



CORDWORD

Monthly News Magazine of the New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America

New England Chapter



HAPPY NEW YEAR

INSIDE THIS EDITION

#DESERTSTORM30:USCG

BOSTON VA COVID SHOTS



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#DESERTSTORM30: PROTECTING THE SEAS

Dan Zedan chokes up as he remembers saying goodbye to his children when he went off to war 30 years ago.

"I'll never forget that night. Forgive me if I get emotional," he said.

Zedan, a Coast Guard Reserve commander at the time, served more than six months in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He spent the first two months as a liaison to the Joint...
[continued on page 14.](#)



On Monday, December 21, 2020 we received our first shipment of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and began offering it to VA Staff and Veterans of our Community Living Center and Spinal Cord Injury units. We have continued to offer the vaccine to inpatients and staff who are at the highest risk of getting or spreading the coronavirus, or of becoming severely ill from COVID- 19. We plan to offer vaccine to all Veterans who receive care at VA Boston and are following national
[continued on page 8.](#)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

Paralyzed Veterans of America statement on last week's Capitol Hill violence and the growing threat of additional unrest

WASHINGTON, D.C. – (Jan. 13, 2021) — [Paralyzed Veterans of America](#) Executive Director Carl Blake released the following statement regarding the recent violence in the Capitol on January 6 and the growing threat of additional upheaval in the days leading up to Inauguration Day 2021, which has led to an unprecedented assault on our democracy:

"As an organization founded 75 years ago by veterans who were catastrophically disabled due to their service to our nation and its democratic principles, we are dismayed by the violence that has taken place in our nation and is threatened in the coming days and weeks as our nation undertakes what has historically been a peaceful transition of power in the world's greatest democracy. We denounce this violence in the strongest terms.

The cornerstone of this Nation is democracy, and more so than any other community, veterans are held to the highest standard in defense of democracy. Extremism in any form is in direct conflict with the principles outlined in the Constitution. Actions that run counter to the values and principles expected of PVA members will not be tolerated. We expect our members and all veterans to lead by example and stand against extremism that is harmful to the very fabric of our democracy and the foundational principles that define the greatness of this country. We must come together as a nation and as Americans in support of a peaceful transition of power."

###

About Paralyzed Veterans of America

Paralyzed Veterans of America is the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. For almost 75 years, the organization has ensured that veterans receive the benefits earned through service to our nation; monitored their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funded research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis.

As a life-long partner and advocate for veterans and all people with disabilities, Paralyzed Veterans of America also develops training and career services, works to ensure accessibility in public buildings and spaces, and provides health and rehabilitation opportunities through sports and recreation. With more than 70 offices and 33 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans of America serves veterans, their families, and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Learn more at pva.org.

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PROGRAM DIRECTORS

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ON THE COVER: New Years artwork by Web DNA.

CordWord is the New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America's (New England PVA) monthly magazine that covers news, health, research, lifestyle and issues of interest and concern to Veterans and others with spinal cord injury and disease. Anyone interested in submitting an article to *CordWord* should email media@newenglandpva.org. The assertions and opinions expressed in articles and announcements in *CordWord* reflect the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the New England PVA. New England PVA can in no way whatsoever be held responsible for the content of such views nor can it be held liable for any direct or indirect damage that may arise from such views.

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Out Front

Michael G. Negrete, Chapter President

First, by now, all of you are aware of the events that occurred at our Nation’s Capital on January 6th. Much has already been [said and written, and much more is still coming](#), so I won’t recount what transpired. I do however, join others in their condemnation of the disgraceful behavior of those individuals who took it upon themselves to attack the sacred halls of our democracy in an effort subvert its constitutional process. Nothing is more foundational to our Republic, our American democracy, than respect for the peaceful transfer of power.

We are a diverse nation, just as we are a diverse membership of veterans. This is a strength, but it must be supported so that it continues as a point of pride and unity, not a source of divisiveness. To harness this strength, we need to listen to and respect each other, even those with whom we disagree. We must resist the urge for vengeance, blame or recrimination, and forego the impulse to label and condemn each other individually or particular groups.

Moving on, we are starting a whole new year with the hopes that we will soon see and end to this pandemic, which has caused so much anguish and hardship. As a Chapter, we will continue to be here to support our members however we can, whether through our programs, services or financial aid. To add to this, we will start providing regular virtual meeting, or more casually get together, using the [Zoom](#) platform. The hope in providing these get togethers with one another is to keep us connected in these continuing times of social distancing and isolation. These meetings will be open forums for any of our members to discuss whatever might be on their minds, be it needing some type of assistance, sharing a personal story or just to listen in on what else might be going on in our membership. We will start off with a single meeting to gauge demand and break-off to start any specialized meeting groups such as, new injuries, MS/ALS, sports, etc. Please check the [Chapter Online Calendar of Activities](#) for coming dates and times. The [Online Calendar](#) also lists an array of other activities throughout New England, both virtual and in-person. There is also information available for [COVID](#), [Caregivers](#), [Sports & Rec](#), [SCI/D Resources](#), [Advocacy](#), and much more! Be sure to [bookmark it](#) and check often.

Also regarding COVID, the VA is working diligently to vaccinate each of us as rapidly as resources and vaccine supplies will allow. For specific details on how the VA Boston HCS has scheduled and is projecting its vaccinations, as well as working with other New England VAs, please turn to [page 8](#). As noted, please keep in mind they have each of us with an SCI/D in their patient registry and will be calling us individually to schedule vaccination appointments as the guidelines vaccination supplies permit. To get the latest updates and [sign up](#) to stay informed about COVID-19 vaccines, visit [VA’s vaccine information page](#).

[Registration opened](#) January 11th for the [40th National Veterans Wheelchair Games](#) being held in New York City this August 8 thru 13. If you haven’t registered, you should do so right away if planning to attend, as there may be some limits on athlete participation due to COVID restrictions. For information about Chapter participation requirement please see [page 10](#).

Talking about opportunities to participate, there is current a Chapter Board vacancy for a Director. If interested in this chance to represent your fellow Chapter members, please turn to [page 22](#) for more information.

Wrapping up here, in my meanderings around the “interweb”, I came across this sign posted in the Indiana University Health hospital. Given the times we are all living in with so much divisiveness, on top of a global pandemic taking nearly 4000 lives a day, we could each apply its intent and meaning to every aspect of our lives, whether virtual or in-person. I won’t add any further ponderings to it here, as I feel it speaks quite clearly for itself.

Michael G. Negrete
*Chapter President/PVA National Director
and Paralyzed Veteran*



From the Director's Desk

Mark Murphy, Chapter Executive Director

I hope that you, your family, and friends enjoyed a nice holiday season. While things were different this year for myself in terms of my inability to visit with some friends and extended family, I was still able to gather safely over the holidays with a few loved ones. I know we are all hopeful that sometime in 2021 we will be able to return to some sense of normalcy as it regards the impact of the pandemic on our individual lives and on the world at large. Because our Chapter office is in West Roxbury, which is in the City of Boston, I have been continuing to monitor the COVID-19 numbers in the City and the ongoing public restrictions associated with the pandemic. On January 5th, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh announced that because of a citywide COVID-19 positive test rate of 8.8% and an ICU bed occupancy rate of 93%, the City has extended its bans on gyms, bowling alleys and museums, along with reduced capacity limits for restaurants, offices, and houses of worship. The Mayor said that the bans on certain gathering spots and 25% maximum capacity on offices, restaurants, and houses of worship is not because of specific outbreaks linked to them but to simply try to reduce the odds that people will come into contact with each other. Since March, as a Chapter we have been making every effort possible to help limit the spread of the virus within our office by having all employees and Board members conduct the work of the Chapter remotely until it is safe to return there in person. We all must continue to do our part by wearing a mask and social distancing while remaining hopeful that a vaccine will become available for all sometime over the next several months.



Back on December 16th I participated in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) coaches call. Representatives from PVA National presented a COVID-19 planning update for the Games, where they laid out the work they are doing now to plan for a safe and healthy experience for those who will attend. They are striving to take a proactive approach in preparation for the Games as they are still planning on holding the event in New York City from August 8-13, 2021. August 7th and 14th will be the travel days. For more information on the NVWG and to download their App, please visit their website at www.wheelchairgames.org. Registration opened on January 11th and closes on April 2nd. There have been no changes to the medical form, so members can now start to schedule their physicals. Please feel free to reach out to myself or Mike Guilbault, our Board member and sports director, for more information.

On December 17th I was delighted to join a virtual meeting with Chapter President Michael Negrete and some staff members from the Spaulding New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center and United Spinal Association's Boston Chapter. Since joining the New England PVA staff I have learned about the work that they do, although I had never been formally introduced except for an email introduction. During our conversation, their staff members shared some of the great work they have been doing in their virtual outreach programs, as they have set up an enormously successful virtual peer mentorship program along with other small virtual groups to discuss several topics of interest. I was also very interested to learn that they held a virtual Gala last year, where they were able to successfully meet their fundraising goals for that event. As I heard about their wonderful virtual outreach and events last year, I was taking notes to assess how we could perhaps adopt some of their best practices for ourselves in 2021. Stand by for updates on that front!

Finally, as I watched the Capital building be stormed on the afternoon of January 6th, I could not help but to think of our Chapter delegation presence on those same steps and in that very building last March during the annual PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar. Those are hallowed grounds, and when inside and outside the Capital building one has a palpable sense of it being a temple of American democracy. To see it desecrated in the way that it was, and with the senseless loss of lives on that day, was truly devastating to witness. May the fractured and broken parts of our Nation be healed as we progress forward throughout this New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Murphy".

Mark Murphy
Chapter Executive Director
and Massachusetts Army National Guard Veteran



FROM the HILL

Kristen McCone Gordon, Chapter Government Relations Director

As we begin a new year, our Chapter is in the process of developing our 2021 legislative priorities across New England. As always, we want to focus on the issues that most directly affect your lives. If you are facing an obstacle due to your SCI injury and/or disease and need

assistance, whether it be related to accessibility in buildings, healthcare concerns during the pandemic and beyond, or workplace issues – please let me know. Our Chapter remains committed to advocating for your needs, and to best do that, I need to hear about the challenges you are facing in your daily lives.

Opportunity to attend the 2021 Pushing Access Forward Advocacy/Legislative Seminar

I'm pleased to announce an opportunity for chapter members to become involved with our legislative efforts at the federal level. On March 1st and 2nd, National PVA will be hosting the *Pushing Access Forward Advocacy/Legislative Seminar* in Washington, D.C. Following the seminar, our Chapter will be conducting briefings with the New England congressional delegation. Due to the pandemic, the seminar and congressional meetings will be virtual this year and open to a larger delegation in each Chapter. Members who are interested in participating are asked to attend the following meetings:

- Training via zoom on January 26th and February 10th (2pm each day)
- Advocacy Legislative Seminar via zoom on March 1st and 2nd from 11am-4pm.

If you are interested in participating in this year's seminar and being more involved in our Chapter's government relations efforts in 2021, please contact me at gr@newenglandpva.org. I would love to work with you on our advocacy efforts!

Preview of PVA's 2021 Federal Priorities

National PVA has released an initial summary of 2021 federal priorities and positions. Our Chapter is looking forward to working with our colleagues in the national office to determine how our Chapter can most effectively support these initiatives and which issues have the best likelihood of passing in the 117th Congress. I look forward to providing you with more information as the session begins, but in the meantime, I'd like to hear from you. What are your thoughts on the issues below? Which ones affect your lives the most? What are we missing? If you are willing to discuss your experiences with the policy issues below, or suggest additional issues of concern, please reach out to me. Any and all feedback is welcome and appreciated.

Preserve Access to VA's Specialized Services

PVA firmly believes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the best health care provider for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders

(SCI/D). VA's specialized systems of care follow higher clinical standards than those required in the private sector. Preserving and strengthening VA's specialized systems of care—such as SCI/D care, blinded rehabilitation, amputee care, and polytrauma care—remains the highest priority for PVA. This includes access to high-quality prosthetics through VA's Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service. If VA continues to shift care to the private sector and woefully understaff its facilities, the Department's capacity to treat veterans will be diminished, and could lead to the closure of facilities and reductions in services offered to catastrophically disabled veterans.

Congress must preserve access to VA's specialized services and provide needed funding for them. Congress must ensure proper staffing of VA's specialized services by ensuring the Department has the authority to provide additional pay, compensation, and retention incentives to make VA service more competitive with the private sector.

Increase Access to Long-Term Care for Veterans with SCI/D

The lack of adequate long-term care (LTC) options presents an enormous problem for people with catastrophic disabilities who, as a result of medical advancements, are now living longer. There are few LTC facilities that are capable of appropriately serving SCI/D veterans. VA operates six such facilities; only one of which lies west of the Mississippi River. Many aging veterans with SCI/D need VA LTC services but VA only has the capacity to provide this kind of care for about 200 patients. Since VA SCI/D LTCs are exceptionally limited, veterans with SCI/D are being treated in community institutions, by providers not trained in SCI/D. This often results in compromised quality of care and poor outcomes. In some areas, it is nearly impossible to even find community placements for veterans who are ventilator dependent and those with bowel and bladder care needs. VA has identified the need to provide additional SCI/D LTC facilities and has included these additional centers in ongoing facility renovations, but such plans have been languishing for years.

Congress must ensure that VA designs an SCI/D LTC strategic plan that addresses the need for increased LTC beds in VA SCI/D centers. Congress must provide increased funding directed at the completion of the remaining SCI/D-related construction projects.

Ensure Proper Implementation of VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Program Expansion

The VA MISSION Act directed that VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) be expanded to severely injured veterans of all eras through a phased approach beginning October 1, 2019. Phase I, which began on October 1, 2020, includes veterans who were severely injured in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975, and on or after September 11, 2001. Phase II is expected to begin on October 1, 2022, and will include veterans from all remaining eras. Prolonged delays are further straining caregivers who desperately need relief now, particularly in light of the impacts of the global pandemic. The new rules governing the PCAFC, which were implemented on October 1, 2020, will also impact current program recipients and result in veterans being

removed from the program.

Congress must conduct oversight of VA's implementation of the expanded PCAFC to ensure that eligibility determinations are consistent and the appeals process is fair and just. Congress must expedite implementation of Phase II of the caregiver program to October 1, 2021.

Improve Access to Fertility Services Through VA

Thousands of service members have suffered a genitourinary injury, resulting in the loss of, or compromised ability, to have a child. In September 2016, Congress granted a temporary authorization for VA to provide in-vitro fertilization (IVF) to veterans with a service-connected condition that prevents the conception of a pregnancy. VA began offering IVF services in January 2017, and in September 2018, they were reauthorized for another two years. In drafting the rules for the program, VA anticipated recurring authorization by Congress; so, the Department stipulated IVF may continue to be provided if Congress approves its funding through the annual budget process. VA's current temporary authority prohibits the use of gametes that are not a veteran's and his or her spouse's. Because they require donated gametes, they are ineligible for IVF through VA.

Congress must repeal VA's ban on IVF and make these services a regular part of the medical benefits package available to veterans. Congress must also pass legislation to authorize VA to provide assisted reproductive technology, including IVF, surrogacy, and gamete donation at VA for any veterans enrolled in VA health care who are living with infertility, including the authorization of service provision to non-veteran partners.

Improve Services for Women Veterans with SCI/D

More than half a million women veterans are currently using VA health care, and women veterans with SCI/D are a small, but important subset of these users. Women veterans, including those living with SCI/D, need access to comprehensive gender-specific mental and physical health care with high standards of care regarding the quality, privacy, safety, and dignity of that care. VA has developed a robust system of care to serve the needs of veterans with SCI/D but there needs to be a stronger focus on the needs of women veterans with SCI/D. As Congress develops strategies and policies for VA to follow, additional emphasis is needed to ensure women veterans with SCI/D are incorporated into these plans.

Improve Access to Transportation for the Most Severely Disabled Veterans

VA Automobile Allowance Grants

Access to an adapted vehicle is essential to the mobility and health of catastrophically disabled veterans who need a reliable means of transportation to get them to and from work, meet family obligations, and attend medical appointments. The current, one-time VA Automobile Allowance Grant of roughly \$21,500 covers anywhere from one-half to one-third of the cost to procure a vehicle. Because of the high cost to procure replacement vehicles (upwards of \$60,000), veterans often retain vehicles beyond their reliability point. Congress must pass legislation that would allow eligible veterans to receive an Automobile Allowance Grant every ten years for the purchase of an adapted vehicle.

Automobile Adaptive Equipment

VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program helps physically disabled veterans enter, exit, and/or operate a motor vehicle or other conveyance. VA provides necessary equipment for veterans with service-connected disabilities such as platform wheelchair lifts, UVLs (under

vehicle lifts), power door openers, lowered floors/raised roofs, raised doors, hand controls, left foot gas pedals, reduced effort and zero effort steering and braking, and digital driving systems. The program also provides reimbursements (to service-connected veterans) for standard equipment including, but not limited to, power steering, power brakes, power windows, power seats, and other special equipment necessary for the safe operation of an approved vehicle.

- Support for veterans with non-service-connected disabilities is limited to assistance with ingress/egress only.
- Congress must direct VA to reimburse the cost of items on the Department's current AAE list as well as modern driver assistance technologies to broaden opportunities for veterans with catastrophic disabilities to drive more comfortably and safely.
- Congress must pass legislation that allows veterans who have non-service-connected catastrophic disabilities to receive the same type of adaptive automobile equipment as veterans whose disabilities are service-connected.

Increase Grants for Housing Adaptations

VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grant helps veterans and service members make medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to their primary residence. The grant has a lifetime limit of \$6800 for those with service-connected disabilities and \$2000 for those with non-service-connected disabilities. HISA grants can be used to help make entrances and exits accessible, allow access to the kitchen or bathroom, and improve plumbing or electrical systems for necessary medical equipment. While the cost of home modifications and labor have greatly increased in recent years, HISA grant rates have not changed in 11 years. With veterans sheltering in place during and following the resolution of the pandemic, ensuring veterans can safely remain in their homes is more essential than ever. Congress must raise HISA grant rates to at least \$10,000 for service-connected disabled veterans and \$5,000 for non-service-connected disabled veterans.

Increase Benefits for Surviving Spouses of ALS Veterans

Eligible survivors can receive an additional \$284.57 per month in Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) if the veteran was rated totally disabled for a continuous period of at least eight years immediately preceding death. This extra payment is commonly referred to as the "DIC kicker." VA regulations recognize amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) as a presumptive service-connected disease and, due to its aggressive nature, it is automatically rated at 100 percent once service connected. Because the average life expectancy for a person with ALS is two to five years, many spouses of deceased veterans with ALS rarely qualify for the additional DIC benefit given the eight-year requirement. This policy fails to recognize the significant sacrifices these veterans and their families have made for this country. Congress must extend DIC kicker eligibility to the surviving spouses of veterans who died of service-connected ALS prior to the 8-year period.



VA Boston HCS Moderna COVID-19 Update

VA Boston Healthcare System Public Affairs Office



On Monday, December 21, 2020 we received our first shipment of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and began offering it to VA Staff and Veterans of our Community Living Center and Spinal Cord Injury units. We have continued to offer the vaccine to inpatients and staff who are at the highest risk of getting or spreading the coronavirus, or of becoming severely ill from COVID- 19. We plan to offer vaccine to all Veterans who receive care at VA Boston and are following national guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and VA on the criteria and order of vaccine delivery. Patients who are health care workers, or first responders, should proceed with vaccination as soon as it is offered by their employer, but also are eligible to receive it as a patient in our healthcare system based on the schedule and criteria below.

By mid-January we will offer the vaccine to outpatients, beginning with our Brockton Campus on January 5th followed by our Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury Campuses the week of January 11th. The first outpatients to receive the Moderna Covid-19 Vaccine will be patients with high risk medical conditions such as undergoing dialysis, chemotherapy, transplant treatment as well as homeless Veterans and those in congregate living situations. Vaccinations will be given by appointment only.

In the coming weeks and months thereafter, we will receive more shipments of the vaccine and give it to outpatient Veterans based on the criteria established by the CDC. We will move as aggressively as possible to vaccinate VA Boston Veterans in line with the CDC’s phased plan for providing vaccines. Our projected timetable depending on vaccine availability is shown in the table below.

VA Boston will call each Veteran in order of priority to offer a vaccine appointment. Once the vaccine has been offered to all Veterans in an age group, we will move on to call the next group. Appointments are required and there will not be walk-in hours.

Our staff can’t provide vaccines to anyone who isn’t eligible for VA care at this time. If you would like to enroll in VA healthcare, please call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

For more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>.

TARGET GROUP <i>(Veterans enrolled at VA Boston)</i>	PROJECTED DATE <i>(Dates may change depending on vaccine availability)</i>
Residents of VA Boston’s Community Living Center or Spinal Cord Injury Unit	Completed December 2020
Veterans Age 85+	January 2021
Veterans Age 75+	February 2021
Veterans Age 65+	March 2021
Veterans Age 50+	April 2021
Veterans Age 50 and younger	May 2021

*The time frame above is only a projection. Based on the number of *actual SCI/D veterans registered* in the VA Boston HCS, and dependent on vaccine quantities available, it is estimated all SCI/D veterans registered could be vaccinated within the next 60 days.

The VA Boston HCS SCI Service is also working with the other New England VA SCI/D facilities to have their veterans vaccinated within the same time frame.

Primary care providers will individually contact registered veterans to schedule vaccination appointments. Therefore they ask, please do not try to call your provider or SCI/D clinics to schedule appointments.

VA Administers Over 146,000 COVID-19 Vaccine Doses

Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs



WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today it has administered initial COVID-19 vaccine doses to more than 14,000 Veterans at high risk of getting COVID-19 infection, and more than 132,000 health care employees as of Jan. 4.

In accordance with VA's [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan](#), the department started vaccination efforts at [37 initial VA medical centers](#), following the [Food and Drug Administration's Dec. 11 decision](#) to issue an Emergency Use Authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine.

The 37 initial sites to first receive the vaccine were selected based on

several factors, including having the capacity to store the vaccine at extremely cold temperatures and the ability to offer high-throughput vaccination. Shortly after, VA included [128 additional sites](#) to the original list. To date, the list of sites has grown to 195 VA facilities spread out across the country with more being added.

"This is a massive undertaking that is happening at rapid pace," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This week, the initial 37 sites that received the first limited Pfizer-BioNTech allocations are beginning to administer the second dose."

The second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine should be administered 21-days after the first vaccination while the second Moderna dose should be administered 28-days after the first. VA began administering Moderna the week of Dec. 21, 2020. Both vaccines require two doses for maximum efficacy.

VA's ultimate goal is to offer COVID-19 vaccinations to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated. As vaccine supplies increase, **VA care teams will reach out to eligible Veterans to schedule vaccinations.**

Veterans can get up-to-date information and sign up to receive updates on [VA's COVID Vaccine webpage](#).

VA Expands Access to Telehealth Services during Pandemic for Older, Rural and Homeless Veterans

Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs



WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today its [Digital Divide Consult](#) has helped more than 12,000 Veterans obtain Internet access or a video-capable device for their health care needs.

As part of the program, VA providers refer Veterans to a VA social worker, who determines eligibility for various programs to assist with getting the Internet service or technology needed for [VA telehealth](#) — ensuring older Veterans, those living in rural areas and Veterans who are homeless or in temporary housing have the opportunity to participate.

According to the [Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association](#), Veterans with lower incomes, more severe disabilities and more chronic conditions are more likely to use virtual care during the pandemic; but

Veterans older than 45 and Veterans who are homeless or who live in rural areas are less likely to use video care. The [Digital Divide Consult](#) provides a solution for these Veterans to access video care when needed.

"The pandemic has tested VA's workforce like never before, and innovations like the [Digital Divide Consult](#) highlight the ingenuity and resilience that have been hallmarks of the department's successful response to this national emergency," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "As our virtual care infrastructure continually improves, so does the quality and accessibility of Veterans' care."

VA's [Digital Divide Consult](#) and other initiatives are prime reasons the use of telehealth services by Veterans continues to rise. In mid-November, a total of 196,116 telehealth video visits to Veterans in their homes or other off-site locations were completed over a seven-day period, representing a 1,653% increase in weekly [VA Video Connect](#) visits since the end of February. The number of video appointments held per day peaked at more than 41,000.

To further enable Veterans to participate in telehealth, VA facilities are establishing test-call services to support Veterans ahead of their first video visit. Additionally, [VA is partnering with Microsoft's Airband](#) initiative to educate Veterans on essential digital skills. VA intends to update the Digital Divide Consult as opportunities for future broadband and device discounts become available.

Learn more about [VA telehealth](#).



Rollin' with Gilbo

By Mike Guilbault, Chapter VP and Sports Director

This year the 40th National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) will be held August 8-13 in New York City, travel days being the 7th and 14th.

Registration must be done [online](#) as done the last few games; I did see there is a [link to download paper forms](#) on the website. Registration opens January 11 and although athletes can register with PVA until April 2nd, that is not

the case if you want to be part of the NEPVA Coasters Team. You must both inform the Chapter that you intend to go to the NVWG and must register by March 2, the Chapter needs the time to get roommates assigned, hospital staff assigned, then get all the hotel rooms reserved. Failure to do either and you will be responsible for your own room reservation and funding.

To [register online](#) or [download the required paperwork](#) you can visit the website www.wheelchairgames.org and everything can be done there. There is a big red button to choose Register Now right on the page below the countdown of days until the Games. For those who have done online registration previously you can use the same username and password as last time, that worked for me. For those who desire their own room or need to share with their significant other, the room rate this year is

\$220.00 and that does not include taxes or any fees the hotel may charge.

The Chapter only pays half the room costs, when sharing with another team athlete each gets half the room funded so the total room costs is covered, none of this is new as any member who has attended previous NVWG will know. Please get your registration started if you plan to attend, certain events only allow so many participants so early registration insures you a better chance of getting to participate in the events you desire. Softball, Basketball, Power Soccer, Disc Golf, Sniper and Trap Shooting are just a few I can think of that only allow so many athletes. New events this year will include Disc Golf, E-gaming and Sniper Competition (for those who shoot an average score of 500+), one can't compete in Air Rifle and Sniper. Disc Golf and E-gaming will not count towards being one of your 5 events max. They have chosen the game Apex Legend as the game that will be played to compete for the medals this year.

Finally, now I'm too old to be competitive, they have also added a Super Q. Previously Quads were not allowed to compete in the Super G so I have been lobbying for years they hold a Super Q so the top quads in Slalom could compete on a tougher course same as the paras and the Super G.

I hope you all are doing well in this crazy time and with the NVWG not being held until August, I am hoping things will be back to somewhat normal by then.

Stay safe out there everyone.

2021 National Veterans Wheelchair Games Planning

via www.wheelchairgames.org

Important Note: Due to the uncertainty surrounding the global COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on large events like the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, we cannot predict what federal, state, or local restrictions will be in place when the Wheelchair Games are scheduled to occur. It is possible that in order to ensure the safety of all who are in attendance, there may be restrictions in place that limit the number of participants and attendees allowed into the venues where the events will occur. Registration at this time will not guarantee a place in the competition. We do track the order in which completed registrations are received. We advise you to get your registration and all required forms submitted as soon as possible. The deadline for registration is April 2, 2021. We anticipate that no decisions in this regard will be made until the late Spring of 2021. Be assured that we are monitoring the situation and taking every action to ensure the health and safety of all those that attend the NVWG. We will notify each registrant of all relevant decisions as they are made. Please stay informed by downloading the NVWG app and visiting the website frequently for additional updates.

NEW EVENTS FOR 2021

Disc Golf: New event and limited to 36 Veterans total for Classes (II,III,IV,V) and 36 Veterans for Classes (1A,1B,1C). For 2021 only, this event does not count against the five-event limit.

Adaptive E-Sports: Online gaming competition. Does not count against the five-event limit.

Sniper Competition: In lieu of registering for the regular Air Rifle competition, we are introducing a Sniper Competition. We recommend this event for competitors with an average score of 500 or better. This event counts towards the five-event rule. Veterans cannot register for both Air Rifle and Sniper. There will be a cap on the number of Sniper competitors.

Super Q: We are adding a competition for the top Quad Class finishers, including Motor Slalom.

DIVISION CHANGE FOR 2021 :

Novice: Recommended for first-time Veterans to the Wheelchair Games. Novice Veterans may opt out to compete as Open, Masters, Senior, effective for all their events.

Open: Any competitor may select to sign up as Open for all events. Age recommendation 45 and under.

Masters: Ages 46-65

Seniors: Ages 66 and above



NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES

40th Anniversary

FACT SHEET

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the world's largest annual wheelchair sports event solely for military veterans. Every year, hundreds of American heroes from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the post-9/11 era compete in this celebration of courage and camaraderie.

Our History

The Wheelchair Games launched in 1981 with 7 events and 75 athletes. Paralyzed Veterans of America joined the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1985 to help expand the event's mission and reach. The Wheelchair Games have since grown to attract more than 500 participants each year.

40th National Veterans Wheelchair Games

We are excited to bring the National Veterans Wheelchair Games to New York City, August 8-13, 2021, and showcase the drive, determination and spirit of our veteran competitors. The 2021 Wheelchair Games marks the 40th anniversary of the wheelchair sports and rehabilitation event. Throughout the weeklong event we also will remember and honor those lives lost on September 11, 2001, as 2021 also marks the 20th anniversary of that tragic day. Many of the veterans who participate each year in the Wheelchair Games were inspired to join the military and serve our country because of the events of 9/11. And in many ways our veteran competitors are much like the city of New York—strong, resilient and full of perseverance.



"September 11th happened my senior year. I was 18 years old, and I knew after the towers went down and the attacks that I wanted to join. I wanted to serve my country. And it was important to me."

Jesse Graham
U.S. Air Force Veteran

2019 ATHLETE SNAPSHOT

Ages **20 to 89** **66** With Combat-Related Injury
104 Novice Athletes **546** Men **69** Women

Co-presented by:



WHEELCHAIRGAMES.ORG

PVA WASHINGTON UPDATE HIGHLIGHTS

PVA Washington Update Volume 26, Number 22

Congress Approves Veterans Omnibus Bill

Congress recently approved [H.R.7105](#), the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, an omnibus bill including a variety of veterans-related provisions addressing benefits and health care. The package contains many provisions that PVA had a hand in developing. Key items include elimination of the 12-year delimitation date for the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program for those who enrolled in it after January 1, 2013; modernization of the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI) program; and reduction of the Dependent and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) remarriage penalty age from 57 to 55. Other provisions provide greater funding or availability for Edith Nourse Rogers STEM scholarships and the VET TEC program, improve the Transition Assistance Program, and establish a VA Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs.

We are pleased that nearly all of the provisions in the Senate passed version of the [Deborah Sampson Act \(DSA\)](#) made it into the omnibus. Versions of the DSA have been in play for multiple congressional sessions. This part of the package is aimed at improving the health care of women veterans at VA through research, pilot programs, and organization and staffing guidance. Provisions here require VA to prioritize retrofitting existing medical facilities to make it safer and easier for women veterans to get care; ensure each VA facility has accessible, clinically appropriate prosthetic appliances for women veterans; and conduct a study on infertility services provided by VA. The bill will be presented to the President for his signature soon and our expectation is he will sign it into law.

Compact Act Signed Into Law

President Trump signed H.R. 8247, the Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment Act of 2020 or the Veterans COMPACT Act of 2020, on December 5. This bill combines language taken from nine separate measures aimed at reducing veteran suicide and compliments the efforts of the John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act which became law a couple months ago. Provisions in the Compact Act direct VA to:

- Carry out a pilot program on information sharing between VA and designated persons regarding the assistance and benefits available to veterans;
- Furnish, reimburse, or pay for emergent suicide care, including transportation costs, at a VA or non-VA facility for certain veterans who are in an acute suicidal crisis;
- Establish a program for the education and training of caregivers and family members of veterans with mental health disorders;

- Create a new Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans, a provision endorsed by PVA, which will make recommendations regarding the use of public lands or other outdoor spaces for medical treatment and therapy for certain veterans;
- Seek to contact certain veterans who have not recently received care to encourage them to receive comprehensive physical, mental health, eye, and audiological examinations;
- Provide VA police officers with annual training on the prevention of suicide among the population it serves;
- Complete an analysis and report on its programs that aid women veterans who are homeless or precariously housed to identify the areas in which such programs are failing to meet the needs of such women; and
- Annually report on the use of VA health care by women veterans.

DOT Releases Final Rule on Service Animals in Air Travel

Effective January 11, 2021, airlines will no longer be required to provide access for emotional support animals under the Air Carrier Access Act as the result of a recently released Department of Transportation (DOT) final rule. Under the rule, a service animal is defined as a dog (of any breed) that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability. DOT will also allow airlines to require passengers

with disabilities who use service animals to complete forms developed by the Department attesting to their service animal's health, behavior, and training, and if taking a long flight, attesting that the service animal can either not relieve itself, or can relieve itself in a sanitary manner. Airlines can also require a service animal to fit within its handler's foot space on the aircraft. More information about the rule is available [here](#).

DOJ Settles with Amtrak to Resolve Disability Discrimination Across its Intercity Rail System

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has announced that it reached an agreement with Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, to resolve the Department's findings of disability discrimination in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Under the agreement, Amtrak

will fix inaccessible stations and pay \$2.25 million to victims hurt by its inaccessible stations. For more information about this settlement, please [click here](#).

VA Benefits Rates Increase

Effective December 1, all compensation benefit rates increased by 1.3 percent and the higher levels will be reflected in January 2021 payments. These adjustments help to make sure that the purchasing power of

benefits keeps up with inflation. If you receive VA compensation benefits, [click here](#) to learn your new rates.

VA Debt Management Collections Activities to Resume January 2021

The VA's Debt Management Center (DMC) has announced that it will resume sending debt collection notifications in January 2021 following a nine-month suspension during the pandemic. Collections will not restart until April 2021. DMC has a [new debt portal](#) that goes live January 5, 2021. Veterans will be able to review their debts electronically. There are four debt relief options: veterans can establish or adjust a repayment plan,

request a waiver, submit a compromise offer, or request a temporary hardship suspension. To learn more, please click [here](#). Or contact the DMC [here](#) or at 1-800-827-0648.

Status of Revisions to SAH Guidance

VA recently updated its regulations to reflect the increased Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant amounts provided by the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-154). A public announcement regarding this action was posted in the [Federal Register](#) in early November. Additional VA guidance and public products (fact sheets, Handbook for Design, etc.) are still in varying stages

of the review and approval process; however, SAH staff have received temporary guidance on how to process active and inactive cases until these are finalized. We also understand that VA is preparing a letter to send to approximately 5,400 impacted veterans advising them of the changes in the program.

New Wheelchair Standards Website

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Improving Health and Function Through Use of Performance Standards in Wheelchair Selection recently launched a new website to share research and information about

wheelchair and cushion performance. More information is available [here](#).



#DesertStorm30: Protecting the Seas

By Gary Kunich, VA Public Affairs Office via VAntage Point - www.blogs.va.gov



#DESERTSTORM30: PROTECTING THE SEAS

Dan Zedan chokes up as he remembers saying goodbye to his children when he went off to war 30 years ago.

"I'll never forget that night. Forgive me if I get emotional," he said.

Zedan, a Coast Guard Reserve commander at the time, served more than six months in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He spent the first two months as a liaison to the Joint Task Force, planning and executing the war. Then he took command of Port Security Unit 302, protecting ships coming into the Bahrain harbor and advising their Coast Guard.

The U.S. Coast Guard never mobilized since World War II. No one expected they would again, including Zedan, who was a vice president of marketing in Chicago when his 15-year-old daughter called.

"Dad, are you going overseas?" she asked.

"What are you talking about?"

"There's a war," she said. "It's war."

It was Aug. 2, 1990.

Tsianina (pronounced Sha-Neenah) was watching news coverage about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

"No, don't worry," he told her over the phone. "It will be over quick."



Coast Guard Veteran Dan Zedan (left) took command of Port Security Unit 302 two months after he arrived in the Middle East.

Coast Guard deploys for the first time since WWII

"That's what I told her," he said, recalling that day three decades later. "But I knew that wasn't going to be the case."

As U.S. leaders assembled a multi-national force and mobilized all branches of the Defense Department, they kept active-duty Coast Guard on the home front and sent Reservists to the Middle East.

Three Coast Guard Port Security Units were mobilized — 303 from Milwaukee deployed Sept. 18 to the King Abdul Aziz Port in Saudi Arabia; 301 from Buffalo, New York, deployed Sept. 21 to Al Jubayl, Saudi Arabia; and 302 from Cleveland, Ohio, deployed Nov. 22 – Thanksgiving Day – to Manama, Bahrain. Armed with M2s and M60s, it was their jobs to protect ships coming into the harbor, making sure they weren't attacked.

"My family had gotten used to me having a bag packed and leaving for military exercises, but never anything like this," Zedan said.

The Coast Guard prepared as early as 1982 for mobilizations.

"It was a little bit like 'Cops and Robbers,'" said Zedan. "We didn't think we'd ever actually deploy. We were the lifesavers. We weren't the John Waynes."

He put on a brave face as he said goodbye to his five kids.

"As I went down the line, I told each one what I had hoped for them. Gave them a hug and a kiss and ..."

He pauses and his voice cracks with emotion.

"I wasn't sure when I'd be home. And if for some reason I didn't come home, I wanted them to know how much I loved them and what I wanted for them in life."



Coast Guard Veteran Mary Fowlkes was working as a middle school teacher in Milwaukee when she was mobilized for Desert Shield in September 1990.

Schoolteacher to supply troop

Mary Fowlkes joined the Coast Guard Reserve in 1983. While she worked as a middle school teacher, she was a supply troop during her Reserve drills one weekend a month and two weeks a year.

With a new school year in place, she was busy working on gradebooks at home the evening of Sept. 15 when the phone rang.

“You need to report tomorrow at 0600 to the 440th (Airlift Wing in Milwaukee),” her commander said.

“It’s a call I never expected. Never,” she said. “He didn’t give me a whole lot of info – just to be prepared to be gone for three months. I didn’t have any camo uniforms. I had a fridge full of food. All the stores were closed. I told my sister, ‘I think I’m going to Saudi Arabia tomorrow. Here’s my checkbook, pay my bills when they come in and cancel my newspaper.’”

She was made part of PSU 303 from Milwaukee. After three days of intensive training, they arrived at the King Abdul Aziz Port.



Coast Guard boats from Port Security Unit 301 patrol the waters around Al Jubayl, Saudi Arabia. Because the Coast Guard had 22-foot boats they were able to provide security for the bigger ships coming into the harbor. The Coast Guard boats had M2s and M60s to provide security.

Working on the fly with little prep

“We didn’t come over with a lot of supplies,” Fowlkes said. “The majority of supplies that were needed had to be purchased in Saudi Arabia. We had to work with merchants and stores to get oil for upkeep of our boats.

“They won’t do business with women. I’d have to stay on base, or the couple times I went out, I had to sit back while they were discussing things. I couldn’t say anything.”

Zedan arrived a day later and found out mobilization plans on paper didn’t work in real life.

“My first job was two-fold. First, the Milwaukee unit was in terrible quarters at the time. I needed to find a better place for them. Mobilization plans called for the Navy to provide vehicles to get the boats from the warehouse to the water. There were no vehicles to do that. Then we didn’t have trucks and no way for the troops to get back and forth.

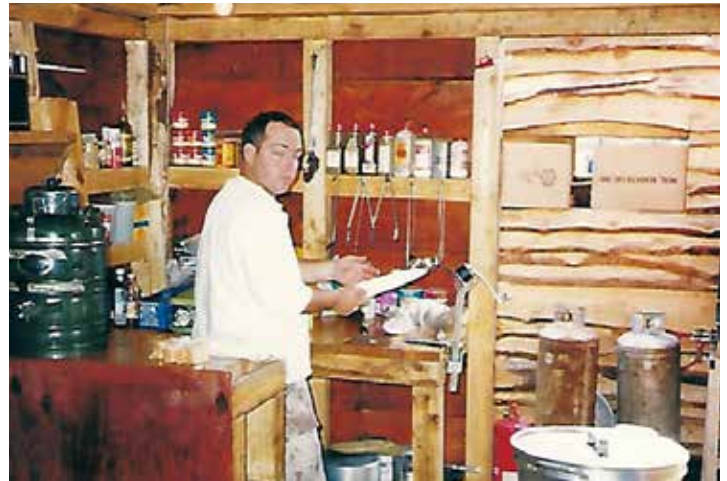
“In the first several weeks, we had no way of getting gas to our boats. We’d literally have to take them out of the water, put them on a trailer and drive them to a gas station.”

While the Navy had big ships, only the Coast Guard had the 22-footers that could get close enough to shore to provide security. But they quickly discovered the boat batteries were wired wrong.

“If it ran for an extended period, it overcharged the battery, and they’d explode,” Zedan said. “We didn’t come over with extra batteries. Our warrant officer goes to the Air Force liaison officer, and some of their aircraft used the same kind, so they gave us two pallets of batteries.”

Military ingenuity worked best when he was in Bahrain, where alcohol is allowed.

“If we were short-handed and needed something, we’d work out deals with other services — a boat ride or case of beer for equipment.



The PSU 301 crew used wood dunnage to build up their base camp, including a boat house, restaurant, weight room and officers’ shed, as well as the protective walls between the tents.

Making a home in a warzone

Bruce Bruni, a lieutenant junior grade assigned to PSU 301 out of Buffalo, faced similar issues.

“I have to agree, our equipment was thrown together. The people at (Coast Guard) 9th District sent us over with 100 sandbags. We needed thousands. That was just enough to keep our tent pegs in place.”

He and his team landed at the most northern port of Saudi Arabia.

“We got off that airplane and it was like walking into a blast furnace,” he said.

“At the time, we were told we were the frontlines. If Saddam pushed south, we were going to need everyone on deck to counter that. You looked around and saw Cobra gunships and other helicopters and everything was hitting home. It looked like a warzone.”

But essentials? Not so much.

“We had no showers, nothing. We had to beg, borrow and steal stuff – literally steal.”

He and a gunner’s mate went out on a special mission to “borrow” a couple Army shower stalls.

“The Army was in a hangar across port and had eight different sections with three shower stalls each. We took off our shirts and went over there to take two of them.”

“What are you guys doing with those?” an Army lieutenant asked.

“We have to move these closer to the water, so when the water comes out, it goes into the pier,” he answered.

“That’s a good idea,” the lieutenant said.

Bruni laughs at the memory.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 18.](#)



Fraud Watch Network

You can't afford to fall victim to scammers. In the five years ending in 2019, fraud cost Veterans, service members and their families more than \$338 million, according to Federal Trade Commission (FTC) data. Impostor fraud was the top complaint during each of those years.

The pandemic has ushered in swindles involving [everything from stimulus checks to fake coronavirus cures](#). Those are in addition to the familiar ruses that employ a Veteran-focused twist on [identity theft](#), [phishing](#), [charity scams](#), [investment schemes](#) and [loan deceptions](#). The crooks' goal is often to manipulate or gain access to government benefits provided to those who served our nation.

"Younger Veterans may be looking at people that might be trying to rip them off on things related to education, [finding a job](#), starting a business," says Carol Kando-Pineda, an attorney for the FTC's Division of Consumer and Business Education. Older Veterans may face similar pitches and solicitations for work-at-home schemes, which lure potential victims with the promise of fast cash but may charge a large up-front fee or seek credit card information.

Military families may be particularly vulnerable to fraud because they relocate frequently and because younger families may be living on their own or earning a paycheck for the first time, the FTC warns.

"Folks in the military are taught to depend [on] and take care of each other," Kando-Pineda says. "Unfortunately, scammers will try to take advantage of them and claim some sort of [military] affiliation to gain their trust."

AARP provides free resources to all Veterans, military personnel and their families, regardless of whether they are association members

Whether you or a loved one may be the target of a scam, or you want to learn more about scam prevention, visit the [AARP Fraud Watch Network](#)

New Year, Same Scams: Tips and tricks from AARP to fight fraud in 2021

via *VAntage Point* - www.blogs.va.gov

[online](#) or call its toll-free helpline at 877-908-3360.

Here are more steps that Veterans can take to combat fraud. These are critical given that former service members and military families are twice as likely as civilians to be targeted for scams, according to research by AARP's free Fraud Watch Network.

[Download or print the AARP Watchdog Alert Handbook: 10 Ways Con Artists Target Veterans](#). Learn how to protect yourself and your loved ones from scammers.

[Get to know Operation Protect Veterans](#). AARP teamed up with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service to expose swindles that focus on Veterans. Report suspicious emails, texts, phone calls or printed materials by emailing protectveterans@aarp.org or calling 877-908-3360.

[Learn from the costly experience of one Veteran](#), awarded a Purple Heart for combat injuries in Vietnam, who fell victim to two con artists promising COVID-19 grants.

[Review the do's and don'ts](#) Veterans should follow after recognizing the warning signs that a scammer has made contact.

[Bookmark the Veterans, Military and Their Families page on AARP.org](#) — aarp.org/veterans — to stay up to date with the latest news and information affecting older veterans. AARP resources for veterans are free and available to nonmembers.

[\(Online Event\) Five Ways to Protect Veterans & Military Families from Fraud & Scams in 2021](#): Join AARP, the USPI, and the FTC for a free "Operation Protect Veterans" webinar. You'll hear from fraud fighting experts about the top scams and frauds targeting Veterans and Military Families in 2021, get your questions answered live, and learn more about stopping scammers in their tracks. The webcast will be streamed live Jan. 26, 2021 at 7:00 pm EST or on-demand at your convenience.

The sharing of any non-VA, Chapter or PVA information does not constitute an endorsement of products and services on part of the New England Chapter, PVA or the VA.

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#DesertStorm30: Protecting the Seas (cont.)

By Gary Kunich, VA Public Affairs Office via VAntage Point - www.blogs.va.gov

"We had those shower stalls moved to our side of the port and painted so quick, you wouldn't even recognize them."

As supplies came into port, they were cradled in wood dunnage – a variety of hard woods that could only be used once. Their team scavenged the scrap to build their base camp.

"We're talking Philippine mahogany and other wood, just piled up on the pier," he said. (The team) would take that stuff and build a boathouse, a shed, tables for a morale tent and walls in between tents."

They used the wood to build stuff for the Marines who returned the favor by relieving them and manning guns on their boats when the Coast Guard needed a break. Coasties also made quick friends with the Navy's Seabee construction crew and their underwater demolition team.

"They had the radar and sonar capabilities," Bruni said. "Told them they'd be the ears and eyes, and we'd be the hands and feet. They'd tell us when ships were coming in, and our boats would intercept and protect from any potential threats."

Home connections and war

And the days dragged on. Troops who were told they'd be home by Thanksgiving, were now looking at Christmas. And before Christmas, were told it would be even longer.

"By the time we got over there, we were busy the entire time," Zedan said. "I worked from 6 in the morning to 11 at night and didn't have a lot of time to think about home. I got my first afternoon off on Thanksgiving.

"Everything was sent by letter. There was no internet, no way to call. My kids sent me a videotape of their Halloween costumes and I didn't get it until Christmas day."

Fowlkes said it helped having some home connection.

"I got great support from my family, my school and my students. They would send pictures and cards. Back then we didn't have e-mail. It took three weeks to receive a letter. We didn't have FaceTime and Facebook. I maybe got three phone calls the entire time I was there.

"I guess what helped was we were surrounded by great shipmates and great leadership," she said. "We were all supportive of each other, we were mature and competent. We met all the challenges we faced and found solutions."

War starts

By the time the war started, the Coast Guard, like so many others, were just ready for something.

"I think pretty much the attitude at that point was, 'Let's get this thing under way,'" Bruni said. "Let's get this over with."

As the Air Force rained bombs on Iraqi forces shortly after midnight Jan. 17, the Coast Guard dealt with rain, high winds and ugly seas.

"There was a lot of high-risk stuff going on," Zedan said. "When we started bombing that first night, it was bad weather. We had 7-foot seas, but we were out there because we had hospital ships we were responsible for

protecting. I was worried we were risking our own men's lives. We were out so far, if something went wrong, it would take us too long to rescue them."

Bruni remembered those wickedly high waves.

"When you're operating a 22-foot boat with 50-caliber guns and 6-foot-or-better waves – some of those waves were a pretty good size – we had a few guys getting banged up."

The Iraqis haphazardly launched Scud missiles throughout the Middle East. There was no telling where they'd land or who they'd hurt.

"That first night, there were a number of Scud missiles launched," Bruni said. "I spent the night in my freaking MOPP suit. We had one land 1,000 meters from the camp. Another missed an ammo ship by a hundred yards. It didn't explode, but it broke apart. We didn't know if there would be follow-up attacks.

"The British had chemical alarms and you could hear it all night long: 'Gas! Gas! Gas!'"

Fowlkes woke that first morning and was told, "We're at war now."

"I remember those sirens going off, and we'd get into our MOPP suits," she said. "Sometimes you could hear the Scuds overhead. You just had to sit and wait until the all clear. I was in that MOPP suit for six hours one time."

Coming home

And finally, it was time to go home. With the ground war ending more quickly than anyone realized, the Coast Guard teams came back stateside in March and April.

Zedan returned to his job as vice president. Bruni to his job as a police officer. Fowlkes went back to her school.

"The woman who subbed for me was outstanding. I think the kids liked her better," she laughed. "It was a little hard and strange getting back to work but my colleagues were very supportive."

Zedan said there was a rough transition.

"It was like it just wasn't real. I remember getting home and my kids were doing their homework. They went about life as if Dad wasn't there. I walked into the backyard. I remember standing there, looking around, as if my body was there, but I was still overseas. I could not believe it was finally over.

"I couldn't stay home. I was going to drive myself nuts. Everything was rush, rush, rush. I needed to get my car and get into the office. It was snowing. Another car comes up the hill, loses control, slides into my lane and I slam into a tree and she slams into me.

"I said, 'OK, I just went through six months and I'm going to get killed in a car accident.'"

He and Bruni both deployed to Haiti in 1994. Bruni returned to the Middle East for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

“They had me at an Army camp in the middle of fricking nowhere,” Bruni said. “They asked what the Coast Guard was doing there. Told them I was looking for the beach and should have turned in Albuquerque.”

“A lot has happened since Desert Storm,” he added. “There’s a lot more recognition by DoD that we’re warfighters.”

Fowlkes did one more stateside deployment after the BP oil spill in 2010. She retired from teaching and retired from the Coast Guard in 2011 as a master chief petty officer. She gets her care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

“It’s just outstanding care,” she said. They get me whatever I need and ask how I’m feeling. I’m always treated with the utmost respect when I go there.”

Bruni retired from the police force shortly after 9/11 and stayed mostly active Coast Guard until 2011, when he retired as a captain.

Zedan retired as a captain in 2001. He still works as a vice president for marketing and plans to stay in the job until he hits 70.

The Coast Guard asked him not long ago to write about his Desert Storm

experiences.

“It hit me like a loaded truck when I realized it was 30 years ago. I can’t believe how far we’ve come, and we’ve deployed numerous times.

“It brings a lot of pride,” Zedan said. “To think back and know all the hardships and all the trouble, the Coast Guard has done an outstanding job. It brings a lot of satisfaction. It just brings a good feeling to your heart.”



About the Author

Gary Kunich joined the U.S. Air Force in 1986 and served for 20 years in public affairs. He is now the public affairs officer for the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, VA Medical Center.



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Being there makes a difference

Recently the Ride-Away team joined forces with MobilityWorks so that we could provide our veterans with the largest selection of mobility solutions that best fit their physical capabilities and lifestyle. Veterans have unique needs so we treat each of them as individuals. First of all, we listen. Then, we work together find the best solution. Collectively, Ride-Away and MobilityWorks will continue to build on our mission to help veterans connect with who and what matters most.

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Do You Have a Mask?

via www.myhealth.va.gov



Face coverings or masks now required at all VA facilities

All VA facilities require the use of face coverings or masks for all patients, families, staff, and volunteers. The health and safety of Veterans, and the staff who care for them, is and always has been VA's top priority.

During the coronavirus pandemic, we're all trying to do our part and help stop the spread of COVID-19. Whether it's social distancing, washing our hands, or cleaning surfaces, we're trying to protect ourselves and stay healthy.

We recommend you bring your own face covering, such as a cloth mask or scarf. This is required for all patients and families in public and administrative areas of facilities. If you don't have a face covering, ask a staff member, and they will provide you with one. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers [helpful guides](#) on making suitable masks at home for personal use.

If you have non-urgent medical concerns, schedule an appointment with your health care team through [VA Video Connect](#). This tool allows Veterans at home to meet with VA health care providers through live video on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an Internet connection.

YOUR INVITED: CHAPTER ONLINE BOARD MEETINGS

Chapter members interested in attending the "virtual" monthly Board of Director's meeting may do so by sending an email request with your full name and address to meetings@newenglandpva.org requesting a "BOD Meeting Invite". You will receive the meeting connection information via email the day before the meeting or sooner. The regular monthly Board meetings are typically held the first Wednesday of the month and start at 10:45 AM. As with the in-person meetings, you'll have the opportunity to listen-in to the meeting's discussions, but reserved from speaking unless called upon.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the Chapter Board meetings, please email them to meetings@newenglandpva.org.

FREE Member Masks and Neck Gaiters



New England PVA Chapter members can now receive two free reusable cloth masks and neck gaiters. Simply complete and submit the request form on the [Chapter website](#) with your name, current mailing address and phone number. Limit one request per member while supplies last.

To offset shipping cost for you and/or other members in need, please help by making a donation in any amount by click associate [website link](#).

STOP!
COVID-19

#DesertStorm30: Chocolate Chip Cookie Uniforms

By Jason Davis, VA Public Affairs Office via Vantage Point - www.blogs.va.gov



Though it was first designed in 1962, [finalized in 1976](#), and then standardized in 1990, the Desert Battle Dress Uniform (DBDU)—affectionately known for its “chocolate chip” or “cookie dough” camouflage patterns—defined the U.S. military era known for a single event: Operation Desert Storm.

That brief conflict and its decisive victory grabbed our nation’s attention 30 years ago this month. America watched the Persian Gulf War from thousands of miles away in nearly real time on a [burgeoning 24-hour news cycle](#). It watched as reporters spoke from Baghdad rooftops, describing an eerily silent capitol in the minutes before Patriot and Scud missiles first lit up the night sky.

In the days that followed, what emerged from the televised destruction of Iraq were the endless loops of Army Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell, the smiling giants in battle dress towering over crowds of troops in the field. America watched its men and women on the front lines, in the chow halls, or standing victoriously in group photos, sometimes under Iraqi landmarks and Saddam Hussein murals. Etched into its collective mind, America’s chocolate chip became the sartorial symbol of its military might.

Though the DBDU is a variant of the Battle Dress Uniform (the BDU, with its three-color woodland pattern, lasted over 31 years in four different decades), its authorization for wear was short.

Chapter Board Vacancy, Your Opportunity to Serve!

Board directorship is just one of a variety of ways Chapter members can contribute and participate in the Chapter’s direction. While Directors are not necessarily expected to have specific prior training or experience in managing or running a business, there are some characteristics that effective Directors share in common.

What is the Board of Directors and What does it do?

The Board of Directors is the governing body representing the Membership of the New England Chapter. It is composed of nine Chapter members. All Directors represent the Chapter membership at-large rather than any special subgroup. Terms for Directors are for two years.

The Board is responsible for ensuring organizational performance of the Chapter on behalf of all members. This work includes developing clearly stated expectations through written policies; delegating responsibility for, and authority over, the achievement of stated objectives; and monitoring

The 1992 version of AR 670-1 – Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia – spells out authorization for “year-round wear on duty by all personnel... when... prescribed by the commander.” And except for the Gulf War, only select units for select operations received authorization.

Functionally, the DBDU was also America’s first desert camouflage uniform. Designers at the [U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development & Engineering Center](#) based its six-color (and later three-color) pattern on the rocky and elevated climate of the American South West. The front face of its 50/50 cotton-and-nylon twill made soiling and stains less noticeable; it measured well for infrared protection, and it was water resistant.

But the DBDU was also costly and more complex to produce, and later “deemed unsuitable for most desert theaters.” Its replacement – the Desert Camouflage Uniform (DCU) – began development in the 1980s and saw widespread use as early as 1992.

Today, it’s hard to see the DBDU outside the context of its time. It was so symbolic for its age that you could buy [Bootleg Bart Simpson apparel](#) and [Topps baseball cards](#) appropriating the pattern – not as themed accoutrement, but as defining feature. And, depending on your view, that it became a cultural pop icon either relegates it to – or enshrines it to – its brief moment under the sun.

For this writer (and Operation Iraqi Freedom Army Veteran), it’s so 1990s that it’s also rad. But we want to hear your thoughts, too. What are your memories of the DBDU? Sound off in the comments below!



About the Author

Jason Davis served five years in the Army’s 101st Airborne, including two combat tours to Iraq.

compliance with written policies. The Board is also responsible for active engagement with our Chapter membership.

By devoting time to focus on the big-picture vision of the Chapter, the Board ensures we adequately position the Chapter for the maximum benefit of our Membership, as well as anticipate trends and values which may have a critical impact on our relevance and survival.

The Board governs the organization and delegates the majority of operational duties to its employees. The Board is primarily involved in strategic planning, financial oversight, Member engagement and service, and community awareness.

If you are interested in serving, please email Chapter President Michael Negrete at michael@newenglandpva.org to receive complete details.

JANUARY CHAPTER MEMBER BIRTHDAYS!

Dennis A Abaid	Stephen J Emt	Fred J Meda	Kenneth R Sherman
David E Alderman	Lawrence R Favreau	William J Michaud	Jeffrey Stephenson
Raquel Ardin	Paul W Feist	Mico J Morin	Barry Sumner
Thomas J Azar	Leonard J Fowler	Scott A Murphy	William E Townsend
Linwood A Baker	Richard R Frano	John D Nikolais	Conrad L Vandal
Robert W Blanchard	Andrew N Gibbons	Robert W O'Donnell	Merrill A Vaughan
Michael JBottary	Lester R Hayward	Henry H Owens	Daniel R Veronesi
Richard W Bourque	Donald A Hodgdon	Matthew W Palis	Raymond A Wells
Herbert K Brewer	Steven R Hughes	John Pappalardo	GShayn White
Donna L Burk Grenon	Thomas P Hyde	Rene Pepin	Ronald E White
Eileen P Butler-Pacheco	Mark A Jenkins	Richard A Powers	James E Wiggins
Robert W Cannon	Joshua L Keller	Barton B Price	Michael Witkowsky
David J Chapdelaine	Dennis S Knutson	Harold A Radochia	Ronald C Yablonski
Donald J Collins	Paul B Lavin	Lenore M Randolph	
Michael J Collins	Corey B Lee	John K Ringland	
Edward J Deiss	David J Lewis	Victor L Rivera-Ayala	
Francis Digiacomio	Corey C Lorden	Jose D Roman	
Michael H Doran	Mark F Lovell	Roger Rua	
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