



Manuel Schneidmiller Post 154, Inc.

Rathdrum Idaho

Newsletter

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Post 154 Mission Statement

The American Legion Post 154 is a patriotic veterans organization devoted to mutual helpfulness to support Veterans and the Community at large. We are committed to mentoring and sponsorship of youth programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow service members, veterans, and their families in our communities. Our success depends entirely on active membership, participation and volunteerism. This organization belongs to the people it serves and the community in which it thrives.

Commander:

Well, frost will be on the pumpkin very soon. Where does the time go? I want to say thank you to every member of Post 154 for having patience during these trying times. We have members that are on both sides of the fence concerning masks and having in person meetings. Please bear with us while we try and make the best decisions concerning these matters. We have to look at the big picture and stand on the side of caution.

Believe it or not, you may be supporting Legion projects and not even know it. Here are some examples of Legion Volunteer Hours:

- All unpaid volunteer work.
- Working with youth groups, church groups, neighborhood groups, visiting nursing homes or hospitals. Sunday School teacher, Girl or Boy Scout Leader.
- Items donated to schools, youth groups, shelters, missions, Goodwill, St. Vincent's, homeless shelters, group homes or any other non-profit organizations.
- Working on Promoting beautification or recycling, adopt-a-highway.
- Driving friends/neighbors to church, doctors or to the store, writing or phoning your legislators.
- Working or donating blood to a blood drive.
- Planting trees, cleaning up community property, disaster cleanup.
- Distributing Poppies in May.
- Donating food/toys/gifts for food baskets for Thanksgiving, Christmas, or all year long.
- Buying yarn/supplies for knitting or crocheting for VA hospitals, during homes or donations in the community.
- Cards or gift wrapping for Veterans in hospitals or nursing homes. Donating food, gifts for gift baskets for veterans.
- Volunteering with Police, Firemen, National Guard, etc.
- Decorating at all Post activities.
- working on monthly newsletter for the Post
- Yard work, shopping, housekeeping, transportation for senior citizens or veterans.

Thank you so much for all that you do and let me close by saying how proud I am to be part of American Legion Post 154 and the people in it. - Dee Sasse, Commander



Finance Officer:

During the month of September, the Post incurred \$433.07 in expenses. The majority of these expenses were payments to the National American Legion organization and were associated with member renewals (\$187.50). Other expenses included \$149.50 for the Veterans Recognition event, \$65.41 to replenish our stock of flags for sale, \$20.59 for a flag donated to the City of Rathdrum and \$10.07 for Chaplain supplies. Income totaled \$2,403.00. The majority of this income came from member donations \$1,250.00 donated by members, membership renewals \$633.00, Veterans Recognition event donations \$300.00, Flag Sales \$52.00, Hat Sale of \$17.00 and flag box donation of \$1.00. – Len Crosby, Finance Officer

Legislative Chairman:

Administration Postal Changes and Delays May Impact Medication Shipments: VA explained last week that approximately 90 percent of Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) packages are shipped to veterans by the USPS. In areas where Administration postal changes have severely impacted, deliveries (Detroit, parts of New York and New Jersey) VA is attempting to proactively convert drug deliveries from USPS to United Parcel Service (UPS) 2nd Day Air until service levels can be returned to normal. The VFW is working with our supporters in the House and Senate to monitor this situation in order to ensure the health and well-being of our veterans remains paramount, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

VA Partners with OnStar to Combat Veteran Suicide: VA announced its new partnership with OnStar emergency services to improve access to suicide prevention resources for veterans. Veterans in crisis will be able to connect to VA's Veterans Crisis Line by using the emergency services button in an OnStar-equipped vehicle or OnStar Guardian smartphone app. "The VA-OnStar partnership aims to promote suicide prevention and reduce deaths by suicide by providing additional resources to veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This partnership will help veteran's access suicide prevention support services and assistance directly and immediately. More than 400 VA suicide prevention coordinators and their teams, located at every VA medical center, connect veterans with care and educate the community about suicide prevention programs and resources daily."

Blood Donations Need Still Critical: The Red Cross strongly urges healthy, eligible individuals who are feeling well to give blood to help maintain a sufficient supply for those battling COVID-19, other infections, and trauma victims. Please schedule an appointment by using the Red Cross Blood Donor app, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org), or calling 1.800.RED.CROSS (1.800.733.2767).

Unprecedented Poll Worker Shortage: Healthy elections require poll workers, the majority of whom are over the age of 60. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, election officials are reporting an unprecedented shortage. Without sufficient numbers of poll workers, it is possible that polling locations could have long lines, lack of staff to assist voters, and possible closures of polling locations. The Legion encourages any member, advocate, or supporter, who is healthy and willing, to consider becoming a poll worker for the general election in November. Contact the Kootenai County Clerk's Office if you can serve in this capacity and assist in the election in our Community.

Veterans Economic Recovery Act: This bill has been introduced in both the House and the Senate and is being reviewed in Committees: The main focus of the Bill is a rapid retraining program to provide unemployed veterans and reservists with 12 months of education benefits to transition to high-demand jobs. Those benefits would be equivalent to the benefits provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

If the bill passes and the program is established, to be eligible veterans must:

- Be between 25 and 60 years old;
- Be unemployed on the day they apply for the program;
- Have an honorable or other-than-honorable discharge;
- Not be eligible for any other VA education benefit;
- Not be enrolled in another federal or state job training program;
- Not receiving disability compensation for reasons that led to un-employability;
- Not be receiving any unemployment benefit when they start training under the program.

Members of the National Guard or Reserve, activated under federal orders for coronavirus response, would also be eligible for the program if they meet the other age, unemployment and discharge requirements.

Veteran unemployment reached nearly 12 percent in recent weeks, and lawmakers have increasingly sought avenues to get veterans back to work as advocates warn that the pandemic could cause a spike in veteran homelessness. (cont. below)

Unfortunately, veterans -- particularly young veteran women -- have not been spared from the economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 virus and by our national response to it.

Bill to support an anti-harassment policy at the VA: A recent VA survey of women veterans found that one of four women report receiving unwanted comments or attention while attempting to obtain care at VA medical facilities. This unwanted attention caused many of these women to either delay or cancel appointments for care they needed. Women who are younger, from minorities or ethnic backgrounds and those who survived military sexual trauma (MST) were the most likely to report harassment.

These incidents of harassment create a significant barrier to care for women veterans, ethnic minorities, LGBT veterans or others. H.R. 4554 would require VA to address this issue through a policy that assigns responsibilities and requires training and reporting mechanisms to be developed.

Ask your Representative in Congress to cosponsor H.R. 4554 and support its final passage.

FLU SHOTS ARE FREE AND ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT WALGREENS – GET YOURS EARLY!! PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS. – Len Crosby, Legislative Chairman

Service Officer:

Welcome to the lovely sights and smells of autumn! Unless smoke is still in the air. Hopefully, the cooler weather will bring some much needed rain to our region. Prayers to all those who have been affected by the relentless fires in the Pacific Northwest. If the smoke or all things related to Covid has not caused your mind to be hazy, please let me introduce you to the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). Not to be confused with the Veteran Directed Care Program....please refer to my article in the September newsletter. To be eligible for the PCAFC, both of the following criteria must be met:

(1) the veteran must have a single or combined service-connected disability rating by the VA of 70% or more - this requirement is included in the definition of "serious injury"; AND

(2) the veteran must be in need of, and requiring in-person personal care services for a minimum of six continuous months based on any one of the following:

- * an inability to perform an activity of daily living
- * a need for supervision, protection, or instruction.

With that said, the VA recently revised the definition of "serious injury" and whether the injury was incurred or aggravated in the line of active duty on or before September 11, 2001. HOWEVER, there are expansion dates...on or before May 7, 1975....or after May 7, 1975 but before September 11, 2001.

So now that we all understand the continued complication of legal jargon, I would recommend that you contact your local certified Veterans Service Officer if you feel you fall into one of these categories.

The Debt Management Center understands the impacts due to Covid-19 are far reaching and is helping veterans and their beneficiaries with solutions. At this time, the Debt Management Center is providing assistance to veterans and beneficiaries in many ways. • Suspended collections on new debts and halted issuing debt collection letters. • Paused referral of delinquent debt to Department of the Treasury, Credit Alert Interactive Verification Reporting System, and credit reporting agencies. • Offering temporary suspension of debt collection. • Providing extended payment arrangements. • Text messages sent directly to veteran's phone accounts – 8.6 recipients. • Conducted a Borne the Battle Podcast with Public Affairs – reached 11 million. • Communicated to veterans via a letter, multiple emails, Facebook, website posts, and blog updates. The Debts Management Center will continue to update their website, www.va.gov/debtman with new information regarding the Covid-19 crisis. They will announce important dates regarding resumption of debt collection activities on their website. For help with payment plans, call the Debt Management Center at (800) 827-0648 or submit an online request to iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask. - Ruth Aresvik, Service Officer

Training Officer:

The next four months of training will focus on the Four Pillars of The American Legion – Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children and Youth. Here is the first installment.

Pillar 1: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

For more than 90 years, the Legion has been the nation's leading advocate for proper health care and earned benefits for America's veterans. The Legion was instrumental in creating the Veterans Administration in 1930, and an ardent supporter of its rise to Cabinet status when it became the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1989. As the relationship between VA and veterans evolves, the Legion will help VA meet its critical mission.

As it has for decades, the Legion continues to aggressively lobby for adequate funding of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), to provide timely access to quality health care. Additionally, the Legion seeks to ensure fair rulings on claims and other earned veterans benefits for those who have service-connected injuries and illnesses. A nationwide network of more than 2,500 American Legion accredited service officers and other professional staff works diligently to assist veterans in obtaining the benefits and care they have earned and deserve through VHA, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the National Cemetery Administration.

Today, as the number of discharged veterans from operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Enduring Freedom (OEF) and New Dawn (OND) surpasses 1.2 million, the Legion's congressionally chartered role to support them could not be more relevant. However, the Legion also strongly believes that a veteran is a veteran, regardless of war era or location of service. In this way, the Legion is the only organization that works on behalf of about 23 million U.S. veterans alive today.

The Legion has tens of thousands of members who volunteer nearly a million hours annually in VA facilities to help their fellow veterans navigate the VA system (saving the department about \$20 million per year).

The Legion stands on the front line of change for veterans through its pillar of service called Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R). VA&R's top priorities are to:

Protect VA from Budget Reductions: Last year's failure of the congressional "supercommittee" means that automatic spending cuts, known as sequestration, are scheduled to take effect in January 2013, unless Congress finds other options for federal budget reductions. Although the Obama administration has said all programs administered by VA (including veterans' medical care) are exempt from sequestration, the Legion is concerned that VA's federal administrative expenses are not covered. This lapse has the potential to affect the care that our veterans need and deserve.

Hundreds of thousands of our men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are now relying on VA for their health care, as are our older veterans. The administration and members of Congress must make sure that VA's entire budget is protected from the effects of sequestration.

Boost VA Construction Projects: The Legion is profoundly disappointed that VA construction, both major and minor, is woefully underfunded. This failure to provide adequate, safe and up-to-date medical treatment facilities affects thousands of veterans. VA's Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) program has identified gaps in space, access, workload, safety, security, and other areas that can be fixed with construction projects, maintenance, enhanced-use leasing (EUL) or other methods. When SCIP was launched, it identified 4,808 capital projects to be corrected over a 10-year period, costing between \$53 billion and \$65 billion. In its first year, the program was not adequately funded to correct deficiencies within the time allotted. Now - using estimates for current construction needs and maintenance - the Legion expects it will take VA 60 years to close construction gaps at current funding rates. Additionally, VA is not able to engage in EULs because Congress did not reauthorize such privileges in November 2011. [Click Here to Continue](#)

- Jean Bledsoe, Training Officer



Submitted by Helen Kinder, Chaplain

In Passing...



*Hal Donahue's wife, Pat, passed away Sunday
September 27th at Life Care Center in Post Falls. Please
keep Hal and his family in your thoughts and prayers. If
you would like to send a card, his address is 4208 W
Trafford Lane Unit 102 Coeur d'Alene 83815.*



Well! Here it is October again, and I don't remember much of July, August, or even September.

What I do know is... we are continuing to increase our total membership at a steady pace. We have added new members and several transfers. Our Department goal for 2021 is to have at least 133 paid members and our total assigned members right now is 138.

Currently our paid memberships are at 75 with 63 unpaid. Goal 133 = 56.39% and assigned 138 = 54.35% I have asked each member to try to bring in one new member between now and December 31, 2020. This is not hard to do even if you cannot meet face to face. You all know veteran friends and family members, just give them a call, and ask them to join Rathdrum Post 154.

Oh! And by the way, do not forget to pay your own dues for 2021. Thank you for being a member of Post 154. God Bless. - Bill Kinder, 1st Vice Commander & Membership Chairman. 208-661-6850

Mark Your Calendar:

National Disability/Employment Awareness Month

October 8th – Executive Committee Meeting

October 12th – Columbus Day – Indigenous Peoples Day

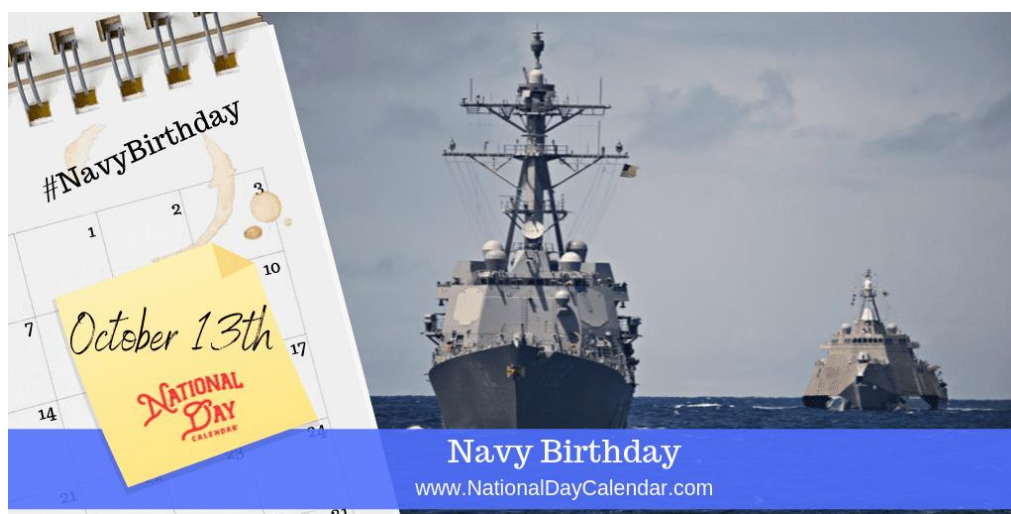
October 13th – Navy Birthday

October 22nd - General Membership Meeting – watch for email to determine if this meeting will be held.

October 26th – National Day of the Deployed

October 29th – World Stroke Day

October 31st - Halloween



Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

July 31, 2020

Department of Veterans Affairs

Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) Final Rule

Frequently Asked Questions

Legacy Participants and Legacy Applicants

1. Who is considered a legacy participant in the PCAFC?

Under the final rule, a legacy participant in the PCAFC is defined as an eligible Veteran whose Family Caregiver(s) was approved and designated by VA before the effective date of the final rule (i.e., October 1, 2020). The eligible Veteran continues to be considered a legacy participant so long as his or her Primary Family Caregiver (approved and designated before the effective date) continues to be approved and designated as such.

If a new joint application is received by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on or after the effective date of the final rule that results in approval and designation of the same or a new Primary Family Caregiver, the Veteran or servicemember will no longer be considered a legacy participant.

2. When is a Veteran applying to the PCAFC considered a legacy applicant?

Under the final rule, a legacy applicant is a Veteran or service member who submits a joint application for the PCAFC that is received by VA before the effective date of the final rule (i.e., October 1, 2020) and for whom a Family Caregiver(s) is approved and designated on or after the effective date. The Veteran or service member will continue to be considered a legacy applicant so long as his or her Primary Family Caregiver (approved and designated after the effective date pursuant to the joint application) continues to be approved and designated as such.

If a new joint application is received by VA on or after the effective date of the final rule that results in approval and designation of the same or a new Primary Family Caregiver, the Veteran or service member will no longer be considered a legacy applicant.

3. How does the regulation affect PCAFC eligibility for legacy participants and legacy applicants and the stipend for their Primary Family Caregivers?

Legacy participants and legacy applicants generally remain eligible for the PCAFC for 12 months following the final rule's effective date (i.e., until October 1, 2021). During this one year period, a Family Caregiver of a legacy participant or legacy applicant will not be discharged or have his or her designation revoked based on the legacy participant or legacy applicant not meeting the new eligibility criteria in the final rule. Additionally, the stipend amount for the Primary Family Caregiver of a legacy participant or legacy applicant will not decrease in the 12 months following the final rule's effective date – it will either remain the same or increase – except in cases where the reduction is the result of the eligible Veteran relocating to a new address.

4. When will VA reassess eligibility of legacy applicants and legacy participants for the PCAFC?

Under the final rule, legacy applicants and legacy participants will be reassessed under the new eligibility criteria within 12 months of the effective date of the final rule (i.e., by October 1, 2021).

5. What will happen after the reassessment?

Legacy participants and legacy applicants will be notified of reassessment results at the conclusion of the reassessment process.

- a)** For legacy participants and legacy applicants who meet the new eligibility criteria, VA will determine the applicable stipend amount under the new stipend payment methodology. If the reassessment results in an increase in the stipend amount, the increase will go into effect as of the date of the reassessment and the Primary Family Caregiver will receive a retroactive payment to account for the

increase back to the effective date of the final rule. If the reassessment results in a decrease in the stipend amount, VA will provide advanced notice of the decrease one year after the effective date of the final rule. The decrease will go into effect no earlier than 60 days after such notice.

b) For legacy participants and legacy applicants who do not meet the new PCAFC eligibility criteria (and who are not discharged or revoked on another basis), VA will provide formal advanced notice of discharge one year after the effective date of the final rule. The discharge will be effective no earlier than 60 days after such notice, and benefits will continue for 90 days after discharge from the program.

6. What services are available to me if VA determines I am no longer eligible for the PCAFC?

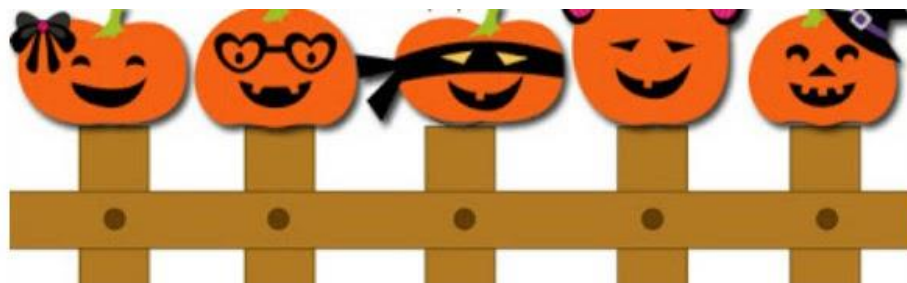
The Caregiver Support Program offers numerous resources for caregivers under the Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS). The PGCSS offers training, education, respite care, self-care courses, the Peer Support Mentoring program, and the Caregiver Support Line available at 1(855) 260-3274 (Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. EST). These services are available to support all caregivers of Veterans who are enrolled for VA health care.

7. How do I get more information on the final regulation?

The final regulation can be found at [Federal Register](#).

For further information on eligibility criteria for serious injury an need of personal care services, [click here](#).

Submitted by Len Crosby





WE HAD A PARTY!

On Saturday morning, September 19th, we had a party, where we cut the grommets from approximately 200 flags. I want to thank all the volunteers for coming out and getting these flags taken care of quickly. Most of the flags were 10'x15', and harder to handle than the smaller flags. Not only did we get the grommets cut but were able to get them

respectfully dispose of them. All of this done in two hours and ten minutes.! OUTSTANDING!!!

Thank you to Holly and Daisy Gleaves, Hal Donahue, Bob Flowers, Dee Sasse, Mike and Sharron McPhail, Tuck and Helen Calhoun, Ron and Susan Kemper, Helen and Bill Kinder. A special thanks goes to Mike and Sharron's daughter-in-law, Stephanie McPhail and her two daughters, Alice McPhail and Hailey Chambers for their help. And help they did! They helped to fold all the of the flags and stash them in vehicles to take to the storage box. – Bill Kinder, Superb Grommet Collector



Update on the Veterans Home in Post Falls:

It's official...! On 8/31/2020, ID Veterans Services received our Post Falls Home MOA and final grant award letter from the VA signed and dated on 8/21/20 by VHA Under Secretary Stone. While we were anticipating receiving this final award letter much sooner, we were informed in mid-June by the VA that it was still in the concurrence process and that delays were foreseen due to the pandemic.

We now have 90 days from the 8/21/20 signature date to enter into a signed contract to construct the Post Falls Home. As such, today, the attached RFP for the construction package was scheduled to appear in the CDA Press, Idaho Statesman, Missoulian, Yakima Herald, AGC's and Mountain Area Plan room.

While we are required to move forward with this RFP now, in order to meet the 90 day timeframe, I'm disheartened to say that based on these kinds of delays, along with the time we've needed to make the necessary redesign changes to incorporate the COVID-19 type enhancements, we are needing to place the start of the building construction on hold through the winter months. With us postponing through the winter months, we are looking at restart construction in early April 2021, which in turn has moved our projected final completion date into the fall of 2022.

While this delay is unfortunate, it's likely a blessing in disguise since, without having this extra time, we would not have been afforded the opportunity to apply for a 2nd VA grant to make the structural & redesigning changes related to COVID-19. By having this opportunity, Post Falls will be one of top state of the art Veteran nursing homes in the nation.

Be sure to reach out should there be any questions related to our COVID-19 design changes or our new timeline.

Best Regards,

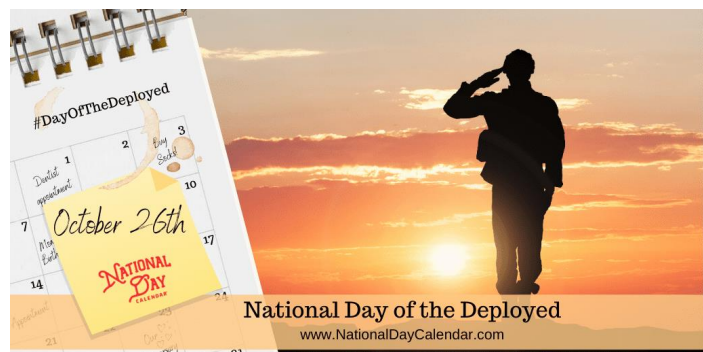
Tracy Schaner, Deputy Chief Administrator
Idaho Division of Veterans Services

"Caring for America's Heroes"

www.veterans.idaho.gov

Phone: (208) 780-1320

Fax: (208) 780-1301



Post 154 Honor Guard:

For those of you not aware, our Post has an Honor Guard. They march in parades, present the colors at ceremonies, and most importantly, provide a rifle salute to honor Veterans at their funerals. Starting this month there will be an account of the honors and hours given by the men and women in our Honor Guard. However, more members are always needed to serve in this capacity. If you are interested in participating in this very fulfilling activity, contact Harold Markiewitz at 208-691-3039.

Coronavirus restrictions continue to impact events in which the Honor Guard would normally participate. During the month of September

One Memorial ceremony was held for a US Army veteran Ron Tucker in which 7 members of Post 154's Honor Guard took part.

Did you know...?

If you receive VA health care, you may need to use outside providers for some of your specialty care. To access this, appointments must be made through the Community Care office. **Please put their phone number in your contact list!** If you don't, and miss their calls you may not get care in a timely manner. The phone number for **Community Care is 509-484-7969.**

New Post 154 Members:

- Kristine Marin, she is USMC, lives in Rathdrum, and is sponsored by Teresa Richardson.

We also had 4 transfers from Post 85.

- James Bern, USA
- Charles Davis USN
- Christopher Kelley USAF
- and Howard West USAF.

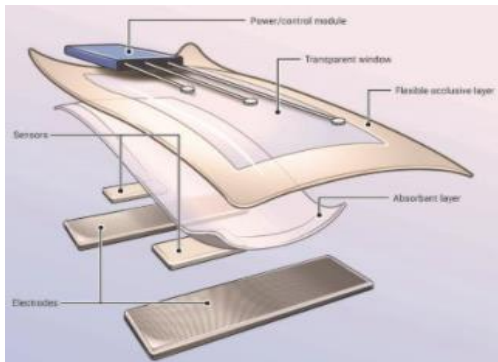
Please make these new members feel welcome.

Bits & Pieces

- [Va Funerals During the Coronavirus: Struggling To Stay Committed And Safe](#) Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Randy Reeves explains how the VA is handling funerals at its 144 national cemeteries during the pandemic.
- **Idaho Division of Veterans Service** Are you a caregiver? Do you ever feel you don't have the tools and resources to do the job? [Legacy Corps Caregiver Support](#) is offering the 6-part workshop via Zoom. Connect with other Caregivers and learn to reduce stress, make tough decisions, navigate family dynamics and connect with resources. To register call 208-947-4283 or email kkouba@jannus.org . [#LegacyCorps](#) [#CaringForTheCaregivers](#) [#VetResources](#)
- Also, please remember to send your volunteer hours to Len Crosby so he can compile them. These include hours devoted to Veterans, Youth, Honor Guard and Community. His email is: crosbylenmary@frontier.com

A Healthier You:

VA Researcher Develops 'Smart Bandage' Technology for Chronic Wounds



In a September 14 post for *Vantage Point Research*, Erica Sprey reports that VA researchers have developed a new treatment for pressure injuries that plague veterans and others with limited mobility who use a wheelchair. Also referred to as pressure ulcers, pressure injuries are chronic wounds that can be painful for patients and expensive to manage, both for the individual and the healthcare system. [Read More...](#)

Army Veteran recalls his time as POW during Vietnam



On Dec. 8, 2020, U.S. Army Veteran David Harker will celebrate his 75th birthday. He may recognize the accomplishment while on his daily five mile walk, or by taking a drive in his 47-year-old car – a 1973 Corvette he’s owned since it was given to him by classmates when he returned from Vietnam after spending more than five years as a prisoner of war. A native of Lynchburg, Virginia, Harker is the third of seven children. He was an athlete in high school and received his associate degree from Bluefield College before transferring to Virginia Tech in 1966. By 1967, however, his fortunes had changed.

Drafted

“I was doing my junior year at Virginia Tech and my grades were low, so I had to take a quarter off in 1967 and during that time, because I wasn’t a full-time student, I had to let the government know. They got me,” he said.

When the draft notice came, Harker’s father, an electrical engineer took the news hard.

“My dad was really upset. He had worked for a power company during World War II and so was exempt from the draft,” Harker recalled. “I didn’t think about the possibility of being killed. My dad’s supervisor said he could get me in the National Guard, but I thought that would be shirking my responsibility. I was called on to serve my country and that’s what I was going to do.”

After basic and advanced infantry training, Harker was approached and offered an opportunity to go to Officer Candidate School.

“I was interested in flying helicopters, but they said I’d have to extend for another year or two, so I said, ‘no, I’ll do my two and go home’.”



Heading to Vietnam

The trip to Vietnam brought Harker through Hawaii, and Guam, before landing in Vietnam Nov. 15, 1967. The recollection of arrival is still fresh even 53 years later.

“There were men on the airstrip who had finished their year and were going to take the plane we had arrived on back home. So, they open the door and it was such a rude awakening when the door opened. The oppressive heat – and I’m sure Vietnam Vets will tell you – the country had a smell of its own.”

David Harker stands next to the 1973 Corvette he received

The soldiers on their way home watched them deplane and Harker heard them say, ‘there’s my replacement.’ “They wished us well,” Harker said.

Although trained on a vehicle-mounted recoilless rifle, Harker was made an infantryman upon arrival in-country and reassigned from the 9th Infantry Division to the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Six weeks later, he was a POW. (cont. below)

"I was in the 3rd of the 21st in an area of operations at Que Son," Harker said. "We operated out of a fire base, with one company pulling security while the other three were out doing search and destroy missions. While out, we'd move about 1,000 meters a day and get resupplied every fourth day with c-rations if the helicopters could get through."

As a 22-year-old, Harker was among the older men in his unit. His commanding officer, Capt. Roland Belcher, told the company while they were enjoying in-country R&R at brigade headquarters in Chu Lai, that he was proud of the work they were doing.

"Captain Belcher had been in a province southwest of Saigon where we were providing security for elections," Harker said. "He said it meant a lot to him that we were able to do that – to make sure those people could go to the polls and not get hurt. I remember that because he died in the rice paddies when we were ambushed."

Harker's first sergeant, nicknamed Top, was a 41-year old Veteran of World War II and Korea who had earned a Silver Star before joining the company.

"After the ambush, he was the ranking person and he held us together."

Capture

Harker and his company were on patrol when they broke contact with the enemy in a creek bed. The North Vietnamese unloaded on the unit and killed two men. As the most forward man, Harker was pinned down.

"I'm thinking, 'I'm going to die.' Top is behind me telling me to switch to auto and fire. They tried to get behind us and eventually I hear a Vietnamese voice and do a 90 degree and within arm's reach at the top of this creek bank is an NVA soldier with a pith helmet and Top is there with no helmet. There's a guy with a rifle telling me to get up. The NVA are stripping everything off us – anything they can use. I tried to bury my M-16 in the creek bed but I think they got it."

After being taken, Harker was left with a soldier with a sidearm who walked in front of him, leading him away from the creek.

"I thought it was odd he was in front of me and I had been taught that you always try to escape. Next thing I know my hand is over his mouth and I have his arm at his side. I know I have to kill him and do it silently, but his bayonet won't come out of the scabbard, and by that time my hand has come off his mouth and he's yelling bloody murder. Before I could get his .45, he stabs me in the side with his bayonet. By that time there are a bunch of rifles pointing at me. I'm surprised they didn't just shoot me, but they took some commo wire and duck-winged me that night."

Of the 15 men who entered the rice paddy that evening, only four made it out. More men would join Harker in his prison in the Trung Son Mountain Range where he would spend the first three years of captivity. By Harker's estimation only about 150 U.S. soldiers were captured in South Vietnam – most of whom were taken during the Tet Offensive.

Harker's first prison was in Quang Nam Province, a difficult, mountainous country that made food scarce and meant deplorable living conditions for the POWs.

"We buried nine Americans there," Harker said. "That's how horrific our living conditions were. We had very little to eat so people died from starvation, infectious diseases – malaria was rampant – dysentery. Between September of 1968 and Jan. 4, 1969, we buried six, including the youngest person we had there, a 19-year-old Marine.

"That first year of adjustment to jungle life was really hard on us. You didn't know what to do. At first you looked out for yourself, but as time went on, you got more altruistic – you realize, it's not about me, but about the guy next door and you realize you had to take care of each other. We came together really well in that respect."

During the Vietnam War only one American doctor was ever taken prisoner. Hal Kushner, who grew up in Danville, Virginia, was injured in a helicopter crash in late November. By Dec. 4, North Vietnamese forces found him and marched him toward the camp where he found, according to a speech he gave in February 2018, "four of the saddest looking American creatures I had ever seen in my life." (cont. below)

“They wouldn’t let him practice medicine,” Harker said of Kushner. “We couldn’t call him doc, but he was a big source of information and help to us. He led the way and showed us how to nurse and take care of men, and that became our goal – to make people in their last hours and days as comfortable as possible – it was our mission, and he was a big inspiration to us.”

In the mountains the men had to forage for food, mostly the manioc root, also known as kasava root.

“There wasn’t a place to grow food, so most of our calories came from manioc,” Harker said. “We were under a 1-to-1 prisoner-to-guard ratio, and the guards would trade manioc and so we would put baskets on our backs and go back and forth over miles of mountain trails carrying 70-80 pounds of root. It’s amazing to think that we could even do it, but we did what we had to do. The little bit of rice they gave us as a ration wasn’t enough to keep a bird flying, so the roots kept us going.”

The guards of Trung Son didn’t physically abuse their prisoners. They didn’t need to.

“We were separated from civilization in the middle of nowhere and we couldn’t communicate; had no food, and no medical attention – that’s torture enough for an individual. We were interrogated when we were captured,” Harker said, “but we knew the Code of Conduct and so we’d give that information. But they’d have a guy with a lantern and they’re asking for information about your unit, it’s size, and I just kept repeating. They didn’t pursue it much. They wanted to get us away from the battlefield but a few days later they did it again. When you have a rifle and you’re in front of the enemy, it’s different. But if they put a blindfold on you and all you can hear is round being chambered – that’s different too. In the north they beat pilots and used a lot of torture techniques.”

Moving day

On Feb. 1, 1971 there were a dozen men still alive in the mountains and they were taken in groups of six to begin their march north up the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Harker watched battalions of Vietnamese troops heading south during the 60-day march, as they ground out 10 to 15 miles a day. During the journey an interpreter would give them extra rice.

“He was a military guy who had fought in Laos as a 17-year old in the early 1960s, and he looked out for us. I think he understood the condition – there was a common situation and appreciation among soldiers.”

“We’d get to a camp every day where we got hot white rice – better than we had at the mountain camp. The next morning they’d put a ball of rice on a banana leaf and we’d carry that with us for lunch as we moved. Eventually we were put on a train, in a box car, and taken to Hanoi, to Plantation Garden, an old French plantation with bars in the walls. We were kept in a 15×17 warehouse – six of us on a wooden pallet. Unlike the mountain camp we couldn’t roam around, and the boredom would overtake you and the heat was oppressive, but we had plenty to eat compared to the south. We also had better medical care there as they had a doctor to attend to us.”

In October of 1972 the Vietnamese allowed prisoners to be outside together for the first time since they arrived, and it looked like the war might be over.

“We had a communication system where we’d put a note on the lid of the waste bucket, or use the tap code, and we had to do that because we were only allowed out of our cell for about an hour a day, and never more than one cell was let out at a time. So, when they let everyone out, and then gave us reading material, they knew it was over. Or they thought it was, because before you know it, the doors are all slammed shut again.”

Soon after, Linebacker II started. From Dec. 18-29, 1972, the U.S. Air Force conducted an operation called Linebacker II, a ‘maximum effort’ campaign to destroy targets using B-52 heavy bombers that dropped more than 15,000 tons of ordnance on more than 30 targets.

“B-52s bombed all night long after talks broke down. The SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) shot down a bunch of planes on the third night, after they figured out the flight patterns, and one night they pulled up a deuce and a half and told us to crawl in the back. We thought we were being taken to China.”

Harker would spend his last three months as a prisoner at the Hanoi Hilton. (cont. below)

Repatriation

Half a world away, in Paris, a peace accord was signed January 27, 1973, and soon after Harker and other American POWs heard the news they had longed to hear.

"We were ecstatic," Harker said. "We'd hear doors open and activity and they came and said, 'you're going, and you're going, and you're going' dividing us up into groups that would be repatriated. They gave us western clothing and a travel bag and when they pulled us out of a holding cell wearing our red-striped pajamas we were given the clothes. By noon, nothing had happened. They gave us food and told us the peace agreement was broken – and we were right back down in the depths of despair. But a few days later we got out.



LONG JOURNEY'S END—Home at last and beaming his happiness, Army Staff Sgt. David N. Harker grasps doorknob at his home on Taylor Road in Richland Hills Sunday. With recently-released prisoner of war are his parents, Mr. and

—George Smith Photo
Mrs. Jack D. Harker. Former POW was confined by Communists for five years in both North and South Vietnam. (Story and additional photos on Page 8).

A newspaper clipping shows when David Harker returned home.

"I remember saluting an Air Force general who was sitting with a North Vietnamese officer, and when we saluted, we had been officially repatriated. On the plane home, the pilot told us when we had entered international airspace and there was a great cheer."

The cheers continued when they landed in the Philippines, Hawaii, and Andrews AFB, Maryland. From Maryland, Harker went to Valley Forge in Pennsylvania where he went through medical treatment and rehabilitation, and he was reunited with his family.

"It was different," Harker said. "I had brothers who were married, and children had been born, but it was exciting coming home. A private airline flew me and my father back and the local TV station had sent a reporter who interviewed me all the way back. There must have been 10,000 people at the Lynchburg airport when we arrived – I had no idea there would be that welcome and response – my big extended family – the high school band was there. It was a long journey and I was glad to be home and for them to be there for me meant so much. I was led to a blue 1973 Corvette and handed the keys. A group of school mates had gotten together and sold bumper stickers for a dollar each to buy me a car and they handed me the keys and a check for \$1,100." (ending below)

Being home with his family, Harker said he learned how much anxiety and frustration and worry his parents went through while he was captive.

“Every POW gets a casualty assistance officer whose job it is to let the family know when they hear something – anything – about their son,” Harker said. “My family never heard anything from their CAO. It wasn’t until 1969, when three prisoners were released that they knew I was alive. My parents found out that a couple of those who were released were at Fort Jackson, and so they went there and got onto base and met with them and heard from them that I was alive. That’s all the knew for five years. So they became involved in the National League of Families who organized and tried to have some involvement with North Vietnam to get information about prisoners and try to make the process more transparent as far as information was concerned.”

Life after war

After he returned from Vietnam, Harker took some time off, but eventually returned to Blacksburg and finished his business degree from Virginia Tech in 1976 and found his way to work as a probation and parole officer. In 1977 he married Linda, his high school sweetheart whom he had dated since 1962.

His family now includes his two children, Megan and husband Mike, and Adam and his wife Anza. David and Linda also enjoy their grandchildren: 13-year old Emily, 11-year old Ethan, and 6-year old Eli, children of Megan; and Adam’s 23-month old daughter Ava.

While Harker is open to discussing his time in Vietnam to serve as an education for younger people, he said it was a part of his life that he’s put behind him.

“Kush and I talk about that all the time – we’re not professional POWs. By the grace of God and the help of other men, we made it out. We all serve our country one way or another. This country is what we love. My life has been a real blessing since then, and the staff at the VA hospital, what they do is marvelous, and I appreciate each one of them. I know they have a heart for those Veterans, or they wouldn’t work there,” Harker said. “I love the Veterans, too, and appreciate their service, and institutions like the VA are a great service to our country.”

In the early 2010s Harker had the Corvette he received in 1973 – the car he and his youngest brother Louie drove across the country after his return – restored. He still drives it today.

“I think of all the love behind it every time I drive it.”

Written by Rosaire Bushey, the public affairs officer at the Salem VA and an Air Force Veteran.



2020 Spirit of Freedom Awards

This letter was received by the Kootenai Veterans Council for distribution to veterans' groups. If you know of someone in our legion post who is deserving of this honor, please contact Commander Dee Sasse here: dsasse1962@gmail.com.

Dear Veteran Leader:

It is with great honor that I will again be recognizing veterans and the volunteers who serve veterans with the 2020 Spirit of Freedom Award. In partnership with the Idaho Division of Veterans Services, awards are traditionally presented on Veterans Day. Due to COVID-19, award presentations might look a bit different this year than they have in previous years. Rest assured that it is still a top priority for me to continue to honor the distinguished veterans and the volunteers who serve veterans with this annual award.

Each organization may submit the name of one veteran and one volunteer for the 2020 Spirit of Freedom Awards. Nomination forms are enclosed. Please return by Friday, October 9, 2020 to allow time for flags to be flown over the U.S. Capital in honor of the recipients.

Send completed forms to:

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo

Attention: Courtney Lehosit

251 East Front street, Suite 205 Boise, ID 83702

(208) 334-1776 phone

(208) 334-9044 fax

Courtney_Lehosit@Crapo.Senate.Gov

This award was created to publicly recognize the many men and women who have fought so bravely for our country and for those who have given countless hours assisting veterans throughout the state. I look forward to receiving the nomination forms and acknowledging these outstanding individuals.

Thank you for all you do to make a difference in the lives of those who have given us our freedom.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Crapo

United States Senator



WITCH WATCH by Ruth Aresvik

nobody knows....
but in that forest on the deepest of nights
unsteady flames lick around the heavy iron
of the witch's kettle.

those shifty flames silently laugh
and dance around the heavy iron
of the witch's kettle.

while the ugly old woman with braille-like skin
moves slowly about....
and narrows an eye in challenging game
to any poor soul who may happen along.

her supper is ready, the giant pot simmers
the old evil witch fills her warped wooden bowl
and gives a sly cackle in welcoming style
to any poor soul who may happen along.



nobody knows....
but deep in the forest
the tired old witch sits night after night....
just rocks back and forth....

and knowingly smiles....
and knowingly waits....
for any poor soul who may happen along.



Jon Stewart Leads Renewed Fight on Benefits for Burn Pit Victims

In a September 15 story for *Military Times*, Leo Shane III reports that veterans advocates on Tuesday launched a new campaign for additional recognition and aid for troops exposed to toxic burn pit fumes during overseas deployments at the height of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, saying time is running out to provide real help to the victims. "This is not about science, this is about money," said comedian Jon Stewart in an emotional press conference on Capitol Hill featuring numerous families of dead and dying veterans whose rare illnesses aren't officially recognized by federal officials as stemming from burn pit exposure.

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Oct 14: Advanced
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Google Docs: 2 hour class
Oct 21: Intro to Docs
Oct 28: Intermediate
Nov 4: Advanced
register for just one or all

Digital Lifeskills: 4 weeks
Tuesdays, Sept 22-Oct 13
weekly class topics are centered around personal digital use, such as photos, video calling, computer basics

THE LITERACY PROJECT OF NORTH IDAHO

**CLASSES AVAILABLE IN CDA & RATHDRUM
ALL CLASSES BEGIN AT 5:30 PM**

Hello everyone!

We are ready. set. GO on our newest computer learning series in both Coeur d'Alene and Rathdrum. Some classes start as early as next week! Read on below for class descriptions and registration links!

Digital Literacy Skills Class-- Having trouble keeping up with technology? This course is set up to meet weekly (Tuesdays) for 4 weeks. Each week the instructor will lead you through a new 2-hour class covering the digital skills vital to staying connected. Our first class will focus on Photos. [REGISTER HERE](#)

Google Sheets --- Spreadsheets leave you cold and overwhelmed? Not sure how to layout all that information? These classes will be 2 hours each and in this 3 week course we will navigate Sheets to

learn the best way to organize your information and how to create formulas that make your life easier. [REGISTER HERE](#)

Google Docs--Need to get familiar with this FREE writing document software? These classes will be 2 hours each and we will offer Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Google Docs classes. We will explore its uses for the office and our personal life. It is a mere document software, but there are a lot of fun things that can be done in this program! [REGISTER HERE](#)

We hope you can join us!

Kat Gilmore
The Literacy Project of North Idaho
Executive Director
208-450-2669
208-687-1884 (fax)



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Civil Air Patrol NCOs are ALL current or prior service NCOs whose training and experience make them invaluable to us in fulfilling all three of our missions – youth leadership, aerospace education and emergency and disaster services.

What this means for our team is we get access to the professional advice of prior service NCOs in the areas of military organization, leadership and management, customs, courtesies, drill and ceremonies and the proper wear of the uniform (all of our members who meet the USAF physical and grooming standards are privileged to wear USAF style uniforms, but absent training they have to "figure it out" from the manuals, NCOs get things done!) and most of all as mentors in all aspects of our program.

The NCO program goals are to: Provide CAP commanders access to professional military skills, training, and experience • To consolidate CAP Military Skills training into a single resource at all levels of CAP command.

For further information contact Capt. Donald Morgan, CAP – 509-714-8063 or dmorgan@cap.gov

To see a fact sheet about Civil Air Patrol, [go here.](#)