

Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

In Service to America



Meeting Notice

15 December, 2021 - Christmas Party

Elks Club

5555 W. Good Hope Rd.
Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.
Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

Future Meetings

19 January, 16 February, 16 March

Chapter web page: www.vietnamvetschapter324.com

National web page: www.vva.org

Chapter Officers

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

Chapter 324 Christmas Party, 15 December, 2021



at The Elks Club, 5555 W. Good Hope Rd.
6:00 Social Time (cash bar) 6:30 Dinner Served
Members and Friends Invited

RSVP ASAP to Pat Moore 414-731-6029 [irishpat\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:irishpat(at)sbcglobal.net)

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Milwaukee Chapter 324
November 17, 2021

Meeting called to Order by President Pat Ciofani
Attendance – Pat Ciofani, John Morgan, Pat Moore, Dennis Szymanski
Minutes for October 20, 2021 meeting reviewed and accepted
Treasurer’s Report – Pat Moore - \$3571.01 in our checking account

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Allied Veterans Update - \$40.00 membership dues paid
Website – Contact Pat Moore with items of interest to the chapter

OLD BUSINESS

Chapter Christmas Party – December 15th at 6:00 pm – Contact Pat Moore if you are interested in attending – Spouses and guests welcome

NEW BUSINESS

Christmas with the Vets – Moved and passed to donate \$100

Adjournment – 7:30

Financial Impact of Widowhood & SSA

The Senior Citizens League, October 19, 2021

When a spouse dies, not only is there the profound emotional loss but also there’s frequently a financial one as well. While a widow receives Social Security survivors’ benefits, she can’t receive the same amount of Social Security income that she and her deceased spouse enjoyed before. And, while Social Security income drops, the effective tax rate tends to increase due to the change in filing status. To top it all off, there are a host of bureaucratic hoops to jump through when a spouse passes away. Here’s a few of the most important:

- You must return the Social Security benefit that your deceased spouse received for the month of death, and any received thereafter. You are not allowed to keep Social Security checks received for the month a person dies, even when the death was on the last day of the month. If your spouse passed away in September, the September benefit is the check received in October. That money must be returned to the Social Security Administration, even if you were dealing with piles of medical bills in your spouse’s last month of life.

- You will not receive a survivor benefit in addition to your own retirement benefit. You receive the higher of the two and, for the overwhelming majority of women, that means giving up your own retirement benefit to receive the higher survivors benefit.

- If you receive your own retirement benefit, rather than a spouse benefit, your benefit will not

automatically convert to a survivors benefit — you must apply. You cannot apply online however, and you must get an appointment from the SSA. Survivors must contact Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to request an appointment.

News reports suggest this has been huge problem for many eligible beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to staffing shortages and closed local offices. TSCL is still sorting through Social Security survivor data, which appears to be lower than the 5,886,000 forecast by the Social Security Trustees in 2020. We are not certain whether some of this is because of deaths due to COVID-19, or problems that eligible beneficiaries may have had in scheduling appointments to file claims.

- Your tax filing status and exemptions change. Tax rates and exemptions tend to be more favorable for married couples filing jointly. When a spouse passes away, you will file as a “single” taxpayer in the following tax year. Single taxpayers often must pay a higher effective rate than married couples, and you don’t qualify for the more generous standard exemption for joint filers.

Several approaches to modify Social Security benefits in order to aid widows are available to Congress. One widely discussed option would boost the widow’s benefit to a percentage of the couple’s combined Social Security benefit (such as 75% of the combined benefit) when the deceased spouse was alive.

Travel Deals and Discounted Rates for Vets

As of July 2021, all Veterans with a discharge status of honorable or general under honorable conditions are eligible to shop for a wide selection of discounted rates on hotels, air fare, rental cars, vacation packages, cruises and much more on www.AmericanForcesTravel.com.

American Forces Travel is the Department of Defense's official Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) platform offering bookings for leisure travel. A portion of all bookings go back to support military quality of life programs. Members can feel confident knowing that their purchases are helping to fund events and activities made just for them.

AmericanForcesTravel.com (structured by Priceline), offers deals up to 50% off hotels to eligible members. With flights from all major airlines and split ticket options, to rental car savings up to 35% and best price guarantee, AFT has travel options for any mode of travel. Customers can also save when booking two or more products together using the Packages feature for flights, rental cars, or hotels.

For more information, visit www.americanforcestravel.com/?refclickid=VABlog2022. Members can also follow www.facebook.com/AFTMWR to message the AFT Team about login and pre-booking questions.

VA Claims Backlog Expected To Grow In Coming Months

Leo Shane III, MilitaryTimes, September 16, 2021

Veterans Affairs officials don't know how bad the backlog of veteran disability claims will get this fall, but they know it's getting worse. The backlog — defined as the number of first-time disability and pension claims that have been awaiting decisions for more than four months — topped 215,000 this week, up 16 percent since July and nearly triple what it was in early 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic in America. In a press conference with reporters on 15 SEP, VA Secretary Denis McDonough acknowledged that the problem is going to get worse before it gets better.

- “We anticipate the backlog to further increase this fall as we process claims for new presumptive conditions from the Vietnam and Gulf wars,” he said.

- “We're in the field fulfilling those claims now. But we want to keep warning our veterans about what to expect, so they see what's coming in the same way that we do.”

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the claims backlog hadn't been above 200,000 cases since 2015. In the years before that, the delayed cases swelled to more than 600,000, drawing national criticism from advocates and lawmakers who said the slow pace of work was delaying needed financial support for injured veterans. After the department digitized most of its medical records and hired more claims processors, officials had been able to keep the backlog under 100,000 cases up until early 2020. Office closings due to the pandemic and new claims files for blue water veterans from the Vietnam war

— individuals who served in coastal waters but were given presumptive disability benefits status by Congress because of possible exposure to chemical defoliants — led to the recent spike in delayed processing.

Past VA leaders have said that reaching zero backlogged cases is impractical, because in many cases the complexity of claims or concerns about incomplete medical records require staff to take extra time to ensure veterans are getting all of the payouts they are owed. Officials could close out those cases quicker to meet the backlog deadline, but then the files would end up in the appeals process, which can take years to resolve.

But McDonough said he is committed to driving the backlog claims number back down. VA officials plan to hire about 2,000 new personnel to help sort through the existing files and anticipated surge new ones coming this fall, as the department begins to offer presumptive benefit status for certain burn pit related illnesses for the first time. “We think that we're staying ahead of this so that we don't fall into some of the big backlogs we've seen in the past,” he said. “But any individual who is impacted matters very much to me, so I want to make sure we're communicating about that and preparing for it.”

Despite the recent surge in caseload, VA officials have not seen a corresponding decrease in claims processing accuracy. According to internal department data, about 95 percent of cases are correctly completed, a figure that has remained steady over the last three years.

FACT SHEET

Decision Ready Claims

The **Decision Ready Claim (DRC) Program** is the fastest way to get your claim processed. With the DRC Program, you can get a decision on your claim within 30 days when you work with an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO). Your VSO will help you gather and submit all relevant records and evidence, including federal and medical records and Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs), and will request your VA claim exam, so your claim is ready for VA to make a decision when you submit it.



What types of claims are eligible for the DRC Program?

Currently, the DRC Program is available for the following types of compensation claims:

- ✓ Direct Service Connection Claims
- ✓ Presumptive Service Connection Claims
- ✓ Secondary Service Connection Claims
- ✓ Increased Disability Claims
- ✓ Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) Claims
- ✓ Pre-Discharge Claims

To file a DRC, you must have previously filed a VA claim and received a rating decision from VA on that claim (this does not include Pre-Discharge or DIC claims). You also cannot file your claim through the DRC Program if you currently have another disability claim pending, if you have an appeal pending for the condition you are claiming, or if your claim is related to pension or special monthly compensation (SMC). To see a full list of exclusions that would disqualify your claim from the DRC Program, go to www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/drc.asp.

How do I file a claim under the DRC Program?

You must work with an accredited VSO to file a claim through the DRC Program. You can find an accredited VSO near you and appoint them to serve as your representative free of charge by going to www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/vso-search.

Your accredited VSO will help you determine if the DRC Program is right for your claim. They are fully trained on the DRC Program and can serve as a qualified advocate for you.

What information do I need to submit so that my claim is decision-ready?

You will need copies of your federal records, medical records, completed Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs), and any other evidence that supports your claim. Depending on the type of DRC you're filing, you may also need copies of your Service Treatment Records (STRs), the Veteran's death certificate, and all of the Veteran's relevant medical records. Your VSO can also help you gather any medical information you are missing to make sure your claim is complete.

As part of the DRC Program, VSOs can now quickly request a VA claim exam, also called a Compensation & Pension (C&P) exam, for you, if needed, before you submit your claim. Providing all relevant evidence when you submit your DRC allows VA to process your claim faster.

For more information about the DRC Program, go to www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/drc.asp or call 1-800-827-1000 (toll-free).

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Virginia man seeks military-themed limericks for veterans with PTSD

BY JONATHAN SNYDER • STARS AND STRIPES • AUGUST 5, 2021



An Air Force veteran identified as Gordon M., left, receives a free guitar after completing 10 free lessons from Guitars4Vets, a Wisconsin-based charity that helps veterans overcome post-traumatic stress disorder through music. (Guitars4Vets)

A self-described “Army brat” in Virginia is collecting military-themed limericks to raise money for a charity that helps veterans overcome post-traumatic stress disorder through music.

Gary Hunt, 71, a part-time handyman in Roanoke, Va., said his charitable effort was inspired by the work of doctors, nurses and

volunteers creating handsewn masks during the coronavirus epidemic.

Furloughed from his maintenance job in March 2020, he set on the idea of creating a book of limericks — humorous five-line poems with a rhyme scheme — about life during the pandemic and selling copies to raise money for a cause.

He compiled two books and raised \$1,200 for Kids Soar, a program to lift kids in Roanoke out of poverty through literacy, and \$1,250 for 3rd Street Coffee House, a nonprofit, church-basement venue for live music in the city.

For his third act, Hunt is planning to publish the book of limericks, with proceeds going to Guitars For Vets, a Wisconsin-based organization with chapters across the country. Its volunteers teach veterans to play guitar as a form of therapy and gives them one to keep.

“The way it works, if you send me a limerick, whether if it’s good or bad, I’ll put it in the book,” Hunt told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday. “Just about everyone who has a limerick with their name in the book will hopefully buy a copy or two.”

The limerick has to reflect somehow on life or experiences in the military, Hunt said. Deployments, life as a military family member, about military family members — the net is pretty wide, he said.

Satire:

New VA Initiative Helps Get Homeless Veterans Into Bigger Tents

The Onion, 8/30/21

WASHINGTON—In an effort to aid unhoused service members, the Department of Veteran Affairs announced Monday a new initiative to help get homeless veterans into bigger tents. “It’s frankly disgusting that these men and women who nobly served their country are consigned to sleeping in a cramped pop-up where they barely have room to stretch out, and we are committed to doing something about it,” said VA secretary Denis McDonough, telling reporters that the initiative would aim to provide former military personnel a high-quality 3-person tent with a screened-in porch area to host guests.

“Our goal is to ensure that within the next five years, every hero who is sleeping on the ground can move into a luxurious REI tent containing multiple vestibules for clothing and personal possessions. And for those who need it, we will also provide a complimentary steel stake for them to fight off potential intruders.”

McDonough added that this was only a temporary solution and the agency’s ultimate goal was to place all the homeless veterans in a giant circus tent where we never have to think about them again.



Vietnam Veterans of America #324
PO Box 18631
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Sign Up Now With Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 324

Anyone can join! Membership Options:

Life Membership for all veterans \$50:

VVA is only offering LIFE memberships at \$50. If you have been getting a 1 year membership for \$20 you will need to pay \$50 at your next renew or be dropped from the VVA. If you paid \$50 at your last renewal you will become a LIFE member automatically without any further payment. NEW members will only have the \$50 LIFE membership when they join. (with a DD214 submitted).

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 completed application to:
VVA Chapter 324 - Membership, PO Box 18631, Milwaukee, WI 53218