterans who served off the coast in the Navy and those with other diseases not on the list — such as brain cancer — are left to fight the agency for compensation on a case-by-case basis.

Those with glioblastoma — or widows seeking survivor benefits — must prove the disease was "at least as likely as not" caused by Agent Orange, a

cumbersome process that often takes years and more times than not results in denial.

Although McCain primarily served at sea from the deck of an aircraft carrier — and survived more than five years in a prison camp after his plane was shot down over North Vietnam — the VA would presume he was exposed to Agent Orange because he also spent time on the ground in Saigon.

Still, McCain never has sought to connect any of his health troubles, including prior bouts with skin cancer, with Agent Orange exposure and has a mixed record when it comes to compensating fellow veterans for wartime exposures. His office did not respond to emailed questions about a possible link between glioblastoma and the chemical.

As a senator, McCain voted to approve the original 1991 law that directed the VA to presume every veteran who served in Vietnam was exposed and to begin compensating those with illnesses scientifically linked to it.

In 2011, however, as many Vietnam veterans aged into their 60s and 70s and annual disability payments to them swelled to more than \$17 billion,



McCain spoke in favor of an amendment that would have required a higher standard of scientific proof before any new illnesses would be covered.

The goal, McCain said in a floor speech, was to ensure that veterans who actually deserved compensation received it, "but at the same time not have a situation where it

is an open-ended expenditure of taxpayers' dollars." The amendment was defeated — and since then, Vietnam vet disability payments have grown to \$24 billion a year — and the episode damaged McCain's reputation with veterans groups.

In a statement, a VA spokesman said the agency currently does not recognize a connection between Agent Orange exposure and brain cancer but is examining the topic anew in light of the questions that have been raised. In March, the VA asked a

**Continued Next Page**

## McCain Continued

National Academy of Medicine panel studying the effects of Agent Orange to focus special attention on glioblastoma. (Previous reports by the group have not found a connection.) The VA also is asking about brain cancer in a sweeping survey of Vietnam veterans now underway.

VA data provided to ProPublica last fall shows that more than 500 Vietnam-era veterans have been diagnosed with glioblastoma at VA health facilities since 2000. That doesn't include the unknown number diagnosed at private facilities.

ProPublica and The Virginian-Pilot reported last year how widows of Vietnam vets were banding together to push the VA to add glioblastoma to its list of diseases linked to Agent Orange. Through a Facebook group, they support one another and offer advice on navigating the VA's labyrinthian process for seeking disability and survivor benefits.

Since news of McCain's illness broke last week, dozens like Jones have joined the group, whose members mostly include widows and surviving relatives, but also some veterans living with the disease. "Every one of us, our phones were blowing up the day it came out" that McCain had glioblastoma, said Kathy Carroll-Josenhans, one of the group's leaders.

One of their challenges is that the VA's handling of claims related to glioblastoma has been somewhat inconsistent. Between 2009 and last fall, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the VA's in-house tribunal for adjudicating benefit denials, issued more than 100 decisions in cases in which widows have appealed benefits denials related to their husbands' brain cancer, according to a ProPublica analysis of board decisions. About two dozen won. (Here are two additional approvals from this year.)

Brad Riddell, a 35-year-old communications specialist living in Austin, Texas, is not a member of the Facebook group but immediately thought of his father when he heard about McCain's illness. His dad, Jerry Riddell, served in a Navy construction battalion in Da Nang during the war and routinely came in contact with Agent Orange, which was used to clear brush before paving roads and runways.

Riddell was in high school when his father had a seizure while driving from work one day. A brain scan later that day revealed a tumor the size of a grapefruit and a medical term that still makes Riddell shudder: glioblastoma.

His father endured three surgeries — including two at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston — before doctors told him there was nothing more they could do. He entered hospice and died in February 1999, just 14 months after the diagnosis.

"I absolutely thought about dad when I heard about McCain," Riddell said. "Anytime I hear that diagnosis, it just feels like, 'Man, that person is a goner.' It's terrible."

After his father's death, Riddell's mother gave him a bag of his military records and told him to hold onto them: "She said, 'You need to have all these records in case there's ever a connection made between your dad's cancer and Agent Orange.'"

In the wake of the McCain news, Riddell wonders if it's time to pull the records out.

Heidi Spencer had a similar revelation a year ago. Her father, Jack Niedermeyer, died of glioblastoma at age 58 in June 2004. Her mother didn't think to apply for benefits until last year when someone at the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post where she works suggested it. Spencer helped her mom fill out the application and the VA approved it in March.

"He never knew his cancer came from Agent Orange. He never talked about his service," she said of her dad, who worked in a steel mill in Pittsburgh and had six kids.

Spencer, 42, found her dad's commanding officer in the Marine Corps, who wrote a letter saying her dad had been sprayed by Agent Orange.

In approving her mom's claim, the VA wrote that glioblastoma was not recognized as a disease that automatically warranted benefits linked to Agent Orange but that "current medical research has shown a causal relationship between herbicide exposure and glioblastoma multiforme." This is contrary to the VA's official policy.

Regardless of McCain's position on the matter, advocates hope his diagnosis will spark a conversation.

In a statement last week, John Rowan, the president of Vietnam Veterans of America, said he was saddened to learn "yet another Vietnam veteran" had been diagnosed with glioblastoma.

"Unfortunately, brain cancer is not on the presumptive list for exposure to Agent Orange," Rowan said in a statement, "despite the efforts of our fellow veterans and their family members."



# B-52 Bomb Weight Capability to be Quadrupled

Gareth Jennings, London, IHS Jane's Defence Weekly, June 24, 2018

The US Air Force (USAF) is looking to quadruple the weight of bombs that the Boeing B-52H Stratofortress is able to carry externally. According to a request for information (RFI) issued on 21 JUN, Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) is seeking a new external weapons pylon that will take the B-52's current 10,000 lb (4,536 kg) maximum external load (across two underwing pylons) to 40,000 lb (18,144 kg).

"The current Improved Common Pylon (ICP) ... was designed in 1959 and has been in service since the 1960s. When it was introduced, there wasn't a requirement nor did anyone foresee a need to carry weapons heavier than 5,000 lb. It was modified in the late 1990s ... and has performed exceptionally well ... [but] it has limitations when it comes to heavy weight

capacity. With current heavy weapons exceeding 5,000 lb there is a new requirement for a replacement external carriage pylon assembly," the RFI said, adding that the new replacement pylon will not exceed 5,000 lb in weight while being capable of carrying multiple weapons in the 5,000 lb to 20,000 lb weight class.

The RFI provided no details as to planned costs and timelines for the pylon upgrade, except to say that the total effort from development to fielding should be accomplished between 36 and 72 months. Responses to the RFI are due by 15:00 hrs Central Standard Time on 20 July. The new pylon would enable the B-52 to carry any of the air-launched munitions in the USAF inventory up to the 22,000 lb Massive Ordnance Air Burst (MOAB) bomb.

## 18 Things About the Stratofortress

It's big. It's ugly. And it's one of the most adaptable aircraft flown in the past 60 years.

- 1) The B-52's first flight was April 15, 1952 - over 63 years ago.
- 2) The B-52 was designed to carry nuclear weapons, but it has only carried conventional ordnance in combat.
- 3) There were huge leaps in aviation happening when the B-52 was being designed, and it went through 6 major redesigns during the 5 year design period.
- 4) A B-52A was used to carry the North American X-15. The X-15 achieved the record for fastest manned powered aircraft, with a speed of Mach 6.72.
- 5) There have been 744 B-52s built, but currently there are only 85 in active service, with 9 in reserve.
- 6) The B-52 can carry up to 70,000 pounds of ordnance, or the equivalent of 30 fully-loaded Cessna 172s.
- 7) Production ended in 1962, which means the youngest B-52 is 53 years old.
- 8) The jet has a unique ejection system; the lower deck crew eject downward.
- 9) The B-52 is expected to serve until the 2040s. That's over 90 years of service.
- 10) In 1964, a B-52 configured as a test bed to investigate structural failures flew through severe turbulence, shearing off its vertical stabilizer. The aircraft was able to continue flying, and landed safely.
- 11) The navigator and radar navigator sit in the lower deck of the aircraft, and they eject downward.
- 12) To comply with the SALT II Treaty requirements, cruise missile-capable aircraft had to be identifiable by spy satellites. To comply, the B-52 "G" models were modified with a curved wing root fairing.
- 13) Early models had cabin temperature problems; the upper-deck would get hot, because it was heated by the sun, while the navigation crew would sit on the cold fuselage floor.
- 14) In 1961, a B-52G broke up in midair over Goldsboro, NC. Two nuclear bombs on board were dropped in the process, but didn't detonate. After the bombs were recovered, the Air Force found that five of the six stages of the arming sequence had been completed.
- 15) In 1972, B-52 tail-gunner Albert Moore shot down a MiG-21 over Vietnam. It was the last recorded bomber-gunner to shoot down an enemy aircraft.
- 16) After the Soviet Union fell in 1991, 365 B-52s were destroyed under the START treaty. The aircraft were stripped of usable parts, chopped into 5 pieces, and sold for scrap at 12 cents per pound.
- 17) During Operation Desert Storm, B-52s delivered 40% of the weapons dropped from the air.
- 18) Currently, B-52s cost \$70,000 per flight hour to operate. And while they might be ugly, they're still a pretty amazing and adaptable aircraft.



In Service to America

**Vietnam Veterans of America #324**  
**PO Box 18631**  
**Milwaukee, WI 53218**

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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)

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

Make checks payable to VVA324 and mail with this completed application to:  
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