



**From Patrick Welch, Director**

Well with the arrival of November, we have several significant events that take place: a) the 233<sup>rd</sup> Birthday of the United State Marine Corps, 10 Nov; b) Veterans Day , 11 Nov; c) my 41<sup>st</sup> Wedding Anniversary; and d) Thanksgiving, 27 Nov. Here's a brief commentary on each:

**Marine Corps** – Becoming a US Marine was the greatest personal achievement of my life and provided me with the honor of serving with people who understand: Honor, Courage and Commitment. Happy Birthday to all my fellow Marines, Semper Fi.

**Veterans Day** – Since the first colonists laid down their pitchforks and took their muskets off the hearth to fight for independence and freedom, this nation has had people who have been willing to give their lives for our country. Without veterans the United States of America would not exist, so when you meet a veteran say Thank you for serving our Country.

**Wedding Anniversary** – I have been blessed with a wonderful wife, Carol who has put up with a great deal more than anyone should be expected to. So four children, three son-in-laws and four grandchildren later we celebrate our 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary. Thank you Carol.

**Thanksgiving** – We Americans live in the greatest country on the planet. A country that is far from perfect, is a continuing work in progress but with all of our issues, still the country that people risk their lives to get into. So be thankful everyday for being born an American.

## Army, National Institute of Mental Health Begin Suicide Study

*By J.D. Leipold  
Special to American Forces Press Service*

WASHINGTON, Oct. 30, 2008 – The Army and the National Institute of Mental Health have begun a five-year, \$50 million research program into the factors behind soldier suicides and how to prevent them, Army Secretary Pete Geren told reporters at the Pentagon yesterday.

Geren said the new partnership with NIMH, the Army Science Board and the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs would build on work that already is under way to conduct the most far-reaching and comprehensive research project ever undertaken on suicide and its prevention.

"It's a five-year study to examine the mental and behavioral health of soldiers, with particular focus on the multiple determinants of suicidal behavior and resiliency across all phases of Army service," Geren said. "Family members and family relationships, including parents and siblings, will also be included in the study where it's appropriate."

The study also will include the National Guard and Army Reserve.

This effort will be followed by an Army Science Board study with the goal of identifying correlated risk factors and recommending mitigation strategies and practices to prevent suicide. At the same time, the secretary said, the Army would not wait for the end of the study to implement mitigation strategies, but would put those strategies into practice as they make themselves clear.

According Dr. Thomas R. Insel, NIMH director, the study will give NIMH a bigger picture on the suicide risk factors of the nation's population, critical information that he said affects the entire United States because the Army is a "microcosm of the nation."

"There are more than 30,000 suicides in the U.S. each year, actually 32,000 in 2006, the most recent year for which we have numbers," he said. "That's almost twice the number of homicides in the country. Suicide is really a significant public health problem. If we can reduce the rate in the Army, it will ultimately reduce the rate in the nation. Those are really the goals for this collaborative effort."



*(Continued on page 2)*

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Dr. S. Ward Casscells, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, said that "suicide rates aren't exactly plummeting."

"Half the suicides we can't figure out what happened, so that's why we need the NIMH's help," he said.

Geren said that of the 115 suicides the Army confirmed in 2007, 36 of the soldiers were deployed at time of death, 50 had been deployed prior to their deaths, and 29 never had been deployed. The secretary said he expects suicide rates for 2008 will be up compared with 2007 rates.

(J.D. Leipold works at Army News Service.)

**The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)** is the largest scientific organization in the world dedicated to research focused on the understanding, treatment, and prevention of mental disorders and the promotion of mental health.

NIMH Homepage  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>



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## Financial Career Opportunities for Military Veterans

Retired Marine General Peter Pace, the first Marine to head the Joint Chiefs of Staff (2005-2007), is now the head of the advisory board of the Wall Street Warfighters Foundation, Inc. (WSWF). This Pennsylvania nonprofit shares offices with Drexel Hamilton in New York and Philadelphia. Its mission is to provide vocational assessment, training support and job placement services for disabled veterans seeking new professional skills.

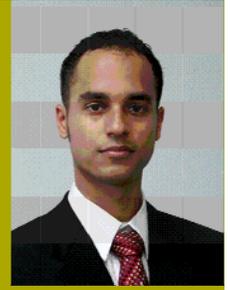
"Disabled vets are well represented in finance, but there's room for many more." Pace said. "As we talk to financial industry leaders about our training program for disabled veterans, the response has been immediate and overwhelming,"

In January 2009, the Foundation will inaugurate an intensive resident training program named **Operation Wall Street**, which will recruit, train, and place graduates in high-demand jobs at Drexel Hamilton and other financial firms partnering with this program. Drexel Hamilton, LLC, a federally-designated Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB), provides staff, administrative support, office space, and funding for the Operation Wall Street training program. Financial institutions including the New York Stock Exchange, the NASDAQ OMX Group, the Chicago Board Options Exchange (CBOE), and Goldman Sachs have pledged assistance in training and introducing disabled veterans to the industry. Base Technologies, Inc., an IT integrator based in McLean, Virginia, provides computers to support the program.

**Operation Wall Street** is open to all U.S. military veterans who have experienced physical or combat-stress related injuries while serving on active duty and who qualify for federal or state service-related disability benefits.

Eligible veterans are encouraged to contact them through Drexel Hamilton's website, [www.drexelhamilton.com](http://www.drexelhamilton.com), to learn more about the program.

## Veterans Advocates: Making All the Difference



Allow me to preface the following column by stating that I have an inherent bias upon the following topic, as I myself am an accredited service officer and veterans advocate. Nonetheless, I will try my best to frame the case with a fair and balanced approach.

Let me start by stating the basic premise that my position entails: that, amongst many other things, I advocate for the veterans cause and represent them in obtaining the basic VA benefits of which they have rightfully earned. The Veterans Affairs administration does its best to assist veterans in this regard. And though it overwhelmingly has the best intentions in mind, the VA is not always the best avenue that a veteran should take when applying for their benefits.

Take for example the recent findings by the department's very own inspector general, which indeed confirmed a veteran's worst fear: unprocessed benefits applications waiting to be shredded. Yes, these are actual VA applications for benefits submitted by veterans that were found in bins and waiting to meet their fate through the other end of a shredding machine's grinders. This occurrence happened at the VA regional office in Detroit, Michigan. A dismayed VFW national commander named Glen Gardner lamented that "With almost 850,000 VA claims in the backlog, the question that begs to be asked and answered is how many veterans had their disability and compensation claims disappear down a paper shredder".

A veterans' advocate has the training, knowledge, and experience which can often make the difference between an approved and a denied claim. We prepare, gather and assist veterans in obtaining all necessary paperwork to submit a well-organized and constructed claim. We always keep and maintain backup files of every single document we send to the VA and ensure that, in the event that any forms related to the claim get mistakenly lost or mysteriously disappear, we provide copies of the files already submitted. Department service officers also request that the VA officially stamps and certifies any and all claim files submitted by us before they are accepted. If the effective date of claim submission were to ever come into question, we can provide the VA with proof. Proof which can sometimes make all the difference between being compensated retroactively or losing months of monetary earnings.

The difference in compensation awards for VA claims that lack accredited representation is also startling. A recent analysis by the New York State Association of Counties concluded that veterans with service officer representation receive "an average annual award of \$11,162". Compare that to the \$4,728 that a veteran without representation gets on average and it's easy to see the significance and importance of having and advocate help assist with a veteran's claim for VA benefits. If you are a veteran who has questions about your benefits, please call our office (716.858.6363) and one of us will be happy to assist.

Join me next month as I cover the Holidays with a special Marines Toys for Tots edition of my regular column.

"Sergeant Serg"

## Erie County Veterans Outreach Squad

On Wednesday September 24, 2008 the Erie County Office of Veterans Services in partnership with the Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State College, the Veterans Administration, the Disabled American Veterans and M&T Bank conducted a seminar for local veterans.

The theme of the event was *Services and Opportunities for US Veterans* and covered federal, state benefits and educational and business opportunities available for those who have served our nation. The presenters were: Carol Griffith from the VA; Terry McGuire from M&T Bank; Howard Brittain from the DAV; Sue McCartney and Joe Giambra from the SBDC and Patrick W. Welch from the Erie County Veterans Services Office. Filippo's Ristorante at 1264 Hertel Avenue in Buffalo provided a wonderful breakfast for all who attended.

These outreach programs will continue to be offered throughout Erie County to insure our veterans are receiving the benefits they have earned.



## VA Will Use Old System to Deliver New Tuition Checks

By [Leo Shane III](#), *Stars and Stripes*  
Mideast edition, Thursday, October 16, 2008

WASHINGTON — Veterans Affairs officials have backed off plans to hire outside help to upgrade the department's GI Bill benefits system, saying they will rely on the current manual process to deliver checks next fall.

Last month department technical experts told lawmakers that private contractors would have to be brought in to help with the GI Bill transition, because the internal IT staff lacked the expertise and manpower to lead the move from the old education benefits system to a larger, completely automated one.

But in a statement last week, Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake said the department did not receive enough qualified outside proposals in its search for outside help, scrapping those plans.

"While it is unfortunate that we will not have the technical expertise from the private sector available to assist us in developing the information technology solution, the VA can and will deliver the benefits program on time," he said.

The new GI Bill benefits, passed by Congress in June, mandate a \$1,000 monthly housing stipend and four years of tuition at any state university for all veterans who served at least three years on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001.

Under the old system, veterans received a flat rate for their education based on their contributions into the system.

But the new system will be more complex, calculating different rates for recipients based on how long they served, what school they attend and where they live.

Plans to contract out the parts of the work had

come under fire from veterans groups, lawmakers and even workers within the department, who thought they should be given a chance to update the system.

But Keith Wilson, a director in the Veterans Benefits Administration, said the latest move isn't a reversal of the decision based on that criticism.

"We stated VA lacks the skills and staff to set up a fully automated system by (August 2009)," he said.

"That still stands and is why we will continue our current manual process to process claims after August.

"Our long-term strategy remains an automated process, but we do not have sufficient confidence a new, fully automated system can be in place by Aug. 1 and are not willing to gamble with veterans' education benefit payments."

Establishing that automated system with internal staff is expected to take two to three years, department officials said.

They also need to hire more staff to handle the larger number of GI Bill claims under the manual system, but could not provide specifics on how many new employees that will be.

Defense Department officials have said they're confident their computer systems will be ready to share military personnel records with the Veterans Affairs Department by March, which they hope will give the agencies plenty of time to sort out any confusion before the veterans' checks start getting sent out at the end of the summer.

**Source:** Stars and Stripes, October 31, 2008  
[VA Will Use Old System to Deliver New Tuition Checks](#)

## There are 17 Marines who are Amputees serving in Iraq!

Joseph Kinney | July 24, 2008:

Thirty-nine years ago I was shot in an ambush while a Marine on a night patrol in Vietnam. I had potentially fatal wounds to my chest and a serious wound to my right leg. To put matters bluntly, I had never been more terrified in my life. Would I die? And if I died, would I go to heaven? I also thought about the buddies I was leaving behind. Somehow, I wanted to believe that they would be better off without me to slow them down.

The next morning I woke up at a hospital in Da Nang. The doctors told me that my days as a fighting Marine were over. Somehow, I felt that I had more to give but wouldn't get the chance.

My history is relevant only because there are huge differences between then and now when it comes to our Wounded Warriors. For the past couple of years I have had the privilege of knowing Col. Jack Cox (USA, ret.) who is a stalwart in the Wounded Warrior Program at Fort Bragg. He has been a great friend and mentor, and has taken the time to introduce me to some of this generation's wounded.

There are at least two important differences between my generation and the young men I have seen at Fort Bragg's Womack Hospital which is near where I live.

For openers, the Army acts as if the wounded person is going to remain forever a soldier. That is their basic operating assumption moving forward.

Second, the attitude of these kids is amazing. These brave warriors, no matter how badly wounded they are, believe that they will soon be back with their units fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Today, there are 17 Marines who are amputees fighting in Iraq. I am certain that there are as many soldiers doing the same for the Army.

Recently, I received a widely distributed email from Col (Dr.) Brett Wyrick. He was a trauma surgeon at Balad Air Base in Iraq.

He wrote: "If I ever hear (anyone) griping and complaining, I jump into them pretty quickly, now. Most people over here have nothing to gripe about compared to Marines. Marines are different. They have a different outlook on life . . .

"One Marine Private was here for several days because he was a lower priority evacuation patient. He insisted on coming to attention and displaying proper military courtesy every morning when I came through on rounds. He was in



*U.S. Marine Cpl. Garrett Jones was re-deployed just a year after losing his left leg to a roadside bomb while serving in Iraq as an infantry fighter. In previous wars, Jones would have received a medical discharge and returned to civilian life. But the Pentagon has made it possible for Marines who'd like to return to the front lines, to return.*

great deal of pain, and it was a stressful to watch him work his way off the bed and onto his crutches. I told him he was excused and did not have to come to attention while he was a patient, and he informed me he was a good Marine and would address ' . . . Air Force colonel's standing on my feet, sir.' I had to turn away so he would not see the tear in my eye. He did not have 'feet' because we amputated his right leg below the knee on the first night he came in.

"I asked a Marine Lance Corporal if there was anything I could get him as I was making rounds one morning. He was an above the knee amputation after an IED blast, and he surprised me when he asked for a trigonometry book. 'You enjoy math do you?' He replied, 'Not particularly, sir. I was nevergood at it, but I need to get good at it, now.' 'Are you planning on going back to school?' I asked. 'No sir, I am planning on shooting artillery. I will slow an infantry platoon down with just one good leg, but I am going to get good at math and learn how to shoot artillery.' I hope he does.

"I had the sad duty of standing over a young Marine sergeant when he recovered from anesthesia. Despite our best efforts there was just no way to save his left arm, and it had to come off just below the elbow. 'Can I have my arm back, sir?' he asked. 'No, we had to cut it off, we cannot re-attach it,' I said. 'But can I have my arm?' he asked again. 'You see, we had to cut it off.' He interrupted, 'I know you had to cut it off, but I want it back. It must be in a bag or something, sir.' 'Why do you want it?' I asked. 'I am going to have it stuffed and use it as a club when I get back to my unit.' I must have looked shocked because he tried to comfort me, 'Don't you worry now, colonel. You did a fine job, and I hardly hurt at all; besides I write with my other hand anyway.'

Now, please tell me that these young guys aren't the Greatest Generation that has ever lived.

Posted By Pat Dollard at <http://patdollard.com/2008/09/there-are-17-marines-who-are-amputees-fighting-in-iraq/>



## VA Claims Backlog Update

Lawmakers have high expectations that they can reduce the backlog and processing time for veterans' benefits claims through a combination of new procedures, including two pilot projects. The Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2008, which passed Congress on Saturday (27 Sept 08) and is being prepared for submission to the White House for President Bush's signature, pushes the Department of Veterans Affairs to use electronic filing and processing of claims to try to improve the speed of claims decisions, reduce the disparity in decisions involving similar issues and cut the number of claims decisions that end up being overturned. The bill also creates a new authority to provide a temporary disability rating for some veterans who have severe and multiple disabilities that are not fully healed. Stabilized and unstabilized disabilities that have an impact on employment could be considered in assigning the temporary rating that would be used to provide disability compensation during the first year after leaving the military.

One of the pilot projects ordered by the compromise bill requires special, expedited treatment for disability claims where the veteran had the help of a veterans' service officer to prepare the paperwork. This one-year test would be carried out in at least 10 regional offices. A second pilot project, to run over three years in at least four regional offices, would have processors and veterans use a checklist when submitting claims in an effort to bring more organization and uniformity to the claims process. The bill also gives VA one year to develop a

program using information technology to process claims that would allow veterans to file applications and to track the progress of their claim online. Several provisions in the bill were drawn from a claims modernization bill sponsored by Rep. John Hall (D-NY) and Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) that attempts to improve training for VA workers who are processing claims and to change how employees are evaluated. Hall said processing a first-time claim by a disabled veteran can take 180 days and even longer if a veteran appeals the initial decision. The long processing time is part of the reason there is a backlog of about 400,000 claims awaiting a decision by VA.

Over the last two years, members of the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees have tried to push VA to process claims more quickly while also complaining about the rate of mistakes in claims and evidence that similar claims are decided differently between VA regional offices. In the report accompanying the benefits bill, the two committees say they want a process that is perceived as fair by veterans, but realize "it is unreasonable to expect states to have exactly the same average compensation or percentage of veterans receiving compensation." The bill requires a report — due one year from now — that looks at variances in benefits between regional offices and between veterans of different states to determine whether the differences are justified.

**Source:** NavyTimes Rick Maze article 2 Oct 08 ++

## Veterans Advocate of the Month

For many years, **Mary Cameron** has been involved in the Veteran's Movement. Currently, she is a volunteer at the Erie County Office of Veterans Services, contributing her valuable time and effort to the veterans' cause. When Mary comes into our office, she brings with her a bright smile and an infectious, positive attitude that we welcome in our department. Her work and contribution has a significant impact on the work that gets done regularly.

Mary also volunteers with the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 77, in Tonawanda, NY. Mary is a very active member in her community as well. She participates in Book Club events, community outreaches and other initiatives that directly impacts the children and families that desperately need someone's helping hand. Mary always strives to help veterans receive the services they have earned.



## Erie County Office of Veteran's Services Meets with "Parachute Group" to Expand Services



The founders of the Parachute Group, a community-based networking group for people looking for a new career or job, recently met with Patrick Welch, PhD., Director, County of Erie Office of Veterans Services to talk about how to further serve the veteran population throughout Erie County. The Parachute Group was formed as a resource to address the needs of all individuals seeking to make a career change, so meeting with the Office of Veteran's Services seemed only natural.

Says Valerie Stanek, CFP® and co-founder of the Parachute Group: "We are intended as a resource for people in transition. When someone experiences a job loss, it is crucial to network as much as possible. The Parachute Group provides anyone in transition with a much needed opportunity to make new contacts and develop new resources. We would very much like the men and women who have so courageously served our country to know that once they are home again, there is a place for them to turn to ease the transition. Patrick is working on an extremely comprehensive initiative to ensure that our veterans receive all of the benefits to which they are entitled, and we are proud that he will consider our group among those resources."

Currently meeting three times per week, members of the group have an equal say in the weekly agenda, meeting dates and times, guest speakers and events. The group provides participants with information on a variety of topics, including programs designed to help find a job, start a business, information on subsidized health insurance and other topics to ease the transition. Most important, however, is the opportunity to interact with people in a similar situation and to maintain a positive outlook. Members will share their experience, knowledge and contacts.

The Parachute Group is independent of any corporation, non-profit organization, governmental program or other affiliation. Its purpose is to provide a forum for networking, information and discussion. Anyone in transition is invited to participate. It is free and open to the public.

You can also email us at [parachutegroup@msn.com](mailto:parachutegroup@msn.com) or call 276-1117 for further information.

*Meetings are held from  
10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.*

**Tuesdays in North Tonawanda**  
at the **YWCA**, 49 Tremont Street,

**Wednesdays in Amherst** at the  
**Harlem Road Community Center**, 4255 Harlem Road

and

**Thursdays in Buffalo** at the  
**United Way**, 742 Delaware Avenue.

### ***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.

## VA Health Care Funding Update

The chairs of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees have introduced legislation, to be taken up next year, to ensure timelier and fully funded budgets for the VA health care system. Proponents say passage of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform Act (H.R. 6939 and S. 3527) also might lead to a gradual reopening of VA health care to thousands of priority group 8 veterans. These are veterans with no service-connected ailments and, by government standards, adequate income. Priority group 8 enrollments were stopped in 2003. The thrust of the VA health budget reform bill, however, is to approve VA health care funds a year in advance and end a disturbing pattern by Congress of passing VA budgets months after the budget year begins 1 OCT. These two- and three-month delays have forced VA hospitals and clinics to operate with funds frozen at previous year levels, creating supply and staff shortages, hiring freezes, and delays in equipment purchases.

The health care budget reform bill would put the VA health care budget under an "advance appropriation" schedule. If it were in effect this year, Congress would be passing a VA health budget now to take effect OCT 09. Part 2 of the package would improve the level of VA health care funding by requiring the department to use a new actuarial model that quite accurately can project the per capita cost of providing health care to the VA's enrolled-patient population. The GAO would be tasked with verifying the accuracy of VA health care cost projections each year. Therefore, if the VA proposed a health budget short of requirements, the White House would feel the political heat and would have to explain both to Congress and to veterans why health services were being targeted for reductions.

This legislation is an innovation from the Partnership for Veterans Health

Care Budget Reform (PVHCBR), a group of eight veteran-service organizations: AMVETS, the Blinded Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the American Legion, VFW, and Vietnam Veterans of America. In introducing their plan as a bill, Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA) chair of the House committee, called it a "historic new approach to guarantee that our veterans have access to comprehensive, quality health care." Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI), Senate committee chair, said it would end VA budgets that are "untimely and unpredictable." A bipartisan group of cosponsors came forward in both chambers. Joining Akaka were Sens. Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Tim Johnson (D-SD), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Russ Feingold (D-WI), Ted Stevens (R-AK), Lisa Murkowski (R-AR), and John Thune (R-SD). Cosponsors with Filner in the House were Reps. Walter Jones (R-NC), Michael Michaud (D-ME), and Phil Hare (D-IL). The veterans' group partnership choose a new path toward VA health care budget reform after Congress declined year after year to back a law that would mandate full funding of the VA health care system for every veteran needing care. Lawmakers argued it would limit congressional prerogatives. It also would expand VA entitlements in violation of the pay-as-you-go budget rule that the cost of any new entitlement be offset by a cut in another entitlement account or by raising taxes.

One proponent of VA budgeting reform is Bob Perrault, who served as director of three VA medical centers before retiring from the Veterans Health Administration in 2004 as its top business officer. Perrault says that in every year he can remember as the director of those medical centers, congressional delays in passing a VA health care budget resulted in disruptive shortages and inefficient

spending patterns. "We'd stopped buying equipment. We'd stopped doing maintenance just to try to maintain [staff] as long as we could," Perrault says. Patient waiting lists would grow, and dedicated staff got blamed for management lapses, when the real culprit was Congress. Until VA health budgets are reformed, even veterans' advocates say it isn't practical to swing open the doors of VA health care again to priority group 8 veterans. If that happens, says Peter Dickinson, a consultant to Disabled American Veterans and former staff member on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, "we could be in danger of returning to the days of '03 and '04, when more than 300,000 veterans waited six months or longer to get an appointment." Ironically, this year, a day before the new fiscal year began, Congress passed and the president signed into law the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance and Continuing Appropriations Act (H.R. 2638). It raised VA spending to \$94.35 billion in fiscal 2009 NDAA, an increase of \$6.75 billion or 7.7%. Two-thirds of that increase, \$4.1 billion, is for health care. This won praise from veteran service organizations. Proponents say passage of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform Act next year could make legislative performances — like this one on behalf of veterans — the rule rather than the exception.

### Source:

MOAA Observation Post Tom Philpott article 10 Oct 08 ++]  
RAO Bulletin 15 Oct 2008



## POW/MIA Update—October 28, 2008



**AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR:** There are **1,750** US personnel still listed by the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) as missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War; 833 US personnel have been accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. 90+% of the 1,750 still missing and unaccounted for were lost in Vietnam itself or in areas of Laos and Cambodia under Vietnam's wartime control.

**LAO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MEETS WITH LEAGUE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:** On September 26<sup>th</sup>, Lao Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Thongloun Sisolith, made a brief visit to Washington, DC, primarily to meet with Lao Ambassador Phiane Philakone and members of the Lao Embassy staff. He also agreed to meet with Ann Mills Griffiths for a 45-minute cordial and productive discussion of accounting-related issues. Griffiths commended the increased Lao Government flexibility in dealing with the US, especially Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) field operations, but also bilateral agreement to exchange Defense Attaches by the end of this year, a major move forward in the evolving military-to-military relationship. This exchange will be mutually beneficial and enable the Defense Intelligence Agency's POW/MIA specialist (Stony Beach Team) to be assigned to the US Embassy in Vientiane, working under the auspices of the Defense Attaché Office (DAO). The League deeply appreciates and supports the advances that the two governments have made on POW/MIA and other bilateral issues of concern.

**20-YEAR ASSESSMENT OF US-SRV COOPERATION & TECHNICAL TALKS HELD:** Ambassador Charles Ray, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/MIA Affairs, hosted Vietnamese officials in Hawaii on September 17<sup>th</sup> for a one-day assessment of the last 20 years of POW/MIA accounting cooperation. Chief of the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) Ambassador Nguyen Van Dao led the nine-member Vietnamese delegation, comprised of several long involved officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Public Security known to the League. US participants included JPAC Commander RADM Donna Crisp, USN, Detachment Commanders from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and senior members of the JPAC staff, plus Principle Director of the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) Col David Ellis, USAF, and senior DPMO staff. League Executive Director Ann Mills Griffiths, a guest of JPAC, made a presentation at the Opening Session, following Ambassador Ray, RADM Crisp and Ambassador Dao, and attended associated social events.

The 20-year Assessment followed the twice yearly US-SRV Technical Talks, hosted on September 16<sup>th</sup> by RADM Crisp to review the recently concluded 92<sup>nd</sup> Joint Field Activity (JFA) and plans for the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> JFAs. The latter is scheduled to include the first ever use of a US Navy hydrographic survey vessel in accounting efforts, a step agreed to by the Vietnamese Government in October 2006, but still not implemented due to bureaucratic inertia, now possibly complicated by proposed new requirements for implementation that Vietnam is proposing.

Though not required for shallow water surveys/investigations that can be conducted using other platforms, the US Navy's ship can help expedite the process of identifying possible shallow-water excavation sites and should be acceptable for use on the humanitarian accounting effort, as it was last year to provide humanitarian medical assistance to the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese leadership should raise NO additional requirements for POW/MIA accounting-related missions than for other humanitarian matters; therefore, the US should make clear that such cooperation is simply part of the expanding military-to-military relationship, now evolving in a mutually beneficial fashion.

**JPAC OPERATIONS:** After a brief period during which no JPAC teams were deployed, operations are now ongoing in Vietnam, Laos, South Korea and India. Five Recovery Teams (RTs) deployed for **Laos** on October 14<sup>th</sup> for their 106<sup>th</sup> Joint Field Activity (JFA) and will be conducting operations on five separate cases Khammouan and Savannakhet Provinces until November 19<sup>th</sup>.

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, four RTs and two Investigation Teams (ITs) began the 93<sup>rd</sup> JFA in **Vietnam**. The four RTs plan to excavate four cases in four separate provinces – Lao Cai, Dien Bien, Son La and Ninh Binh. One IT plans to investigate 23 cases in eight provinces and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). The second IT will conduct research and interviews on 10 cases in Hanoi and three cases in two other provinces. Reportedly, unilateral advance research and interviews will be conducted by the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) on 12 cases throughout the country. The 45-day work period will mean redeployment to Hawaii on December 9<sup>th</sup>.

In **South Korea**, one IT began working in Kyong Gi Province and in the DMZ. The other IT began conducting under-water Phase Two Testing (P2T) operations in the Port of Pyongtaek. These teams are expected to conclude their work on November 25<sup>th</sup>. Another P2T commenced operations in **India** this week and is expected to conclude its work about November 21<sup>st</sup>. For more information you can go to the following web sites: [www.pow-miafamilies.org](http://www.pow-miafamilies.org)

## SCRA Can Help Veterans with Foreclosures

The ***Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA)*** is a 2003 revision of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act, passed by Congress in 1940. The SCRA includes several provisions that help to alleviate the legal and economic burdens of U.S. military personnel.

You Walk Away, LLC, is a San Diego-based company that helps families who face home foreclosures. It has instituted a new program called the ***Military Walk Away Protection Kit***, intended to help servicemembers who may be facing economic hardships at home.

This protection kit helps active-duty personnel who have received home loans to stave off foreclosures, by preventing lenders from taking legal action for a specified period of time. This allows military personnel to re-negotiate with lenders to lower their current payments, or opt for a preset interest rate of 6 percent or lower, thereby avoiding foreclosure and possible economic disaster during an already difficult time.

"The **[SCRA](#)** is literally never mentioned as an option for people on active military duty, which is unfortunate, as this is an important benefit for military families," says Chad Ruyle, principal and co-founder of You Walk Away. "We created our program as a way to not only publicize this option for military personnel, but to also offer aid to a spouse or family looking for alternatives. Often, our team can help negotiate terms on their behalf by lowering their loan to a set 6-percent rate, saving their home, and their economic future."

[Source: American Legion website](#)



For more information on the Military Walk Away Protection Kit, call (877) 878-9255 or visit the [You Walk Away Web site](#).

Check out the new Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court page on our website ([www.erie.gov/veterans](http://www.erie.gov/veterans)) to see how Buffalo has spearheaded the efforts to assist returning Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans that are having troubles back at home.

### Erie County Veterans Services

- Patrick Welch  
Director
- Sergio Rodriguez  
Assistant Service Officer
- Alyssa Ersing  
Assistant Service Officer
- Judy Ehman, RSVP Volunteer and  
Newsletter Editor



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)