

# Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

*In Service to America*



## Meeting Notice

17 October, 2018

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

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

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

**Future Meetings: 2018**

21 November, 19 December

**2019**

16 January, 20 February, 20 March, 17 April

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

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

## Chapter Officers

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*John is listed in the phone book - good luck finding one*

## Disabled Vets - Military Space Available Travel Now Authorized

When President Trump signed into law the new National Defense Authorization Act, disabled veterans were granted a huge travel perk that has virtually gone unnoticed. Not only will the new perk save veterans thousands of dollars, but it will increase morale, esprit de corps, and open the door for many veterans to connect with the military again in ways they can only imagine. One veteran said, "I'm shocked! I can't believe the military has opened this door to us."

Under the new Disabled Veterans Access to Space-A Travel Act, veterans with a service-connected, permanent disability rating of 100% can hop on any scheduled or unscheduled military flight within the continental United States (and scheduled overseas flights) operated by Air Mobility Command (AMC). The new Act would authorize veterans who have a service-connected, and permanent disability rated as 100 percent to travel on Space-A at no additional cost to the Department of Defense (DoD) and without aircraft modifications, according to military officials.

Clarification on whether or not required caregiver accompaniment is authorized has not yet been promulgated. This is a huge benefit to disabled veterans who travel on aircraft. Many veterans find airports unaccommodating, and difficult to get around. Flying from military terminals are much less congested, and will probably be more suitable for disabled veterans.

To sign up for Space A Travel complete AMC Form 140, Space Available Travel Request (<https://www.amc.af.mil/Portals/12/documents/AFD-140926-014.pdf>) form and e-mail it to your desired AMC Passenger Terminal. Info you need to complete the form includes: • Email address • Personal information (Rank/Grade, First Middle Last Name) • Service Branch (AF, Army, Marines, Navy, CG) • Status (Active, Guard, Reserve, Retired, Disabled Veteran, etc.) • Other Travelers (dependents names) • Total number of seats required • Travel status (See Travel Eligibility-Category I-VI). The form has not yet been modified to reflect 100% disability eligibility. In the interim suggest use Category VI until otherwise advised. • Overseas Travel Ready Status (Have Required Passports/Visas etc.) • 5-Destinations (Sign-up for up to 5 Destinations e.g. Germany, USA, Japan, Alaska, or Hawaii)

**324 Christmas Party, 7 p.m. 19 December, Elks Lodge - Members and friends invited - RSVP**

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Milwaukee Chapter 324**  
**September 19, 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, Patrick Moore, David Titter, Pat Ciofani, John Morgan, Paul Balge, John Zutz, Janice Dahlke, Oliver Williams, Joe Herbert – Guests – Lisa Davis-Dar, Mary Buszynski, Tom Dauer

**Minutes of the July 18, 2018 meeting reviewed and accepted**

**Treasurer's Report** – Pat Moore - \$5714.91 balance in our checking account

**Communications**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Volunteering at the VA – Pat Ciofani**

**Website** – Payment to be made for next year of service – Contact Pat Moore to post items of interest

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Awards Breakfast – Oct 28, 2018** – We will honor members David Titter and Pat Ciofani – Moved and passed to purchase table at breakfast and to purchase 2 awards

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Daughters of the American Revolution** – Mary Buszynski and Lisa Davis-Dar gave an overview of their organization and its mission and requested a speaker for their Veterans Day luncheon – David Titter volunteered to give a presentation on November 12<sup>th</sup>

**VVA State Council Meeting September 22, 2018**

**Stand Down – September 22, 2018** – Moved and passed to donate \$300

**Veterans Day Parade – November 10, 2018** – Moved and passed to donate \$100

**Elks Club Donation** – Moved and passed to donate \$200 for the use of their facility

**Christmas Party** – Moved and passed to have our annual Christmas party instead of a December meeting

**For the Good of the Chapter** – 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the High Ground September 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Adjournment – 7:45 pm**

## **Pin-Ups for Vets releases 13th annual calendar, female vets featured**

Ken-Yon Hardy/Stars and Stripes September 8, 2018

Pin-Ups for Vets will release their 13th annual calendar for 2019 and sales raise money to support VA hospitals, ill and injured veterans, homeless veterans, deployed troops and military spouses.

In 2006, Gina Elise founded Pin-Ups for Vets as a way to honor her grandfather's World War II service and raise money for veterans. She had seen news reports about underfunded veterans' healthcare programs, older veterans who were stuck in bed without visitors and severe injuries sustained by troops fighting in the Middle East, according to her website.

"I just felt so strongly that I wanted to do something to help and improve the lives of our troops and veterans," she said. A fan of World War II nose art, the decorative painting or design on the fuselage of an aircraft, she took that concept and developed a fundraising pin-up calendar.

Now the nonprofit is releasing its 13th annual calendar for 2019 and it features 19 female veterans. Calendar sales raise money to support VA hospitals, ill and injured veterans, homeless veterans, deployed troops and military spouses.

Pin-Ups for Vets also schedules tours of VA and military hospitals. The 2019 calendar can be purchased at: [www.PinUpsForVets.com](http://www.PinUpsForVets.com).

# Sexual trauma claims wrongly denied by VA, investigation finds

Donovan Slack, USA TODAY Aug. 21, 2018

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs improperly denied hundreds of military sexual trauma claims in recent years, leaving potentially thousands of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder without benefits, a VA inspector general investigation found.

Last year alone, the investigation found the agency mishandled as many as 1,300 sexual trauma claims. Some 12,000 veterans file for sexual trauma-related PTSD benefits each year.

The inspector general found the VA failed to order required medical exams in more than half the cases, didn't obtain necessary records to back up the claims in hundreds of cases or denied claims despite contradictory evidence.

The agency neglected to provide adequate training to employees vetting the claims. It stopped conducting quality audits of the sexual trauma claims process in 2015. And the following year, it shunted the claims into a national queue where staff without any specialized knowledge processed them.

The VA has specialized processing for other types of claims, including those related to traumatic brain injuries or from prisoners of war.

The inspector general recommended the agency review denied claims, reintroduce specialized vetting and audits, and provide better training for claims processors.

In response to the findings, Paul Lawrence, the VA's top benefits official, said the agency will comply with the recommendations.

Such pledges were met with caution Tuesday among veteran advocates and assault survivors like Ruth Moore. She was raped twice by a supervisor in the Navy and endured repeated denials of her claims by the VA over 23 years.

"This is why women commit suicide, this is why women are homeless, this is why women don't get help," said Moore, who went on to found Internity, a nonprofit in Maine dedicated to helping survivors of military sexual assault.

Service Women's Action Network said the improper denials amount to an "unconscionable heaping of additional pain and suffering on those who

have service-connected trauma."

The VA put special rules in place in 2011 for vetting claims from victims of sexual assault during military service. They eased guidelines for the types of evidence needed to support the claims and required processors to take extra steps, including getting veterans' complete personnel files and looking for signs of an assault, such as deteriorating performance.

Processors are supposed to advise veterans to seek statements from family members, clergy or colleagues they may have confided in at the time of the assault. And if there is contradictory evidence, the claim "should be resolved in favor of the veteran," the IG report says.

Yet in one case examined by investigators last year, a veteran had reported being assaulted to a VA medical center and received related treatment from a private medical provider, but VA staff processing the claim denied it without even ordering a medical exam.

"Had (they) obtained a medical examination, a clinician might have provided a positive opinion regarding the veteran's claim, which in turn could have resulted in the approval of the claim."

In another case, a male veteran indicated he received psychiatric treatment from several private providers, but VA claims staff never got the records and denied the claim saying "there was no credible supporting evidence of the event."

VA staff told investigators that they stopped doing audits of sexual trauma claims processing in 2015 and "reallocated resources towards other areas" because the error rates declined.

The agency also hasn't updated training materials for processors since 2014, and investigators found they are outdated, incomplete and inaccurate.

"Furthermore, the training was one-time only, and there was no requirement for annual refresher training," they concluded.

The drop-off in focus on such claims at the VA coincided with a national uproar over a massive backlog in benefits claims at the agency. The backlog, which reached as many as 600,000 claims in 2013, had been reduced to 80,000 by the end of last year.

## **Double-Billing for Private Care Cost VA \$101 Million, IG Finds**

More than 250,000 double-billings by medical contractors for private care in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Choice program -- and other accounting errors -- cost the department \$101 million in overcharges from March 2016 through March 2017, a VA Office of Inspector General audit found.

During that one-year period, 142,493 duplicate payments were made to Health Net Federal Services and 111,148 to TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp., for a total of 253,641 duplicate claims out of 4,758,759 medical claims submitted, the audit, released Thursday by the IG's office, revealed.

The double-billings by Health Net and TriWest cost the VA \$66.1 million in overcharges, and three other types of accounting errors by the two contractors cost \$35.3 million, for a total of \$101.4 million in losses to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the report said.

The VA's Office of Community Care (OCC) shared the blame with the two contractors for lack of oversight, the audit found. "Because of ineffective controls, OCC failed to identify improper claims," an executive summary for the audit said.

OCC failed to provide the contractors with a policy and procedure manual to guide them in processing medical claims, the audit said. As a result, both Health Net and TriWest said the absence of a manual was a "cause of a substantial amount of confusion and lack of clarity, leading to payment delays and payment errors." However, both contractors have "acknowledged receiving overpayments from VA and their obligation to repay all such overpayments."

The audit on double-billings in the Choice program was released as the VA and the Trump administration press ahead with an overhaul of the Choice program aimed at greatly expanding private health care options for veterans under the new VA Mission Act signed into law by President Donald Trump in early June.

The bill provided about \$5 billion to extend the current Choice program for one year while the system was streamlined to eliminate inefficiencies. Congress has yet to appropriate funds for the new program under the Mission Act. Cost estimates for the new program run to more than \$50 billion over five years.

The IG's audit and executive summary attributed part of the billing problems to the urgency in which the Choice program was implemented in 2014 in response to the wait-times scandals at the VA's Phoenix Medical Center. The system set up gave contracts to third-party administrators, in this case Health Net Federal Services and TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp, to provide patient-centered community care, or private care, to veterans.

The goal was to "enable veterans to obtain care from providers in their community" when the VA could not meet their needs. The system broke down, the audit said, when processing claims individually proved to be taking too much time, resulting in a backlog of payments to the contractors.

The VA's Office of Community Care then went to a system of bulk payments, but "OCC did not implement effective internal controls to detect the submission of duplicate claims by [third-party administrators] and to prevent payment," the IG's audit said.

## **Arlington National Cemetery 27-Acre Millennium Site Dedicated**

The Associated Press | September 6, 2018

Arlington National Cemetery opened a new section of gravesites with the burial of two Civil War soldiers recently discovered at a northern Virginia battlefield. The cemetery dedicated its 27-acre Millennium site 6 SEP which will add 27,000 spaces, including more than 16,000 reserved for cremated remains in a new columbarium. The 27-acre space is expected to give the cemetery capacity into the 2040s.

The first ground burials in the new location will be two unidentified sets of remains found among severed limbs in a surgeon's pit at Manassas National Battlefield. Experts believe the two were Union soldiers who died during the Second Battle of Bull Run in 1862. More than 400,000 veterans are interred at Arlington, which is running out of room. The military is considering restricting eligibility requirements to preserve the cemetery's ability to accept more burials.



# Major League Baseball - Vet Support Not What You Would Expect

Nick Francona, MilitaryTimes, August 23, 2018

A military softball tournament at the All-Star Game. Veteran tributes. Surprise military family reunions. Camouflage uniforms. Checks to charities. At face value, Major League Baseball (MLB) loves veterans and military families. The league appears to check the right boxes, until you dig deeper, which is what Marine veteran Nick Francona did as one of the few post-9/11 veterans employed in MLB.

He loves baseball and grew up around the sport and played through college. He always dreamed of working in a front office, but delayed that pursuit until after serving in the Marine Corps. He never imagined that he would eventually walk away from baseball, pushed out for standing up for myself and all veterans and military families. He was turned into a pariah by an institution that glorifies veterans in public while failing them miserably in private.

His personal wake-up call came when he was assistant director of player development for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He informed his boss, Gabe Kapler, now manager of the Philadelphia Phillies, that he was going to get a traumatic brain injury screening for recurring morning headaches. This simple notification spiraled out of control. He was called a “damaged veteran,” and urged to take a leave of absence. When he wouldn’t leave on his own, he was pushed out. It took seven months for MLB to conduct an investigation, which turned out to be a sham, with the results never being shared. He turned down a settlement, recognizing that he would be shut out of baseball and wouldn’t be able to help other veterans.

Despite this dispute, Francona was hired by the New York Mets and encouraged to help MLB better serve veterans and military families by improving their programs. He took this charge seriously, proposing initiatives that would improve MLB’s support for a community it claims to care about. It was only when he experienced pushback on low-cost, high-value proposals that he realized the crass and cynical commercialism of the league overshadows efforts to genuinely support the veteran and military communities. While he doesn’t see widespread malice across MLB front offices — and players are often very supportive of veterans — there is a dangerous combination of apathy and ignorance that has caused MLB to fail miserably in employing veterans and engaging meaningfully with military families.

When it comes to the MLB’s employment of

veterans, the numbers speak for themselves: In 2017, MLB boasted of having 10 veterans in a workforce of approximately 5,000 across team and league offices. The league has existing mechanisms in place, including diversity programs, that could increase the number of veterans working in baseball, but MLB has ignored numerous suggestions to modify these programs to include veterans. The league instead advanced a bizarre, unsupported narrative that there were “closeted” veterans across baseball who refused to reveal themselves.

Francona has counseled dozens of veterans who wanted a fair shot at a career in baseball, only to find the door slammed in their face. Some shared stories of outright discrimination, with teams ending interviews over concerns about their ongoing military service. Other veterans with impressive resumes couldn’t get an interview for a job they were overqualified for because they didn’t “have relevant experience” in the eyes of the recent college grads screening their resumes. While many American employers compete for high-performing veterans because they see the value to their bottom line, MLB treats veterans as a problem to be handled out of sight until they are trotted out for the sake of patriotism.

MLB’s true motives are apparent when it comes to Memorial Day. Despite being criticized for callously exploiting Memorial Day in 2017 to sell apparel, MLB officials refused to acknowledge they were missing the mark in 2018, insisting it was merely a “messaging issue.” In their eyes, the real problem was that they were criticized, not that they exploited the memory of fallen troops to sell apparel. MLB refused to answer questions about the amount donated from each item sold or where the money went.

Francona expects MLB will respond to his allegations by noting that he was fired by multiple teams; they said as much when pressuring him to leave quietly. And that’s true. He was fired most recently by the Mets in June for criticizing MLB’s lack of transparency and engagement around Memorial Day 2018. The Mets told him that he did a tremendous job for the organization, but that his comments were “not compatible with a career in baseball.” His real crime in the eyes of MLB was standing up for the right of veterans to be more than just figureheads for our national pastime. The truth was inconvenient and he was a liability.



In Service to America

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

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## **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)

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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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