



**From  
Patrick Welch  
Director**

This month we are continuing to honor our female veterans. We have featured an article on the policy change that will allow women to serve on submarines. You will also find a story about female WWII pilots belatedly receiving well-deserved recognition for their service. Later in the issue, a husband and father shares his pride for the women in his life who are presently serving in the military.

Our Women Veterans Advisory Committee is up and running and has provided me with a great deal of information on specific issues concerning women veterans.

On April 6, the Buffalo Veterans Court welcomed General Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, so he could observe firsthand how the Court has been so successful in assisting veterans. Our next issue will feature pictures and an article written by our own Deputy Director, Sergio Rodriquez.

Due to staffing constraints, we regret that will no longer be able to issue this newsletter every month, but will instead offer six issues a year.

Please distribute this newsletter to your email distribution list. Anyone who would like to receive this each month can email me at [patrick.welch@erie.gov](mailto:patrick.welch@erie.gov)

**Remember my mantra: "If you do NOTHING, then someday when you need the VA, then NOTHING is just what you may get." ©**

## Women to Serve on Subs, Gates Tells Congress

By Donna Miles  
American Forces Press Service



The Navy plans to repeal its ban on women serving on submarines, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has informed Congress.

Gates signed a letter Feb. 19 informing Congress of the Navy's plan to lift the policy, which it intends to do through the phased-in assignment of women to submarines, Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell confirmed today.

The secretary endorsed the plan, the brainchild of Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, Morrell said.

No change can take effect until Congress has been in session for 30 days following the notification, Navy Lt. Justin Cole, a Navy spokesman said.

Mabus, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead and other Navy leaders have looked closely at the issues involved with integrating women into the submarine force, including close working conditions and accommodations, he said.

No funds will be spent to reconfigure submarines to accommodate female crew members until the Navy Department presents the phased

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-approach plan to Congress. Mabus has been a strong proponent of the policy change since being confirmed to his post in May.

"I believe women should have every opportunity to serve at sea, and that includes aboard submarines," he told reporters in October. Roughead, in a statement issued in September, said his experience commanding a mixed-gender surface combatant ship makes him "very comfortable" with the idea of integrating women into the submarine force.

"I am familiar with the issues as well as the value of diverse crews," Roughead said. The integration of women into the submarine force increases the talent pool and therefore, overall submarine readiness, Cole said.

"We know there are capable young women in the Navy and women who are interested in the Navy who have the talent and desire to succeed in the submarine force," he said. "Enabling them to serve there is best for the submarine force and our Navy."

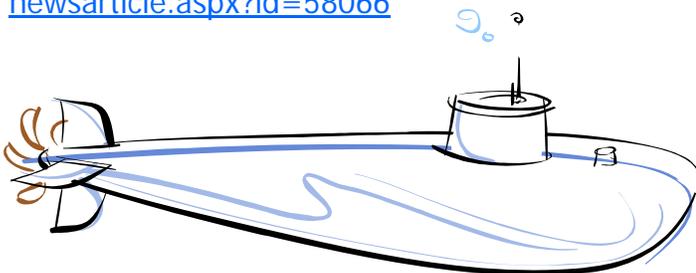
The policy change – and the Navy's ability to work through the issues involved -- is not without precedent, he noted. In 1993, the Navy changed its policy to permit women to serve on surface combat ships.

**Biographies:**

- [Robert M. Gates](#)
- [Ray Mabus](#)
- [Navy Adm. Gary Roughead](#)

**Source:**

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=58066>



## A Look at Social Security

If you served on active duty anytime between 1957 and 2001, you may qualify for a higher Social Security payment because of your military service.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for your military service during those years can be credited to your record for Social Security purposes. Special earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty training. For additional information, visit the Social Security website at <http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>.



## VA Begins Advertising Campaign

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a two-month, nationwide advertising campaign to assist student Veterans and servicemembers applying for the Post-9/11 GI Bill.



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Text messaging ads will also link student Veterans to VA. By texting "GIBILL," Veterans will then be directed to follow three steps to apply. VA also developed a hip pocket guide and checklist with helpful tips to assist Veterans and servicemembers in the application process.

Information about the Post-9/11 GI Bill, as well as VA's other educational benefit programs, is available at VA's website at [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov), or by calling 1-888-GIBILL-1 (or 1-888-442-4551).

There are big differences between GI Bill programs. Find out which program best fits your situation with Military.com's [GI Bill Calculator](#).

Source: [www.military.com](http://www.military.com)

**WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE**

Nearly **one-third**  
of the adult  
**homeless**  
population has  
served their country in the  
Armed Services.

**SHE SERVED**  
**DOESN'T SHE DESERVE BETTER?**

Department of Veterans Affairs | [www.publichealth.va.gov/womenhealth](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/womenhealth)  
Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, VACO 10/2009

## First Female Military Pilots Get Congressional Gold Medal

By Air Force Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski  
Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 11, 2010 – The first female military pilots received the Congressional Gold Medal yesterday at a ceremony in the Capitol.

Almost 70 years ago, the Women Airforce Service Pilots were disbanded with little fanfare. This ceremony was a way to make things right for the trailblazers, Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley said at the ceremony.

“As a result of your conviction and your devotion to duty, from that time onward, women would forever be a part of United States military aviation,” Donley said.

More than 200 WASPs attended the event, many of them wearing their World War II-era uniforms. The audience, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi noted was one of the largest ever in the Capitol and too large to fit into Emancipation Hall, also included their families, as well as the families of WASPs who have died or couldn't travel.

Military members from every branch of service served as escorts for the veterans. For Air Force 1st Lt. Sarah Reich, escorting WASP Janet Lee Hutchison to the ceremony was “one of the greatest experiences” of her life.

“The past couple of days with Janet have changed my life,” said Reich, an Air National Guard communications officer. “She told me, ‘I have never known fear; everything is an adventure,’ and I’ll take that lesson with me forever. Her story as a WASP is just amazing.”

The process to approve the Congressional Gold Medal was introduced and approved in record time last year. The bipartisan effort was led by

Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas and Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, as well as Reps. Susan Davis of California and Ilena Ros-Lehtinen of Florida. All four elected officials spoke at the event.

Deanie Parrish, associate director of Wings Across America, accepted the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of the WASPs. Along with Pelosi, House Minority Leader John Boehner, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell presented the medal.

Air Force Lt. Col. Nicole Malachowski, the first female pilot in the Air Force's air demonstration squadron, was instrumental in shaping the bill to honor and recognize the WASPs. She also spoke at the ceremony.

“Today is the day when the WASPs will make history once again,” Malachowski said. “If you spend any time at all talking to these wonderful women, you’ll notice how humble and gracious and selfless they all are. Their motives for wanting to fly airplanes all those years ago wasn’t for fame or glory or recognition. They simply had a passion to take what gifts they had and use them to help defend not only America, but the entire free world, from tyranny.

“And they let no one get in their way,” she added.

Of the more than 1,100 women who volunteered and flew every fighter, bomber, transport and trainer aircraft in the inventory 68 years ago, only about 300 are still alive.

Betty Wall Strohfus, a WASP from Minnesota, was one of the women who “just had to be here for this.” She flew the B-17 Flying Fortress and B-26 Marauder bombers, as well as the P-39 Airacobra fighter.

"It's almost unbelievable. We never thought this day would come," she said. "We were all just so grateful to have the opportunity to fly. But this was just such a lovely ceremony and so nice for all these people to come out for us."

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest award Congress can present to a civilian or group of civilians. Past honorees include the Navajo Code Talkers in 2000 and Tuskegee Airmen in 2006.

Each WASP received a smaller version of the medal to keep. The original medal will be donated to the Smithsonian Institution for display later this year with the "Women in Aviation" display at its Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Va.

(Air Force Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski serves in the Secretary of the Air Force public affairs office.) Source: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=58279>

**Biographies:**

[Michael B. Donley](#)

**Related Sites:**

[Special Report: Women Airforce Service Pilots](#)

**Related Articles:**

[Women Pilots of WWII Inspired Generations](#)



*Betty Wall Strohfus, a Women Airforce Service Pilot from Minnesota, sings the national anthem during a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony at the U.S. Capitol, March 10, 2010. More than 200 WASPs attended the event, many of them wearing their World War II-era uniforms. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski*

(Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.



*Betty Wall Strohfus, a Women Airforce Service Pilot from Minnesota, displays her copy of the Congressional Gold Medal at the U.S. Capitol, March 10, 2010. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski*



*Betty Wall Strohfus, a Women Airforce Service Pilot from Minnesota, proudly wears her World War II-era uniform during a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony at the U.S. Capitol, March 10, 2010. In addition to her medals honoring her service during the war, she also donned her flight wings and a medal she received at the opening of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski*



*Betty Wall Strohfus, a Women Airforce Service Pilot from Minnesota, poses with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton A. Schwartz at a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony at the U.S. Capitol, March 10, 2010. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski*

## Saluting Our War Heroes

The Buffalo News will be honoring local veterans who have served the United States in the different wars defending the country right up through the current engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere with Operation Enduring Freedom.

To be considered for selection, please fill out the pertinent information below. Individuals selected will be contacted for a brief follow-up interview by phone.

Name:

Date of Birth:

Hometown:

Telephone number and e-mail address:

Branch of military:

Rank:

Years of military service:

Enlisted or drafted:

Job in the military:

Where stationed:

Most memorable experience:

Additional comments:

Please provide a photograph of the individual from his/her days of service. Send it in JPG form attached to an e-mail addressed to [lmichel@buffnews.com](mailto:lmichel@buffnews.com). The paper will make arrangements to schedule taking a current day photograph of the individual.

The above information can be returned attached to an e-mail to [lmichel@buffnews.com](mailto:lmichel@buffnews.com) or by mailing it to:

The Buffalo News  
Attn: Lou Michel  
P.O. Box 100  
Buffalo, NY 14240

### Editor's Note:

**Our own Patrick Welch was the first  
veteran recognized in this series.**

**Read his story at:**

<http://www.buffalonews.com/2010/03/21/994852/vietnam-veteran-takes-leading.html>





*Editor's Note:* We recently heard from a Vietnam vet in support of the dedication of 2010 as the "Year of the Female Veteran in Erie County." I invited Bob Clark to share his thoughts on women in the military and his own family's service.

Having spent 40 years in military service I have had the opportunity to see the evolution of the female role in the military. When I was in Vietnam in 1968 the only women in uniform I saw were nurses and corpwaves (That's what the female Navy enlisted medical personnel were called back then). They were all in the rear in relatively safe environments or on hospital ships offshore. When I was in Iraq in 2005 there was no area in which I did not see women in uniform, shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, carrying the load and risking the risks of combat.

Quite simply put, we could not fight the fight we do without the efforts of women in combat today. I am impressed and awed by my wife's drive and professionalism. I am equally amazed and humbled by my daughter's skill and courage. Each has shown herself to be an outstanding example of what it means to be an American. They are representative of a heretofore unrecognized and underappreciated segment of our country's arsenal, the Female Veteran.

I joined the Navy in 1965 because my father was a Gunners Mate in the Navy in WWII. It never occurred to me as I was growing up that I would do anything else because it was simply part of the maturation process that I followed. Education, military service, work and a family were what my father did. That is what I would do. During my 40 year career I served as a Hospital Corpsman with the Navy and Marine Corps in Vietnam and as a combat medic with the Air Force in Iraq (starting and ending my career with a war).

Ironically, I never expected to have a military wife nor did I expect to have military children. Sue and I met in the service and became a natural fit because we have the same values. People sometimes say that opposites attract. I have always argued that being male and female was opposite enough and you ought to work on finding common ground after that. We have.

I presume that my children are in the service because they absorbed some of the values with which they were raised. I never pushed or even suggested that either of them go into the military. Nevertheless, my son, Chris, graduated from the US Naval Academy in 2001, the same year that Elena joined the Army. He served two tours in the Persian Gulf and is now a lieutenant in the Navy Reserves. When I asked my daughter why she joined the Army she said that "It was the only uniform you haven't worn."

To those who have a military background, I don't believe that I have to explain my reasons, or the reasons of my family, for our participation in or support of the service. It is like breathing. It just comes naturally and we don't think about it.

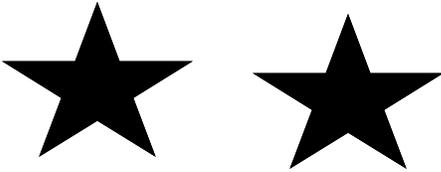
To those who have questioned what my family and I have chosen as a life's work I have always calmly replied "I fight for your right to disagree with my fighting for your right to disagree".

Say that several times out loud and it will make sense.

—Bob Clark CMSGT USAF (Ret)

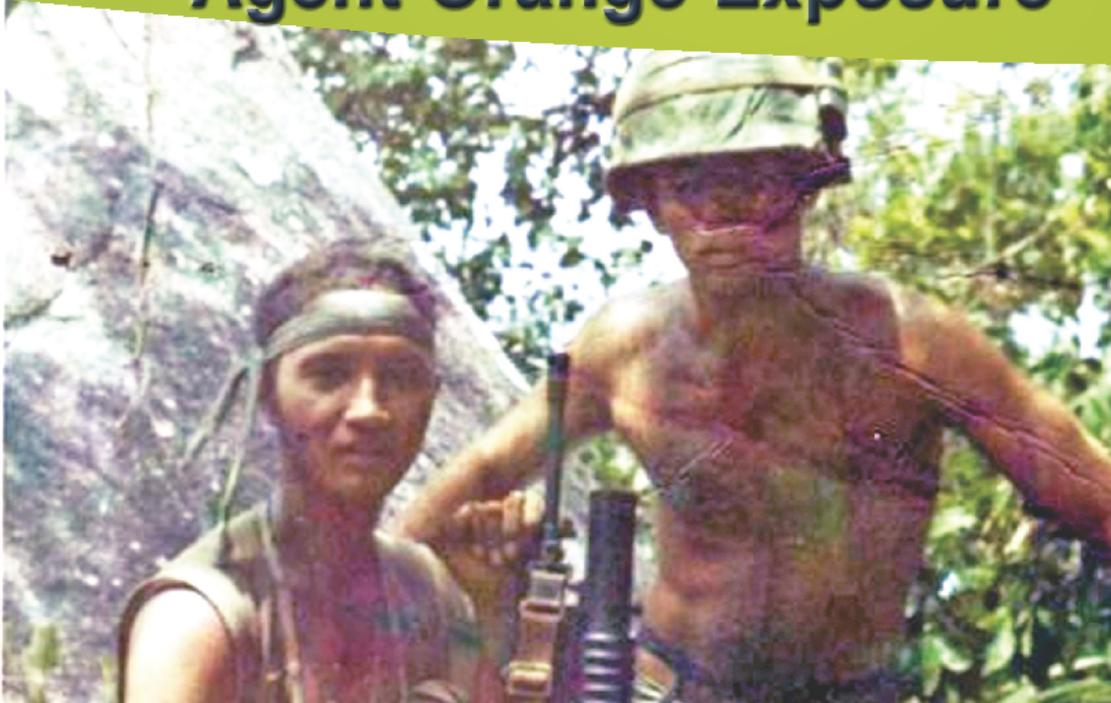


My wife, Sue, is a Master Sergeant with the 107th, has 27 years in service and is currently downrange with the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing in Balad, Iraq.



My daughter, Elena, is a Sergeant who was recently assigned to 10th Mountain at Fort Drum. She is a combat flight medic with 8 years in service, has 2 tours in Iraq and 1 in Afghanistan. She will return to Afghanistan with 10th Mountain in August.

# New Diseases Associated With Agent Orange Exposure



## Newly VA Recognized Diseases

- **B CELL LEUKEMIA'S**  
Cancers which affect B cells, such as hairy cell leukemia
- **ISCHEMIC HEART DISEASE**  
A disease characterized by a reduced supply of blood to the heart
- **PARKINSON'S DISEASE**  
A motor system condition with symptoms that include trembling of the limbs and face and impaired balance

## New Diseases Associated With Agent Orange Exposure

The VA has determined that a Veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, is presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in support of military operations

Previously, eleven illnesses were presumed by the VA to be service-connected for these veterans

On October 13, 2009 Secretary Shinseki announced the decision to include the following illnesses: B cell leukemia's, such as hairy cell leukemia; Parkinson's disease;

and ischemic heart disease as presumptive conditions

Vietnam Veterans with these diseases, in addition to the previously identified illnesses, may be eligible for disability compensation and health care benefits

If you, or someone you know, was an in-country Vietnam Veteran, contact your nearest Veterans Counselor for assistance



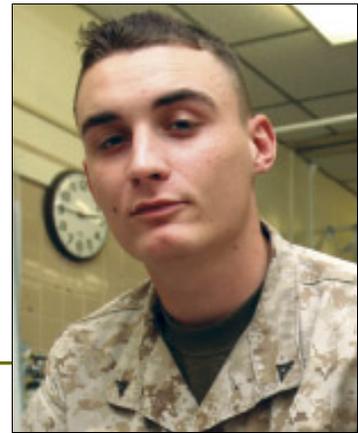
Contact us today to see how we can help  
For More Information:

Tel 1-888-VETSNYS (1-888-838-7697)

[www.veterans.ny.gov](http://www.veterans.ny.gov)

## The Western New York Connection...

### *Lance Cpl. Aaron Hostutler*



**Lance Cpl. Aaron Hostutler**

North Tonawanda, N.Y.

**Age:** 20

**Occupation:** Combat correspondent

**Unit:** Marine Corps Base Okinawa, Japan, Consolidated Public Affairs Office

Hostutler initially signed up for the bone marrow program while in military occupational specialty school in Fort George G. Meade, Md., to impress a girl. About a year and a half after signing up, Hostutler received an e-mail from officials at the program informing him of a teenager who was in dire need of bone marrow. He flew out in February to the St. Joseph Hospital of Orange County, Calif. The girl he was out to impress, now his wife, was at his side during the procedure. Hostutler donated more than three pints of bone marrow to a teenager he never met.

From Marines Magazine, Portraits and Profiles:

<http://marinesmagazine.dodlive.mil/2010/01/04/faces-in-the-ranks-2/>

## ***Mission Statement of Erie County Veterans Services***

To insure that every veteran in the county is registered in the VA System and is fully aware of all the benefits that they have earned.

To make veterans an economic force in education, employment and business development.

### **Contact us at:**

#### **Erie County Veterans Service Agency**

Rath Building - Suite 800  
95 Franklin St.

Buffalo, NY 14202

PH: 716.858.6363

Fax: 716.858.6191

<http://www.erie.gov/veterans/>

- Patrick Welch  
Director
- Sergio Rodriguez  
Deputy Director
- Judy Ehman, RSVP Volunteer  
and Newsletter Editor

*Originated in 1926, The Erie County Veterans Service Agency was the first of its kind in the State of New York. Due to the increased demand for such services, and accelerated by World War II, the Agency became a part of the County Government on January 1, 1945.*

*Since that time, this office has provided service to many thousands of veterans and their dependents, residing in Erie County.*

#### *Our Mission is*

*To insure that every veteran in the county is registered in the VA System and is fully aware of all the benefits that they have earned.*

*To make veterans an economic force in education, employment and business development.*



IT TAKES THE COURAGE AND  
STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR TO  
ASK FOR HELP...

If you're in an emotional crisis,  
call 1-800-273-TALK (Press "1" for Veterans)  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)