

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**



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VET NEWS

April 2006

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING April 10, 2006

The quarterly Advisory Committee meeting will be held April 10, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. in the Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office. Please try to have at least one representative from your organization in attendance.

At 6:00 p.m., there will be a Van Driver's Training session. All are invited to stay for the Advisory Committee meeting.

Light refreshments will be served.

WWII AND VIETNAM CERTIFICATES STILL AVAILABLE

The VA office still has certificates and pins available for presentation to WWII and Vietnam veterans. In addition, we have a limited number of pins for the Korean War veterans.

Contact the VA office to arrange for presentation at an appropriate ceremony.

SPRING TRAINING

The South Carolina County Veterans Affairs Spring Training will be held April 11-13 in Summerville, SC. The office will be open those days but the service representatives as well as the Service Officer will be at the training sessions.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Daylight Savings Begins, April 2

Easter Sunday, April 16

American Legion Convention, June 23-25, Radisson Inn

DAV Convention, May 18-20, Radisson Inn

VFW State Convention, June 2-4, Myrtle Beach

REQUIREMENTS FOR VAN/POV DRIVERS

Need copy of current DRIVER'S LICENSE

Need copy of current AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

**Must view DRIVER SAFETY VIDEO
If you are a DAV Van and/or POV Driver**

**Must sign SC Dept. of Public Safety Request
for Drivers Information—Form MV-20**

Must have a VAN DRIVER'S PHYSICAL EXAM

**Must complete Van Drivers' Questionnaire
VA Form May 1991-10-0043A**

Must complete a DAV VAVS Form 20

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE – DONATIONS NEEDED

The Lexington County Veterans Office has some medical equipment which can be loaned out to veterans or their families. We have wheelchairs, a hospital bed, potties, and walkers available.

If you are aware of any surplus or no longer needed equipment, please contact the VA office. We'll pick it up and make it available to veterans.

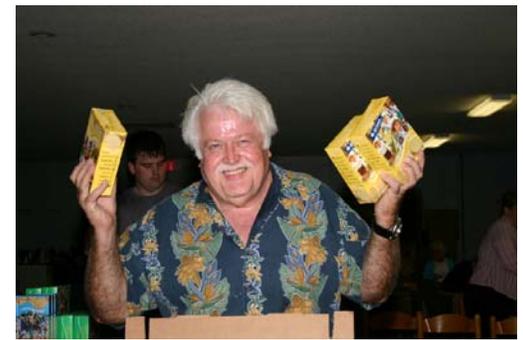
HAPPY EASTER

April 16 is Easter. Get on your Easter bonnets and Sunday suits, take the children to church, and have a great family outing with an egg hunt.



VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE ASSIST THE BLUE STAR MOTHERS WITH THEIR GIRL SCOUT COOKIE SHIPMENT TO TROOPS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

11,000 BOXES OF GIRL SCOUT COOKIES WERE SHIPPED ON MARCH 17, 2006. THANK YOU: BLUE STAR MOTHERS, LEXINGTON COUNTY BUILDING SERVICES, USPS, AND VFW POST 8738 and others who helped!



AMERICAN INVASION OF SAIPAN



First wave of American invasion, Saipan, June 1944

The fall of Japan's inner defense ring began with the execution of Operation Forager and the capture of Saipan, one of the key islands within the strategic Marianas Archipelago in the Western Pacific. On 15 June 1944, U.S. Marines of the 2nd and 4th Divisions began their invasion of Saipan, landing on the southwestern coastline. They were joined by the Army's 27th Infantry Division. Despite three days of bombardment by ships and planes prior to the invasion, Japanese resistance was fierce. Over 4,000 American casualties were suffered in the first two days of fighting. The Battle of Saipan was one of the bloodiest confrontations in the Pacific theater. As Lito Airfield was captured, followed by Mt. Tapochau as U.S. forces drove towards the northern point of the island. On 9 July 1944, twenty-five days after the Americans hit Saipan's beachheads, the island was secured. Neighboring Tinian was invaded on the 24th of July and was secured by 1 August after only nine days of intense fighting.



Beach assault, Saipan, June 1944

Over 5,000 American soldiers lost their lives in the Marianas campaign. Japanese losses totaled 66,000. The demise of Japanese defenses on these islands, and later on Guam, accorded the United States strategic airfields from which the bombardment of the Japanese home islands was pursued.

The large civilian population on the islands was something that the U.S. troops had not anticipated. To better care for them and protect them, Camp Susupe and Camp Chalan Kanoa were established on Saipan and Camp Chulu was established on Tinian.

Life in the camps was not easy, but people did their best with what they had. The camps opened their gates for the final time in July 1946 when the last of the Japanese nationals and Korean laborers were repatriated to their respective homelands. The native Chamorros and Carolinians remained in Chalan Kanoa and began the arduous task of rebuilding.

The indigenous population of Saipan and Tinian has come a long way from the hardships suffered during the war and the indelible imprint of centuries of colonization to reclaim their "paradise lost". In 1976, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands chose to become members of the American family as a Commonwealth in political union with the United States.

These eight soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal Of Honor, the highest military decoration of the United States armed forces, for their actions in the Battle for Saipan or the Battle for Tinian.



60th Anniversary of the World War II Battles of Saipan & Tinian



WWII Medallions The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands has minted a medallion to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Battle at Saipan. Any veteran of the Pacific Theater during WWII is eligible. VFW Post 3457 on Saipan distributes the Medallions. Requests must be made through Post Commanders to insure only VFW members get the free medallions. So, here's what your VFW Post needs. Your Name, Address, Rank, and your unit and branch of service.

At the battle of Saipan the Army's 27th division lost 3,674 killed and wounded, The Marines lost 10,435 killed and wounded.

NOMINATE A SERVICE MEMBER

The *Military Times* "Servicemembers of the Year" awards program is now open for nominations. Click on the *Soldier of the Year* button at:

www.armytimes.com and follow the instructions or find links to nomination forms for other services.

The nominee must be a member of the active, Guard or Reserve forces. The awards ceremony to honor the Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman of the Year will be held in July in Washington, D.C.

VA CLAIMS BREAKDOWN

Claim Category	Jan. 27, 2006	Jan. 2005
Cases requiring a rating	365,194	342,126
Non-rating cases	142,002	90,015
Miscellaneous cases	<u>40,215</u>	<u>41,728</u>
Total original disability claims	547,411	473,869
Appeals (RO & BVA)	<u>152,494</u>	<u>152,550</u>
Total disability claims	699,905	626,419
Education (at RPOs)	<u>113,908</u>	<u>92,016</u>
Total claims	813,813	718,435

RO: Regional Office

BVA: Board of Veterans Appeals

RPO: Regional Processing Office

2 MILLION VA PENSIONS UNTAPPED

Because they are unaware they qualify, nearly 2 million veterans or their widows are leaving an estimated \$22 billion a year in VA pensions unclaimed. VA says many veterans "are completely unaware that the program exists."

Part of the problem is that VA calls it a "disability pension," but a person does not need to be disabled to qualify. To be eligible, veterans must be 65 or older, have served in uniform during a war and earn less than \$10,579, or have non-service connected conditions. Veterans' widows must make less than \$7,094 to qualify. Income can be reduced by unreimbursed medical expenses.

A 2004 VA report estimated that 853,000 veterans and 1.1 million widows are eligible but aren't receiving pensions. That means only 27% of eligible vets and 14% of eligible widows get the money that is due them. If all of those who are eligible received pensions, VA would pay out an estimated additional \$22 billion a year.

VA pensions cases fell to 541,000 in 2005, the sixth consecutive year of decline. VA estimates that number will dip below 500,000 by 2012.

www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Milsvc/Docs/Dpeneg.doc

Call VA toll-free at 1-800-827-1000 or the Lexington County VA office at: 803-785-8400 to speak to a Service Representative.

MORE PENSION BENEFIT RATES

Aid & Attendance: Monthly/Annual

Veteran	\$1,471	\$17,651
Veteran w/1 dependent	\$1,743	\$20,929
Each additional dependent	\$ 150	\$ 1,806

Housebound: Monthly/Annual

Veteran	\$1,077	\$12,929
Veteran w/1 dependent	\$1,350	\$16,205
Each additional dependent	\$ 150	\$ 1,806

Survivors Monthly/Annual

Spouse	\$ 575	\$ 6,906
Spouse w/1 child	\$ 773	\$ 9,286
Spouse with A & A	\$ 944	\$11,338
Spouse with 1/dep, A&A	\$1,126	\$13,527
Spouse Housebound	\$ 721	\$ 8,668
Spouse w/1 Dep Housebd	\$ 904	\$10,858
Each Dependent Child	\$ 203	\$ 1,806

Burial, Headstone & Plot Rate Table

Headstones	\$ 128
Service-Connected Burials	\$ 2,000
Non Service-Connected Burials	\$ 300
Plot Allowance	\$ 300
State Cemetery Plot Allowance	\$ 300

Medal of Honor Allowance (Annual) \$12,828

Medicare Rates (Monthly) \$ 88.50

NEW MEDALS RATE VETS

PREFERENCE

Four medals created in the last few years qualify recipients for veterans preference when applying for federal civil service jobs.

Holders of the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal or the Korea Defense Service Medal qualify for an extra five (5) points or (10 points if disabled) on passing scores when taking an initial federal civil service employment test.

They also receive preference during reductions in force or layoffs.

For more information, access:
www.opm.gov/employ/veterans/htm/vetguide.asp#2Types

COLD WAR MEDAL REJECTED

A provision in the 2006 Defense authorization bill that would have created a Cold War victory medal was dropped before the bill was signed into law. The House had approved the measure, but in negotiations with the Senate the medal was rejected because of opposition from the Pentagon.

The Pentagon opposed it for two reasons: The cost is prohibitive, and the Defense Department issued a certificate to recognize Cold War vets in 2001.

It was estimated that between 14 and 16 million veterans would be eligible for the medal, It would cost the taxpayers between \$27 to \$33 for each medal and certificate awarded. The total cost for the award could be between \$378 million and \$528 million.

The Pentagon plans to continue issuing the certificate, which Defense officials believe “appropriately recognizes military and civilian federal service during the Cold War.”

The Cold War Veterans Association (CWVA) will continue to push for a medal. For the goals—which include a national memorial as well as a campaign medal—of the organization, go to CWVA’s Website at:
www.coldwarveterans.com

Paul W. Tibbets
Brig. General USAF, Retired

”On August 6, 1945 as the Enola Gay approached the Japanese city of Hiroshima, I fervently hoped for success in the first use of a nuclear type weapon. To me it meant putting an end to the fighting and the consequent loss of lives. . . .”

Limited copies of General Tibbets’ book are available at the Lexington VA office for a \$20.00 donation.

20 x 28” prints of Gibson Pond painted by “Griff” are available for a \$25.00 donation. Prints of Becky Rickenbaker’s 16 x 20” rendition of the Lexington County Veterans Monument are available for a \$25.00 donation.

“Support Our Troops” and “Flag” magnetic ribbons are available for \$5.00 donations.

All donations go to the Lexington County Veterans Fund.

AMVETS AND MOTION PICTURE HALL OF FAME ANNOUNCE “OPERATION DVD”

Safe entertainment is a concept that is difficult at best for our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even baseball and softball games are no longer possible because of snipers, mines, bombs and other terrorist activities.

It is with great pride that **AMVETS** (a nationally chartered veterans organization in existence for over sixty years) and **The Motion Picture Hall of Fame** announce a strategic alliance to provide safe entertainment for our troops.

Operation DVD is an appeal to patriotic Americans to donate their new and used DVD’s, which will then be shipped to our fighting men and women overseas. The goal of **Operation DVD** is to attain one million+ new and used DVDs donated by the American Public.

“Children Titles” donated will be distributed to Service-men’s families (Stateside) through the Family Readiness Group of the National Guard, with the assistance of AMVETS.

In addition, **Operation DVD** is partnering with both the **USO** and the **Boys & Girls Clubs of America**. DVDs will be distributed to troops in audiences of USO tours and “Children Titles” will be provided to Boys & Girls Clubs located on military bases around the world.

Individuals may mail their new and used DVDs or monetary donations to: Operation DVD, Box 1300, Palm Springs, CA 92263-1300. For further information, individuals may write to the above address, or call (310) 995-3792.

RETURN OF THE ENOLA GAY

MEDICARE RX SIGN-UP TIPS

The deadline for choosing a Medicare Part D prescription-drug plan is just around the corner (May 15, 2006). If you haven't selected one yet, here are a few tips to help you make your decision.

Narrow the field. There are hundreds of Part D plans, but you can choose only one from those offered in your area. To zero in on the best one for you, look at the three C's—cost, coverage, and convenience. Be sure to consider the total cost of the plan—the premium, deductible, and your co-payment amounts, plus any expected outlays during coverage gaps. What counts is what you will pay out-of-pocket for the entire year. One of the best ways to calculate this is by calling the Medicare hot-line (800-633-4227) or by going to the Drug Plan Finder at: www.medicare.gov. Another key factor is the real cost of any plan is its formulary, the list of drugs it covers. Are needed medications on the formulary? Also, are the drugstores that honor the plan convenient? Of, if you prefer mail order, make sure that's an option.

Save the mail. If you're receiving prescription drug benefits from a current or former employer, a union, or the military, you should have gotten a letter by now telling you whether you will continue to have these benefits. If you didn't receive a letter, call the plan's administrator right away. Get confirmation in writing. If your plan does keep its drug coverage, it should also have sent verification that its prescription coverage is creditable, which means it's at least as good as Medicare's drug coverage. Save this piece of paper. If you elect to change plans later, or your current benefits are discontinued, you'll then be able to sign up for a Part D plan without paying a late-enrollment penalty. If your current plan turns out not to be creditable, you should look into enrolling in a Part D plan before May 15.

Look to the future. If you don't use any prescriptions now or use only a few and your drug costs are low, you should still consider signing up for the least expensive plan available to you as insurance against a time when your prescription

needs might be greater. (In many areas there are plans with premiums under \$15 a month.). Reason: Those who don't enroll in some plan by May 15, 2006, or don't have creditable coverage will pay a penalty for every month they delay in signing up after that. And that penalty amount will be added to their Part D premium for the rest of their lives. After enrolling, however, you are allowed to change plans once a year during open enrollment.

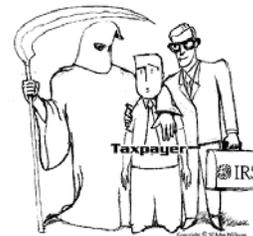
Go to the source. AARP offers three free publications explaining Medicare Part D: "Medicare Drug Coverage: The Basics" (#D18444), "The New Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage: What You Need to Know" (#D18350), and "Extra Help for People with Limited Incomes" (#D18251). To order a copy, call 888-687-2277 or log on to www.aarp.org/medicarerx. To see a comparison of plans, enroll, or ask questions, call Medicare at 800-633-4227 or log on to www.medicare.gov.

FREE TURBO-TAX PROGRAM

This year, the Department of Defense is providing free access to the popular TurboTax filing program to all active duty guard and reserves (regardless of their activation status) and their family members via the Web site:

www.militaryonesource.com

This free program serves as an online "tax mentor" and helps in the preparation and filing of both federal and state taxes. Military OneSource can also refer you to certified financial counselors, tax experts and public accountants who can answer questions, also at no charge, by calling toll-free: (800) 342-9647. For hearing-impaired tax filers, log onto: www.militaryonesource.com



"It is appointed unto men once to die...
(Hebrews: 9:27)

Since April 15 falls on Saturday in 2006, the due date is the next business day (Monday, April 17).

BOOK DONATION TO SCHOOL

The local schools of Lexington County are looking for books on military history. If you have any books please consider donating them.

VA MEDICAL RECORDS ONLINE

By the end of 2006, 5.3 million VA patient medical records are expected to be available electronically. Computer technology allowed VA to do away with paper records in 1998.

Another innovative VA practice permits a patient's vital health indicators to be sent electronically from a patient's file to private homes via a modem. Approximately 350,000 VA patients have this type of access to their records.

KNOWING WHEN

Hospice eligibility requires a medical prognosis of six months or less to live—in the physician's best medical judgment. But prognosticating is an inexact science. Some patients live longer than six months on hospice care, and others may improve and even leave hospice.

One rule of thumb used by hospice and palliative care programs is to ask the primary physician: Would you be surprised if this patient died within the next six months? If the answer to that question is no, then the patient may very well be a candidate for hospice.

Veterans who are struggling with serious illnesses or questioning whether they might be candidates for hospice are encouraged to ask their physicians.

For those receiving health care at VA medical centers, another option is to request a palliative care consultation. If the physician agrees to this request, then the palliative care team will do a one-time assessment. This includes the patient's medical symptoms, supportive care needs and treatment preferences in order to recommend a realistic course of action that is individually responsive.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

1700 Diagonal Rd., Suite 625
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 837-1500

www.nhpco.org (includes a searchable directory of hospice providers)

Dying Well www.dyingwell.org is the Web site of Dr. Ira Byock, a leading national palliative care physician and author of two helpful books about end-of-life care, *Dying Well* and *The Four Things That Matter Most*.

Finding Our Way: Living with Dying in America is a 15-part national newspaper series on end-of-life care. The articles first ran in 2001 and now are posted online at:

www.findingourway.net

(*Veterans of Foreign Wars*, February, 2006, p. 41)

BUDDY POPPIES

Veterans at the local VA hospital have received kits to begin creating poppies for American Legion Auxiliary distribution.

It's a large box that hold the kits. There are hundreds of bright red crepe paper sheets, each with multiple leaf-shape cut outs and sheets of green and black strips with close edge cuts resembling flat brooms. There are, also, many pre-cut wires and pages of labels; "Made by Veterans" in memory of veterans, to help veterans that is the essence of the American Legion Auxiliary poppy.

The poppy, merely a symbol, represents the story of men and women off to endure the horrors of war so that their loved ones and others at home might continue to live in peace.

So, when you see the volunteers passing out Buddy Poppies next month, please be generous. Auxiliary Units use their donations to help veterans with food, medicine, and other needs.



**NATIONAL ANTHEM
CELEBRATES 75 YEARS**

STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last
gleaming?

Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous
fight;

O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly
streaming.

And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.

Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen, thro' the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?

Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,

In full glory reflected, now shines on the stream;
'Tis the star-spangled banner: oh, long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

These are toll-free calls

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion

A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.

No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Oh, thus be it ever when free men shall stand,
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation;
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land
Praise the Power that has made and preserved us as a nation.

Then conquer we must, when our cause is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust";
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave



O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

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APRIL OUTREACH PROGRAM

April 4th 8-12 Batesburg-Leesville

April 11th (cancelled due to training)

April 18th 8-12 Swansea

NEW OFFICE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Lexington Main Office: 785-8400

From Batesburg-Leesville: 332-8400

From Chapin: 941-0231