



Director's Comments

Thanks to everyone for your comments on this new format for the **IDVA Update**. In this issue IDVA- and SAA-specific news will all be in the first few pages along with any issues specific to Indiana. Those articles will be followed by the federal Veterans Administration (VA) articles which come mostly from Washington, D.C.

With sixteen months remaining as the Director I look around and see many changes which have occurred at IDVA since 2005 and am sometimes amazed we have accomplished so much. However, there is still much to be done.

This next legislative session we hope to have introduced a bill to extend the eligibility period for the Military Family Relief Fund (MFRF) and to include National Guard members activated for state active duty.

In researching some other matters we came across an item with which many County Veterans' Service Officers (CVSO)s may not be aware. The Remission of Fees (ROF) program includes the children of veterans from the Vietnam war who may have been carried as being a Prisoner of War (POW). The law allows their children to participate in the ROF program. The difference is that these students do not have the maximum of 124 semester hours. They may attend for however long it takes them to attain up to a bachelor's degree. The student retains eligibility even if the veteran parent is subsequently returned to their family.

Many CVSOs have related to me they and their veterans are having problems with the National VA's toll-free number (1-800-827-1000). They report being told their call cannot be taken and are instructed to call back. The Indianapolis VARO tells me there is a phone-tree option which can be selected which allows the caller to leave their number and receive a call-back within 24 hours. That may be something for the CVSOs to try and also to pass along to their veterans.

We have checked into the problem of unreturned calls from our special VA Regional Office telephone line established a year or so ago specifically for CVSOs. CVSOs inform me their calls are not returned. The VARO assures me the telephone line is still operational Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and calls will be returned within 48 hours.

All of us here at the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs, the State Approving Agency and the Indiana Veterans' Memorial Cemetery want to pay special tribute to **Marcia Ann Hines**, a beautiful, special lady who we miss very much. Marcia came to IDVA on November 8, 1999 as our receptionist and rapidly proved to be a valuable addition to the team. For the past several years she was the Program Coordinator for our SAA. She passed away on July 27, 2011. She will always be remembered.





Welcome to IDVA Amber Mertens, Stephanie Shene, and Hillary Weatherholt!



Amber Mertens began as a work-study in the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs office before joining the State Approving Agency as a Program Director.

Amber grew up in central Indiana and graduated from Mooresville High School. She joined the US Navy, where she served as an Arabic translator at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

She deployed to the Middle East from 2005-2006, serving aboard both domestic and foreign ships. After the Navy, Amber returned to Indiana where she began working in the banking industry. She completed her BA in Sociology from IUPUI and has an Associate Degree in Arabic from the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

Amber's hobbies include reading, traveling, and watching Pacers basketball.



Hillary Weatherholt is our new work-study. She grew up in an Air Force family and has lived in many interesting places. She graduated from high school in Kaiserslautern, Germany and is now using her G.I. benefits at IUPUI and is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. In her free time she is active in her sorority, Phi Mu, and

the Indianapolis community. She looks forward to serving the veterans of Indiana.



Stephanie began as a work-study for the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs. She has worked with the State Approving Agency for a year, which is where she learned about and applied for the Program Coordinator position.

Stephanie went to high school in central Indiana where she graduated from Center Grove High School. She enjoys watching and playing sports. Stephanie is currently using her Chapter 35 GI Bill benefits to attend IUPUI where she is pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work degree.



The Indiana Dept. Of Veterans' Affairs

Update



Mitch Daniels - Governor
Tom Applegate - Director

September 2011

The Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs Newsletter

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IDVA Fall Conference

The IDVA Fall Conference will be held in the MacArthur Auditorium at the Indiana Veterans' Home, 3851 N. River Road, West Lafayette, Indiana 47906 on Friday, October 14, 2011 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Lunch will be provided but, to assist with the cost, a collection will be taken. A tour of the Home will be conducted for new County Veterans' Service Officers and any others who wish to participate.

IDVA Veterans Affairs Commission Meeting

Following the Conference, the quarterly meeting of the IDVA Veterans Affairs Commission will be conducted. Starting time will be at 2 p.m.

2012 Annual Spring IDVA CVSO Conference

Due to a scheduling conflict with the Marriott Inn - East, the Annual Spring IDVA CVSO Conference has been moved back to its original date of 5-7 June 2012. The Jon Brinkley Memorial Golf Outing will be held at the Pleasant Run Golf Course on Monday, 4 June.

IDVA on Facebook!

To keep up with what's going on with IDVA and the veterans' community, we encourage everyone to follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/#!/indiana.veterans>.





State Approving Agency to Change Mission October 1st

The State Approving Agency (SAA) is the G.I. Bill educational wing of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs. Its mission, as it has been with all State Approving Agencies throughout the United States, has been to perform all duties necessary for the inspection, approval and supervision of programs offered by qualified educational institutions, training establishments and tests for licensing and certification. This has been accomplished in the past by conducting supervisory visits to each applicable facility – a process which, on average, took about 2-3 hours per visit.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Improvements Assistance Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-377, Section 203), signed on January 4, 2011, will make a big change to that.

The new law deems certain programs of education to be approved for the purposes of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) educational benefit programs. It also gives the Federal VA the authority to approve and disapprove certain programs of education, a task which in the past was accomplished by the SAA. Instead, the VA will use the State Approving Agencies (SAAs) for *compliance and oversight* of schools. Rather than conducting the 2-3 hour supervisory visits, the SAA will be conducting compliance visits, a process which could take 2-5 days.

Programs and courses not covered or approved by Public Law 111-377 will still be approved by the SAA. Those programs include:

- Private for Profit, accredited or not
- All stand alone NCD(s)[Non-college degrees], accredited or not
- OJT
- Non-registered apprenticeship



As of 30 August 2011, Indiana had 1,969 men and women deployed from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve for Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation New Dawn.

Since 9/11/2001 18,722 Hoosiers have been mobilized for the Global War on Terror and another 3,573 for domestic missions, for a total of 22,295 deployments.





The Indiana Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn Memorial Wall

Indiana has sustained the following casualties since the last IDVA Update, bringing the total for Indiana to 184



United State Marine Corps Captain **Brian S. Letendre**, 27, with ties to McCordsville, Indiana.

Died May 3, 2006 during Operation Iraqi Freedom while conducting combat operations against enemy forces in Anbar province, Iraq.

He was assigned to the Marine Forces Reserve's Inspector and Instructor Staff, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, Plainville, Conn.

Wife, Autumn, resides in McCordsville, Indiana. Captain Letendre was belatedly added to the Indiana list as a casualty with ties to Indiana.



United States Army Specialist **Augustus "Augy" J. Vicari**, 22, of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, with ties to Lowell, Indiana.

Died on July 29, 2011, in Paktia Province, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, of injuries sustained when his dismounted patrol encountered an improvised explosive device.

He was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Army National Guard, Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

A 2008 graduate of Lowell High School, he joined the Army two years ago and was deployed to Afghanistan in June 2011.



United States Army Private First Class **Brett E. Wood**, 19, of near Spencer, Indiana.

Died on September 9, 2011, in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. According to initial reports, Private First Class Wood died of injuries sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his dismounted patrol. This was just weeks after spending time back home recovering from a concussion he suffered in another bombing.

He was assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Wainwright, Alaska.

A 2010 graduate of Owen Valley High School, he was deployed to Afghanistan in April 2011 and was home on leave in August after a bomb explosion caused a concussion and hearing loss.



National Cemetery Administration considering Indianapolis for a Columbarium-only expansion

The National Cemetery Administration is planning new cemeteries and is coming up with more ways to serve cremation families. As part of that plan they are looking at Indianapolis, specifically Crown Hill Cemetery as a site for a columbarium.

Columbariums are above-ground niches which are receptacles for cremated remains. More and more families are electing cremation as it is more affordable.

The VA says they are early in the planning process for the initiative. Right now they are simply trying to find land. IDVA Director Tom Applegate and Indiana National Guard Adjutant General R. Martin Umbarger have contacted former Indianapolis NCA Director Glenn Powers and encouraged him to also look at Washington Park East, a Flanner & Buchanan facility which has been very supportive of veterans and National Guard members. Both locations are lovely sites and Indianapolis would be lucky to get this new facility at either location.

VA Streamlines Online Applications for Health Benefits Renewal Automated 10-10EZR Form Simplifies Updates

WASHINGTON (September 8, 2011) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has automated its online Health Benefits Renewal (10-10EZR) form as part of its ongoing effort to streamline access to benefits.

"This action dramatically reduces the time it will take for enrolled Veterans to submit updates to their demographic information and further reduces access barriers to needed care for Veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

Previously, Veterans filling out the online 10-10EZR were required to print a copy, sign it and send it to their local medical center before updates to their personal, insurance or financial information could occur. Veterans may now submit these updates online.

For additional information, go to www.va.gov/healtheligibility or call VA's toll-free number at 1-877-222-VETS (8387). The online form is available at <https://www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez/Form/1010ezr.pdf>.





Over \$2.2 Billion in Retroactive Agent Orange Benefits Paid to 89,000 Vietnam Veterans and Survivors for Presumptive Conditions

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced today that more than \$2.2 billion in retroactive benefits has already been paid to approximately 89,000 Vietnam Veterans and their survivors who filed claims related to one of three new Agent Orange presumptive conditions.

On August 31, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) amended its regulations to add ischemic heart disease, hairy cell leukemia and other chronic B-cell leukemias, and Parkinson's disease to the list of diseases presumed to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.

“As the President said to the American Legion yesterday, VA is committed to ensuring Veterans and their families receive the care and benefits they have earned,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “I encourage all potentially eligible Veterans to apply as soon as possible to preserve the most favorable effective date for payments.”

For new claims, VA may authorize up to one year of retroactive benefits if a Veteran can show that he or she has experienced one of those conditions since the date of the regulatory change.

VA has reviewed, and continues to review, thousands of previously filed claims that may qualify for retroactive benefits under a long-standing court order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in *Nehmer vs. U.S. Veterans Administration*.

“VA encourages survivors of Veterans whose death may be due to one of the three diseases to file a claim for dependency and indemnity compensation,” added Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. Secretary Shinseki’s decision to add these conditions to the list of Agent Orange presumptive conditions was based on a study by the Institute of Medicine, which indicated a positive association between exposure to certain herbicides and the subsequent development of one or more of the three conditions.

Potentially eligible Veterans include those who were exposed based on duty or visitation in Vietnam or on its inland waterways between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; exposed along the demilitarized zone in Korea between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971; or exposed due to herbicide tests and storage at military bases within and outside of the United States.

The Agent Orange Claims Processing System website located at <https://www.fasttrack.va.gov/AOFastTrack/> may be used to submit claims related to the three new presumptive conditions.



Beyond the three new presumptive disabilities, Veterans may file online at VA's My-eBenefits web site at: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>. They can check the status of their claim with a premium account (confirming their identity), and use a growing number of online services. Servicemembers may enroll in My-eBenefits by using their Common Access Card at anytime during their military service, or before they leave during their Transition Assistance Program briefings. Veterans may also enroll through their myPay or MyHealthVet accounts by visiting their local VA regional office or Veteran Service Organization, or by calling 1-800-827-1000.

The website makes it easy to electronically file a claim and allows Veterans and their physicians to upload evidence supporting the claim. It also permits online viewing of claim status. For more information about Agent Orange presumptives and disability compensation, go to <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/>. For questions about Agent Orange, Veterans may call VA's Special Issues Helpline at 1-800-749-8387 and press 3.

More Information on the VA's "e-Benefits" Program

Bob Kelley, Grant County Veterans Service Officer, shares the following information:

I read a recent newsletter from The American Legion and noticed more info on **E-Benefits**. The VA rep from Indy (during the 2011 Spring IDVA CVSO Conference) stated that everyone who needed a Premium account (except Active Duty/Guard/Retiree's) with **E-benefits** needed to come to the Regional Office to get a premium account. However, since May of this year, they have been doing Premium accounts over the phone for any Veteran who has been receiving compensation and has direct deposit. I validated this and actually had my regular account updated over the phone.

The veteran should call 800-827-1000 and press option 7, ensure they have their checking account info and driver licenses info for verification. To speed up the process, the veteran should pre-register with **e-Benefits** (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>) before calling to update to a Premium account .





VA's Telephone Service Helps Family Members Encourage Veterans to Seek Medical Care

WASHINGTON (September 6, 2011) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched a telephone service, **Coaching into Care**, to provide assistance to family members and friends trying to encourage their veteran to seek health care for possible readjustment and mental health issues.

"Those closest to veterans are often the first to recognize when veterans are having difficulties," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Family members and friends may not know what to say to encourage their veterans to seek much needed readjustment and health care. The **Coaching into Care** line will help them find the right words."

To help veterans address problems and support veterans in making decisions about getting care, the **Coaching into Care** program offers unlimited, free coaching with family members or friends over a series of telephone calls. The priority is connecting veterans with VA care in their community through the family member's help and encouragement.

Callers receive professional coaching on solving specific logistical obstacles and encouraging sometimes reluctant veterans to seek care while still respecting the veteran's right to make personal decisions. **Coaching into Care**, launched in March 2011, has had more than 650 calls with family members or friends of greater than 175 veterans to encourage them to seek care. This phone line is connected to VA's Veterans Crisis Line, Caregiver Support Line, and the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans. This way, if the caller or veteran is in an immediate crisis, or has concerns regarding caregiving for a disabled veteran, or seeking assistance regarding homelessness, there is no wrong number for families to call.

Callers can reach VA's **Coaching into Care** program at the toll-free number **1-888-823-7458**, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, and online at <http://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/>. As always, veterans can reach immediate help at the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, press 1 for Veterans.

VA Announces Expansion of Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER), which includes the Roudebush VA Medical Center in Indianapolis

WASHINGTON (Sept. 8, 2011)- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today it will expand its pilot for the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER), which enables sharing of veterans' health records.

"The expansion of the VLER pilot program will allow more veterans and facilities to participate in this exciting new technology," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "I invite veterans to sign up for the pro-



gram. It will keep health care providers informed, improve continuity and timeliness of care, and eliminate gaps in health care information."

VLER is a multi-faceted business and technology initiative that includes a portfolio of health, benefits, personnel, and administrative information sharing capabilities.

This pilot expansion is designed to share veterans' health information electronically, safely, and privately between VA, Department of Defense (DoD), and selected private health care facilities that are members of the secure Nationwide Health Information Network.

VA is on track to implement health information exchange at 11 VA medical centers and to partner with both DoD and private health care entities by fall 2011. This expansion will enable authorized users to access health information and will provide seamless service to America's servicemembers and veterans.

VA's goal is to have 50,000 signed authorizations from veterans who are VA patients to participate in the pilot by the end of the fiscal year, Shinseki noted.

In addition to other ongoing efforts to share benefits and administrative data, the pilot is an initial step toward a larger capability which will become available throughout VA. VA will expand this pilot to provide these services to servicemembers and veterans nationwide.

Existing Sites

- * San Diego VA Medical Center and Kaiser Permanente San Diego, in operation since winter 2009;
- * Hampton VA Medical Center in Virginia, MedVirginia and DoD, in operation since fall 2010;
- * Spokane VA Medical Center in Washington, Inland Northwest Health Services and DoD, in operation since spring 2011;
- * Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va., and MedVirginia, in operation since spring 2011;
- * **Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center in Indianapolis, and Indiana hospitals, in operation since summer 2011.**

Expansion Sites:

- * Grand Junction VA Medical Center in Colorado, and rural Utah hospitals, first in Moab, Utah, through the Utah Health Information Network by fall 2011;
- * Asheville VA Medical Center in North Carolina and Western North Carolina Health Network by fall 2011;
- * VA Western New York Healthcare System in Buffalo, N.Y. and Buffalo area hospitals through the HEALTHeLINK Health Information Exchange by fall 2011;
- * Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, S.C. and Charleston area hospitals through the South Carolina Health Information Exchange by fall 2011;



- * Minneapolis VA Health Care System and Minnesota hospitals through the Community Health Information Collaborative Health Information Exchange by fall 2011; and
- * VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Washington and MultiCare sites by fall 2011.

Retroactive Traumatic Injury Benefits No Longer Just For OEF/OIF Injuries

Washington – As of October 1, 2011, the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection benefit, also known as TSGLI, will be payable for all qualifying injuries incurred during the period October 7, 2001 to November 30, 2005, regardless of where they occurred, and regardless of whether the member had SGLI coverage at the time of the injury. The Veterans' Benefit Act of 2010 removes the requirement that injuries during this period be incurred in Operations Enduring or Iraqi Freedom.

This is welcome news for the many servicemen and women who suffered serious traumatic injuries while serving stateside or in other areas outside of OEF or OIF during this time period, but until now have not been eligible for TSGLI. TSGLI provides a payment ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000 to Servicemembers sustaining certain severe traumatic injuries resulting in a range of losses, including amputations, limb salvage, paralysis, burns, loss of sight, hearing or speech, facial reconstruction, 15-day continuous hospitalization, coma, and loss of activities of daily living due to traumatic brain injury or other traumatic injuries.

Former Reservists and National Guard members who were injured during the retroactive period and suffered a qualifying loss are eligible for a TSGLI payment even if the cause was not related to service, such as a "civilian" automobile accident or severe injury which occurred while working around their home. The law regarding these payments covers these individuals 24/7. Additionally, survivors of Servicemembers who died more than seven days after their injuries are also eligible to receive a TSGLI payment if the member had a covered loss.

VA is working with VA and DoD Public Affairs to publicize this change in the TSGLI law, while the branches of service are identifying any retroactive claims they have denied because the injury was not OEF/OIF and out-reaching to those individuals.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki stated, "We at VA appreciate the President's and Congress' efforts to improve benefits to our troops. Now all of our nation's Servicemembers who suffered severe traumatic injuries while serving their country can receive the same traumatic injury benefits, regardless of where their injury occurred."

Although applications are currently being accepted by Branch of Service TSGLI Offices, benefits will not be paid until October 1, 2011, the effective date of the law. For more information or to apply for a TSGLI payment, Servicemembers and Veterans should go to <http://www.insurance.va.gov/sgliSite/TSGLI/TSGLI.htm>. They can also contact their branch of service TSGLI Office (contact information available at above link).