



HAWAII VETERAN

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State of Hawaii Office of Veterans Services

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State Advisory Board on Veterans Services

By Jennifer Aina

The State Advisory Board on Veterans Services has been tasked to name the newly built Veterans Long-Term Care home in Hilo. The Board solicited for names from veterans' organizations statewide. The Board will be submitting the name before the end of June.

Two new board members have been confirmed by the Legislature and appointed by the Governor. They are Mr. Herring Kalua, representing the Big Island and Mr. Marvin Koga representing Oahu.

The Advisory Board meets on the first Friday of each month. The meetings are open to the public. Go to <http://www.dod.state.hi.us/ovs/advisoryboard.html> for meeting location and time or call OVS at (808) 433-0423.



Filipino-American veterans Angelo Mercado and Jose Gonzalez receive Memorial Day programs from volunteer Taylor Murakami

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Director's Message

I am proud and honored to have been appointed by Governor Lingle to be the Director of Veterans Services for the State of Hawaii in April of 2004. During the legislative process, our department did very well. We were authorized \$751,000 in additional funding for fiscal year 06 and 07 to repair our Veterans cemetery in Kaneohe. The funds will be used primarily to purchase casket liners for our deceased veterans, fix the sprinkler system that is in disrepair, and hydro mulch the gravesites. The majority of the funds about \$320,000 will be used to remove the hill behind of the columbarium, and \$109,000 will be used to repair any damage to its structure. Another \$30,000 was approved to publish and circulate our newsletter. This will mean OVS will be able to get a newsletter out to you on quarterly basis, informing you of additional benefits you might be eligible for.

We are also going in for an additional counselor's position, so that we can better serve our veteran community. The counselor will be located here at Tripler Army Medical Center but will also travel to the neighbor islands to support our offices there. We are trying to anticipate and plan for the additional workload when our troops come back as new veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Construction of our 95-bed skilled nursing home facility is progressing nicely on the Big Island. As promised, the Veterans Affairs department has released 20 million dollars to the State of Hawaii to pay for their share of the costs in constructing the new State Veterans home in Hilo. The State Veterans home is scheduled to open in the later part of 2006.

Our Memorial Day program was a great success. The theme this year was HONORING OUR FALLEN WARRIORS AND THEIR OHANA. We had more people attending this year than ever before. The band from Tillamook High School in Oregon and the choir from Spanaway Lake High School in Washington State both did a marvelous job. The JROTC cadets from Waianae High School supported us again this year with a saber honor guard. The U.S. Navy provided over 50 Sailors, who manned all the American flags around our

columbarium area for the ceremony. It was similar to the procedure they perform when their ships come into port and pass the Arizona Memorial. The "manning of the rails" honors their fallen comrades in arms. Musician mate 2nd class Mallory McKendry of the Pacific Fleet Band sang the National Anthem with pride and love for country that came through loud and clear. Let us not forget Mihana Aluli Souza who did the Oli chant for us once again, and has always been a real supporter of our veterans and the cemetery as a whole.

The U.S.S. Hopper and PHNSY IMF also donated over 800 leis for our gravesites and columbarium niches. Thanks to everyone's generosity, all our interred warriors and family members received leis on this special day.

As all of you know, over 88% of our Army citizen soldiers have been activated to fight our war on terrorism, many, including our 29th Infantry Brigade have not yet returned home. May we all continue to pray for our warriors who are in harms way because these proud Americans are the best of the best and know that freedom is not free. God bless them, God bless all of you for being true patriots, and may God bless the United States of America.

Colonel (Retired) Edward R. Cruickshank
Director, OVS



Flagbearers stand ready at the 2005 Memorial Day ceremony.

VA News

Returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are entitled to two years of free health care from the VA.

VA health care is available to veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations in a period of war, after the Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during "a period of hostilities" after November 11, 1998. This policy is not limited to hospital care and includes other appropriate medical care and nursing home care as well. The two-year period begins when the military member is discharged or retires from active duty. The care is designed to meet the medical needs of combat veterans for 2 years after they leave active duty. It is expected that during this time veterans' claims for disability compensation for these injuries, illnesses, or medical conditions will be adjudicated. If veterans' claims are approved as service connected, they will be placed in the appropriate priority group and continue to receive their care without a copayment. If their claim is disapproved, they may still be able to receive care, but they may be required to make a copayment for the services.

This policy also applies to the National Guard and Reserve personnel who were activated and served in a theater of combat or in combat against a hostile force. Members of the Guard and Reserve forces must be ordered to active duty by a federal declaration, serve the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty, and be released, discharged, or retired under conditions other than dishonorable.

Advanced Clinic Access and what it means to veterans.

Advanced Clinic Access (ACA) is a new system to give veterans better access to their primary care team here at the Pacific Islands Health Care System. This is a brand new concept under development and not yet available, but coming soon. Basically ACA allows veterans to make an appointment that fits in their schedule. If the veteran needs to cancel the appointment, it can be rescheduled sooner, and there will be less people who forget to come to their appointment. This is how the system works: At your appointment, your provider will tell you when to come back. You will be told if you need any tests before your next appointment and you will be given a paper to remind you about what you need to do before your next appointment. A letter will be sent telling the veteran when the appointment date and time will be. If the date and time of the appointment are not good, the veteran can call 1-800-214-1306 to reschedule. Keep in mind the Advanced Clinic Access system is not yet in operation, but coming soon. This is another case of you and your VA working together for your health.

VA disability compensation for Diabetes

To qualify for VA disability compensation, most veterans must have a diagnosis of diabetes and evidence that it began or was aggravated during active duty or within one year or release from duty. VA currently is paying disability compensation to more than 70,000 veterans with diabetes, many of them Vietnam veterans.

In 2001, veterans who served in Vietnam and later developed adult-onset (Type 2) diabetes became eligible for disability compensation on a presumption that the condition is connected to their military service. They do not have to present evidence that their diabetes began during or shortly after military service. This presumptive policy is an outgrowth of research into the potential effects of Agent Orange.

VA has made diabetes care a priority ever since it began treating chronic diseases on an outpatient basis several years ago. Its emphasis is multi-focused: (1) patient education; (2) health care provider education and guidelines; (3) epidemiological assessment; (4) quality of care; and (5) basic science, clinician and health services research. VA is the largest integrated health care system to provide care to people with diabetes. Nearly all veterans with diabetes are men; 2.4 percent are women. The largest group of veterans with diabetes is over 65 years of age.

Research is an important part of the VA's treatment of diabetes. VA has funded a five-year study at 20 VA medical centers to determine if tight control of blood sugar will decrease cardiovascular conditions such as heart disease and stroke. VA established the Diabetes Quality Enhancement Research Initiative to translate research findings into better care and outcomes for diabetic patients through aggressive treatment of risk factors that can be changed and prevention of progressive complications.

More information on diabetes can be found at <http://www.va.gov/health/diabetes/default.htm>. If you need information on obtaining disability compensation for this disease, contact the Honolulu VA Regional Office at 800-827-1000.

VA Home Loan limit is now \$539,475 for Hawaii

You are correct. The maximum VA guaranty amount to an amount equal to 25 percent of the Freddie Mac conforming loan limit for a single-family residence, as adjusted for the year involved. To illustrate, the maximum VA guaranty amount for 2005 is \$89,912. This is 25 percent of the 2005 Freddie Mac conforming loan limit for a single-family residence, which is \$359,650. Under Freddie Mac's charter, the maximum loan amounts are 50 percent higher for first mortgages on properties in Hawaii, Alaska, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Since this higher amount also applies to VA loans, eligible veterans in these areas can seek to purchase a single-family home with no down payment, for up to \$539,475 using the VA guaranty. The previous maximum loan amount in Hawaii and Guam was \$240,000.

VA-guaranteed loans are obtained by making application to private lending institutions. Lenders may be found by asking in the community in which you live what firms in the area make home loans. The information may be obtained by looking in the telephone directory under "Mortgages," or by inquiring at banks, savings and loan associations, mortgage companies, real estate brokers' offices, and other public and private lending agencies. Our VA regional office will also provide a list of lenders who are active in the program. Call toll free 1-800-827-1000 for more information, or visit VA's website at www.homeloans.va.gov.

What PTSD symptoms to look for in returning combat troops

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following experience or witnessing of life-threatening events, such as military combat. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, and feel detached from others. These symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair a person's daily life.

In the first weeks and months following a war zone trauma, many returning veterans continue to feel an unexpected sense of detachment, irritability, and other symptoms of stress. Veterans may also experience a loss of interest in social or sexual activities; they may feel distant from others and emotionally numb. However, such stress-related symptoms are usually temporary. Only a small portion (5-10%) of war veterans with symptoms goes on to experience PTSD. In these individuals, the symptoms continue over time and may get worse.

Trauma memories, trauma flashbacks, and the avoidance of such memories can make living with a suffering veteran feel like you are living in a war zone. Friends and family members may feel hurt, alienated, or discouraged because the veteran has not been able to let go of what he experienced in the war, and they may become angry or distant towards the survivor.

Supportive relationships with family and friends' relationships are extremely beneficial for war veterans experiencing stress. These relationships provide companionship, a sense of belonging, and support for coping with life stressors. If you feel your husband continues to isolate from friends and experience the symptoms of PTSD after a few months in country, you may want to seek advice from a professional who has experience in PTSD.

There are several ways to obtain more information on PTSD. Contact the Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical Center at 1-800-214-1306, the Pacific Center for PTSD located here on Oahu at 566-1935 or the Honolulu Vet Center at 973-8387.

What are Advance Directives, and Do You Need One?

You have the right to make decisions regarding your medical care. This includes the right to accept or refuse medical treatment. An Advance Directive is a written statement about medical decisions you want made for you in the event you can no longer speak for yourself. The two most common forms of Advance Directives are a Living Will: a document in which you state in writing your wishes about medical care; and, Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care: a document giving a person you appoint, such as a relative or friend, the authority to speak for you about your treatment, should you be unable to do this for yourself.

Continued on next page

VA News Continued

You will be asked about your wishes regarding an advance directive at admission. This document, if you choose to create one, will be maintained as part of your medical record and will be reviewed periodically with you or your surrogate decision maker. The provision of care is not conditioned on the existence of an advance directive. A policy on informed decision making is developed by the medical and administrative staff and is consistent with all legal requirements. Talk to your Primary Care Provider if you have questions about Advance Directives or wish to complete one.

Latest VA research on Alzheimer's disease

Researchers with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) found that a diet high in docosahexenoic acid, or DHA—an omega-3 fatty acid found in relatively high concentrations in cold-water fish—dramatically slowed the progression of Alzheimer's disease in mice. Specifically, DHA cut the harmful brain plaques that mark the disease. The results appear in the March 23 online edition of the *Journal of Neuroscience*. Senior author Greg M. Cole, Ph.D., a neuroscientist at the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System and UCLA, said that unlike many studies with mice, this one points to the benefits of a therapy that is easily available and already touted for other medical conditions. DHA—either from food sources such as fish and soy, or in fish-oil supplements—is recommended by many cardiologists for heart health, based on scores of previous studies. DHA has a tremendous safety profile—essentially no side effects—and clinical trial evidence supports giving DHA supplements to people at risk for cardiovascular disease.

The new study involved older mice genetically altered to develop Alzheimer's disease. The researchers fed one group of mice DHA-fortified chow. The control mice ate a normal or DHA-depleted diet. After three to five months—the equivalent of several years in human biology—the high DHA group had 70-percent less buildup of amyloid protein in the brain. This sticky protein makes up the plaques, or patches, that are a hallmark of Alzheimer's. Food sources of omega-3 fatty acids include fish such as salmon, halibut, mackerel and sardines, as well as almonds, walnuts, soy and DHA-enriched eggs. Last year this same research team identified another nutrient that appears to combat Alzheimer's plaques in mice: curcumin, the yellow pigment in tumeric, one of the spices that make up curry powder. Researchers became interested in curcumin's potential to prevent or treat Alzheimer's disease after noting the low prevalence of dementia among the elderly in India, where curry is a staple.

2005 VA Benefits Handbook Available

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently released the 2005 edition of the "Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents" handbook. The 120-page handbook details

federal payment rates and outlines a variety of programs and benefits for American veterans.

Most of the nation's 25 million veterans qualify for some VA benefits, ranging from health care to burial in a national cemetery. Additionally, veterans may be eligible for programs providing home loan guaranties, educational assistance, training and vocational rehabilitation, income assistance pensions, life insurance and compensation for service-connected illnesses or disabilities. In some cases, veterans' survivors may also be eligible for benefits.

The handbook may be downloaded for free at <http://www.va.gov/opa/feature>.

Fact Sheet: Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam Conflict

Population Affected:

According to a Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) January 2003 Fact Sheet, an estimated 2.6 million personnel served within the borders of South Vietnam and in adjacent waters between 1962 and 1975.

DVA estimates Hawaii's current total veteran population to be roughly 114,778; conservative estimates project the living Vietnam Veterans population in Hawaii to be approximately 36,000.

Problem:

According to the VA's Environmental Agents Service (EAS), Agent Orange Overview dated May 10, 2004 (website release), approximately 20 million gallons of herbicides were used in Vietnam between 1962 and 1971 to remove unwanted plant life and leaves which otherwise provided cover for enemy forces during the Vietnam Conflict. This defoliant has now been "presumed" to be the cause of certain life-altering, often debilitating illnesses.

Concern(s):

Shortly following their service in Vietnam, veterans reported a variety of health problems and concerns which some attributed to exposure to Agent Orange or other toxic herbicides. Many Vietnam veterans are unaware that the "typical" diseases often associated with aging, may in fact be attributable to their military service in Southeast Asia.

Solution:

The Department of Veterans Affairs has developed a comprehensive program to respond to these medical problems and concerns; to include healthcare services, disability compensation for veterans with service-connected illnesses, & vocational rehabilitation.

Eligibility Criteria for VA Disability Compensation:

A veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the period January 9, 1962 to May 7, 1975, is presumed to have been exposed to herbicides (Agent Orange). What this means is that a veteran does not have to prove actual exposure. Simply having service in Vietnam is enough for the VA to say a veteran was exposed.

Service in the Republic of Vietnam includes physically serving in or visiting the country. Service in the waters off Vietnam is included if

it involved duty or visitation in Vietnam. This means the ship came into port and the veteran disembarked. Service or visitation in Vietnam, as noted above, must be shown in the veteran's service records.

The Agent Orange Act of 1991 established a presumption of service connection for veterans with service in Vietnam who later developed, to a degree of 10 percent or more in VA's rating schedule, the following conditions:

- ⊙ Hodgkin's disease,
- ⊙ Multiple myeloma,
- ⊙ Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL),
- ⊙ Acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy,
- ⊙ Porphyria cutanea tarda,
- ⊙ Prostate cancer,
- ⊙ Respiratory cancers (cancers of the lung, bronchus, larynx or trachea),
- ⊙ Soft-tissue sarcoma,
- ⊙ Chloracne or other acneiform disease consistent with chloracne,
- ⊙ Diabetes mellitus (type 2),
- ⊙ Chronic lymphocytic leukemia.

The following conditions must manifest themselves to 10 percent within one year after the last date of service in Vietnam for VA to presume service-connection:

- ⊙ Chloracne or other acneiform disease consistent with chloracne,
- ⊙ Porphyria cutanea tarda,
- ⊙ Acute subacute peripheral neuropathy.

For more information about VA benefits, veteran's can visit VA's "Agent Orange – Herbicide Exposure" Internet page at: <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/benefits/herbicide/>

Agent Orange Registry and VA Medical Care:

Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war are also eligible for a complete physical examination. If a VA physician suspects a disease might be related to Agent Orange, VA will provide free medical care. Those who participate in the examination program become part of an Agent Orange Registry and receive periodic mailings from VA about the latest Agent Orange studies and new diseases being covered under VA policies.

Vietnam veterans and their families may contact the VA at 1-800-749-8387 for more information about Agent Orange or the FREE physical examination.

Recommendation:

File a claim for Disability Compensation by contacting the VA at 1-800-827-1000 or seek assistance from any Veteran Service Organization (i.e. American Legion, The American Ex-POW's, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Intelligence Service). The Oahu Branch OVS Counselors at 433-0420 are also available to help.

Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery Update

By Miles Okamura

Aloha! On August 1, 1991, the gates at Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery officially opened for business. 123 acres of majestic scenic property, located at the foot of the Koolau Mountain range on the Windward side of Oahu. Dedicated and determined to take care of their "Fallen Heroes," the State of Hawaii vowed to work tirelessly to upkeep the overall quality of the cemetery.

Since September 1999, the caring for the grave sites of our fallen heroes has been taken on by the new administration here at the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery. With many budget cuts and a decrease in manpower, the expectations were not met in a timely manner.

Today, with new energy and creative personnel moves, the cemetery has turned the corner and is headed in the right direction. With the addition of the permanent grounds supervisor, Herring Kalua and the support from Pat Tangonan and Eddie Tangonan, and the staff of the State Department of Defense Maintenance Section, the overall maintenance of the cemetery has improved greatly.

With the tireless and dedicated work of Colonel Edward R. Cruickshank, U.S. Army (Retired), Director of the State Office of Veterans Services, the State Legislature approved over \$750,000.00 over the next two fiscal years to do major repairs to the cemetery. Repairs to the cemetery include the re-grading of the ground sections above the Columbarium, repair to the Columbarium and sprinkler system, and a study on the cemetery grounds to improve soil conditions, drainage and compaction.

Another improvement the staff is implementing is the grass coverage of gravesites once a burial is completed. On May 27, 2005, the staff began to hydromulch the naked gravesite areas to cover the dirt with grass in a shorter amount of time. Hydromulching is a process in which grass seeds are spread out over an area with a mixture of paper and wood chips, fertilizers and other additives to speed up the germination and protect the seeds from the weather elements. It will also cut down on the number of seeds eaten by the many birds in the cemetery. The staff



will be mulching as each burial row is completed. This should cut down the time to six to eight weeks for the grass to grow instead of the old process that, at times, took more than a year.

Our "Fallen Heroes," family members and friends deserve the very best we can provide and that is what our staff at Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery is determined to provide. With patience, and possibly at times, assistance, Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery will be what the expectations are, a shrine to our "Fallen Heroes" while providing an Honorable and Respectful final resting place.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the veteran organizations for taking time out from their schedules to clean the Korean and Vietnam Memorials once a week throughout the year. Special thanks go to Sammy Young for reporting on the constant needs of the Memorials. With his assistance we were able to ask the collaborating State Departments to provide the needed upkeep of the Memorials and its surroundings.

The image used as the masthead was taken by Sgt. 1st Class Wayne Iha of the 117th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. The man pictured is Mr. Shigeru "Stu" Tsubota of the 100th Bn.

Big Island of Hawaii Report

By Keith Ribbentrop

Veterans have contributed to the rights and freedoms we enjoy today. The world as we know it is as a result of the toil and blood they gave in the name of liberty and freedom. When their Military Service Obligation was complete they came home, settling in their community, starting a career, building a home, a family and life under the liberty and freedoms they fought for.

The sacrifice that our veterans have made are realized through portal events such as Pearl Harbor and September 11 and the on going battles for democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq; there is a strong community support not only for the soldiers that are currently engaged in the war on terrorism—but for those who have already made those sacrifice of their individual personal freedoms.

On the Island of Hawaii, in Hawaii County we have witnessed first hand that very strong community support. There are two instances of community support garnered by veterans that allow the communities to take pride in its unselfish contributions and accomplishments, improve the quality of life for veterans and have a profound impact in the way government thinks about projects.

As a result of the veterans community participation, not only is a State Veteran Home being built in Hilo, but also other locations are currently being surveyed for future State Veteran Home sites. Governor Linda Lingle and Mayor Harry Kim give credit not only to the veterans but more so to the strong community support demonstrated for this project.

Another project is the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery in Kona. The local veterans chose a

challenging location for the cemetery, so challenging in fact that the National Cemetery Grants program would refer to it for a while as "the most expensive state veterans cemetery in the nation", and additional federal funding was difficult. Veterans Groups picked up the colors. They engaged the community to improve the cemetery—and improve it they did. Kukio Corporation, Hualalai Four Seasons, Mauna Lani Development, Mauna Kea Development, Waikoloa Development, South Kohala Golf Course Association and the local chapters of the Disabled American Veterans, The American Legion, and The Veterans of Foreign Wars came together and made an oasis in a lava field. Considerable corporate donations of expertise, materials and equipment are on going. These contributions were met with veterans providing labor in a spirit of voluntarism unmatched in the Modern Era. The outcome is a location that the whole community can take ownership in and point to with pride. Equally as important is the interest the folks in Washington D.C. now take in West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery. They have sent a representative to Kona to review the cemetery. By in large, as a result of the community's support for the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery, there are several projects being developed for the location and because the community has taken ownership of this cemetery, the statement, "the most expensive state veterans cemetery in the nation", is not used with reference to this cemetery anymore.

It is the individual veterans responsibility to be involved in their community. If you are involved, engaging the community's support is not as difficult as it might seem, just talk to them—we guarantee that the support you need will be there.



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