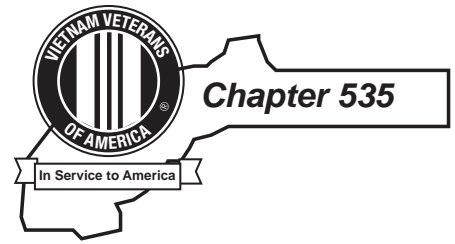




# INCOMING

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
 CHAPTER 535  
 Chapter 535 Web Page  
 www.vva535.org



*"It Feels Good to Get Involved"*

*In Service To America and the Gold Country*

Volume 23 Issue 3

March 2013

## **President's Message**

### **March Guest Speaker**

Bill Hodges - Agent Orange and other toxic problems  
 It is becoming increasingly clear that the Veterans Administration and other federal government bodies continue to act irresponsibly in responding to veteran's health problems resulting from exposure to Agent Orange (dioxin) and other toxic substances over the past fifty years. In their 2012 Annual Report the Veterans Affairs' Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses commented "the Committee has regretfully found itself in the familiar role of delineating the unwillingness of VA to address straightforwardly the tragic health consequences of the 1991 Gulf War. The Committee has provided honest independent advice to the Secretary regarding the conduct of the research program.

The Committee has brought to the attention of the Office of Research and Development and the Office of Public Health the latest science and most promising research opportunities... The Committee Charter requires that the Committee measure federal Gulf War research against the standard of whether this research has improved the health of Gulf War veterans. No improvement was made in 2012." The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses was created by Congress in 1998 to make recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on government research relating to the health consequences of military service during the Persian Gulf War.

Vietnam Veterans of America, together with other veterans' organizations, has taken an active role in lobbying the federal government to become more responsive to these challenges, including lobbying for the funding of independent research centers to better understand the long term multi-generational impact of exposure to dioxin and other toxic materials. As noted in last month's newsletter, dioxin has been identified as causing a long list of serious medical conditions that have impacted not only the lives of veterans who were exposed to dioxin in Vietnam, but also their descendants. The VVA is concerned that the pattern of inappropriate response to dioxin is being repeated with

health problems stemming from recent wars. Bill Hodges will comment on how exposure to dioxin has impacted veterans and their children, and will provide an update on what the government, including the Veterans Administration, is doing about it. Bill will also talk about similar problems coming out of Desert Storm and Iraq. Born in Oakland, Bill Hodges grew up "in a little town outside San Diego." He joined the Naval Reserves before graduating from high school in 1964. After completing boot camp and Yeoman A School he applied for active duty in 1965. He was assigned to the Fleet Admin Unit, serving COMNAVAIRPAC, working in the office of Air ASW. After being discharged from active duty in June 1967, Bill went to work in retail, raised a family and moved back to Northern California. He has been a sales rep in the photographic industry since 1985.

Bill has been a member of Vietnam Veterans of America for about twenty five years, and is a member of Chapter 400, Oakland/Alameda. He has served as Chapter President for two terms and is the delegate for both VVA - National and the California State Council. In the State Council he chairs the Agent Orange Committee, getting heavily involved not only with the long term health impact of dioxin but also other toxic substances that are impacting the health of

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## *Presidents Message Continued*

veterans in more recent conflicts.

In addition to his activities with the VVA, Bill has served two years as President of the Alameda County Members Council for the National Rifle Association. He also serves as a commissioner on the Alameda County Veterans Affairs Commission. In his spare time, Bill is a senior docent on the USS Potomac, FDR's Presidential Yacht. Bill is married to Sue, also a Vietnam Veteran. They live in Oakland.

Because Bill's presentation on dioxin and other toxic substances is important to so many veterans, we will invite veterans from other organizations to join us on March 7th. Feel free to share this with other veterans you know who may also be interested.

### **Firewood Raffle**

Thanks to everyone who helped sell raffle tickets for our fire wood. We finally sold enough tickets for the third raffle. The winner was chapter member Bart Ruud. Congratulations, Bart! We have one more cord of oak. Instead of raffling it off, Harold will sell it on KNCO's Swap Shop, unless you know someone who would like to buy it. The price is \$375, and includes additional pine logs if you are interested.

### **Veterans Helping Veterans – the Dale Thomas Project**

This project is moving forward nicely, with one exception. In the past month we laid ground asphalt on the driveway, so access is much improved. Postal deliveries of food and medicine are now made without problem. The floors are finished. In the next week or so we'll lay new carpet. Soon John Bynes and his merry band of carpenters will start work on the walls and replace the windows as well as install a new heating and air conditioning system. The trash removal crew has another load of trash to carry away. A crew of electricians has also resolved a myriad of problems with the electrical system. Let there be light!

The one "exception" is best described by John Bynes in his recent email. "There I was, tearing up the bedroom subfloor, on a Veterans Service Project I'm involved in. Saw cutting along the last wall, I reach under the last bit of subfloor to make sure there are no electrical wires below and I feel a furry animal. I figured it was one of the feral cats living under the house. No. Then I figured it was a rat. So I look under the floor and see the black and white of a skunk nesting in the floor insulation. Somewhere along the way, I tried to convince our newly retired Police Chief, Lou Trovato, to put a bullet into his head. I even tried to dissuade our little visitor from hanging around by spraying the surrounding areas with a homemade version of WW I

chlorine gas. I only succeeded in running our Police Chief out of the room. Eventually, we managed to push him through a hole in the floor membrane to exit our work space. About an hour after I screamed like a girl (I was told by the others) we managed to chase him out. Nobody got sprayed, but it wasn't my aftershave either.

Semper Fi, John!

Fellow veteran Dan Renfro is trying to trap the skunk. So far, we've trapped a feral cat or two. Patience...

Brother Dale's spirits are up. Despite the skunk problem he commented recently that we've given him back his life. He much appreciates the work being done to make his home more livable. Thanks to everyone who has helped on this project.

### **Meeting with Congressman Doug LaMalfa and staff**

At the end of January several of us met with Congressman Doug LaMalfa and two staff members, Jennifer Horne and Jenna Batti, to discuss several issues. Congressman LaMalfa has a strong interest in veteran's affairs as evidenced by his frequent participation in packing parties with Friends of Nevada County Military and his support of the local chapter of Blue Star Mothers. He requested this meeting to get up to speed on veterans issues. We discussed PTSD and the long term effects of exposure to Agent Orange. Individual members discussed their experience working with the Veterans Administration as well as any pending issues they have. Jenna, who is the case worker in Doug's office, took notes on pending cases. Last week Jennifer Horne and another staff member visited the Veterans Administration Hospital in Reno to become more familiar with their operation. In view of the many comments about the VA's processing center in Oakland, Jennifer told me she is planning to visit that office in the near future to get a firsthand impression. Jenna plans to attend our meeting on March 7 to follow up on pending cases. She will be in the Remembrance Room at 5PM to meet with anyone who has an issue to discuss.

### **Membership Drive**

Over the past year we've made progress in strengthening our cash position. Now I need your help in building our membership. If each of us undertakes to speak to Vietnam era Vets about the VVA, we will soon see our numbers grow. In the next few weeks we will put together information for you to use in talking about the national activities of the VVA and our local chapter. Thanks for your help on this important task.

**Fred Buhler, President 265-4878**

# Chapter 535 Information Center

## Chapter 535 Officers & Board of Directors

### Officers-Phone

<b>President</b>	
Fred Buhler .....	265-4878
<b>Vice-President</b>	
Pete Burelle .....	274-3787
<b>Secretary</b>	
Dave Johnson .....	885-1230
<b>Treasurer</b>	
Harold Graves haroldgraves@sbcglobal.net.....	470-8507

### Past President

Kent Hawley.....	432-3551
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### Directors

Harold Graves haroldgraves@sbcglobal.net.....	470-8507
Ric Sheridan rfsheridan@sbcglobal.net.....	274-1413
Dan Davis .....	272-4110
Pete Burelle howling_wolf28@yahoo.com.....	274-3787
Jerry Molloy petem1947@sbcglobal.net .....	273-4804
Bill Holman bholman@succeed.nett .....	265-8387
Fred Buhler .....	265-4878
Kent Hawley.....	432-3551
Dave Johnson .....	885-1230
Dick Corn.....	272-5922

### CA State Council Delegates

Pete Burelle, Fred Buhler (alternate)	265-4878
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## Chapter 535 Committees Chairs

Finance .....	Ric Sheridan
Parade and Honor Guard.....	Pete Burelle
Product Sales .....	Pete Burelle
Food Sales.....	Jerry Molloy, Dan Davis
Membership Affairs .....	Margie Buhler
Newsletter ...	bholman@succeed.net, 265-8387 Bill Holman
Nominations.....	Dick Corn
Christmas Year Round .....	Harold Graves
Chapter Events .....	Vacant
Shredding Program.....	Dan Davis
NCCVC .....	Margie Buhler, Pete Burelle
Web Master.....	Ralph Remick

### Nevada County Veterans Affairs Rep.

Eric .....	(530) 273-3396
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The Vinh Son Orphanage, has a new web site

[www.friendsofvso.org](http://www.friendsofvso.org)



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## TRACTOR WORK

**Bill Holman 265-8387**


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Land Clearing  
Berry Bushes Removed



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### Membership Facts Chapter 535

<b>VVA</b>	
Individual members	26
Life members	37
<b>AVVA</b>	
Individual members	1
Life member	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>



### Upcoming Dates and Events

March 7	Chapter Meeting 6 pm
April 4	Chapter Meeting 6 pm

## Veterans Directory

### Congress

Senate - Veterans Affairs Committee .....202-224-9126  
House - Veterans Affairs Committee.....202-225-3527

### Department of Veterans Affairs

Board of Veterans Appeals .....202-233-3001  
Central Office .....202-233-4000  
Freedom of Information/Privacy Act .....202-233-3616  
Personnel Locator.....202-233-4000  
Public Information .....202-233-3056  
Veterans Health Administration .....202-535-7010  
VA Telephone Care Program .....800-733-0502  
Cemetery, Burial, & Headstone Info.....800-697-6947

### Agencies

Department of Defense .....703-545-6700  
DEERS Information (California).....800-334-4162  
CHAMPUS (California).....800-741-5048  
Office of Management and Budget Veterans Affairs.202-395-4500  
Small Business Administration Office of Veterans  
Affairs .....202-205-6773

### Locator & Reunion Services

Army Worldwide Locator.....317-542-4211  
Navy Times Locator Services .....703-750-8636  
Service Reunions .....703-998-7035  
Vietnam Veterans Locator.....319-388-9023  
Veteran's Locator Service ..... 800-449-VETS

### Miscellaneous

Vietnam Women's Memorial Project .....202-328-7253  
Sons & Daughters In Touch CA .....805-872-4035  
Retired Pay - Cleveland DFAS.....800-321-1080  
Navy Lodging..... 800-NAVY INN  
Army Lodging ..... 800-GO ARMY

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## NCCVC E-Waste February 16, 2013

The NCCVC E-Waste Event on Saturday February 16, 2013 filled approximately  $\leq$  of a 10,000 pound bin. Until we receive the official count from CEAR, we hope the E-waste collected will translate into at least \$600. That is the amount estimated to allow the NCCVC to proceed with the work and materials needed to repair and replace the windows on the top floor of the Grass Valley Veterans Memorial Building. At present we have \$3,776.35 plus a \$10 donation received at the E-waste event.

Thank all of you who spent time, since NCCVC began this project in September 2011, collecting and donating unwanted items to these fundraisers. Not only does your donation keep those items out of the landfill, veterans participation aids the repairs to our Veterans Building. We'll keep you apprised of the start and progress of these reparations.

Margie Buhler  
VVA Delegate to NCCVC

## Newsletter Submissions

Please ensure that submissions for the newsletter reach us no-later-than the 15th of the month before the meeting. They may be mailed to:

### VVA Chapter 535

Attn: Newsletter Editor

18455 Augustine Rd, Nevada City, CA 95959

e-mail to [bholman@succeed.net](mailto:bholman@succeed.net) or

call Bill Holman at (530) 265-8387

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of Vietnam Veterans of America National, State Council, or Chapter 535 or the newsletter editor, but those of the author of the comments.

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### Has Your Address Changed?

Please let us know before the Post office quits forwarding your newsletters. If you find your not receiving your newsletters or hearing from us, please contact Bill Holman at 265-8387.



## April Meeting - annual elections

On April 4th we'll hold our annual elections. We are planning to meet that evening in the dining room, since we're going to have refreshments. Dave Chaix will also brief us on his recent visit to Vietnam.

The following nominations will be presented to the Chapter. Of course we will also welcome nominations from the floor for anyone else who is interested in becoming an officer or joining the board.

President	Fred Buhler
Vice President	Dick Corn
Secretary	Dave Johnson
Treasurer	Harold Graves
Director	Ric Sheridan
Director	Don Davis
Director	Bill Holman
Director	Kent Hawley
Director	Ralph Remick
Director	Pete Burelle
CSC Representative	Pete Burelle
CSC Representative Alternate	Fred Buhler

## **VA Compensation & Pensions**

What the nation owes each year to veterans who are disabled by war and service has more than doubled since 2000, rising from \$14.8 billion to \$39.4 billion in 2011, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The toll of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where troops served repeatedly in combat zones, is a key contributor to escalating costs of individual disability payouts, says Alison Hickey, VA undersecretary for benefits. "I would point first and foremost to multiple deployments," says Hickey, a retired Air Force brigadier general. "I would call it unprecedented demand." The 3.4 million men and women disabled during their service, some of them having served in World War II, are about 15 percent of the nation's 22.2 million veterans. The disabled veteran population has increased 45 percent since 2000 and may grow sharply with a new generation who seek compensation for more ailments and are savvier than their elders about their VA rights, say Hickey and veteran advocates. "We get veterans coming in to us all the time, World War II guys or Korea (War) guys, that never filed a claim because they think they didn't deserve it," says Garry Augustine, national service director for Disabled Veterans of America. Augustine, a Vietnam veteran, said his generation was provided little more than their separation papers when they left the service. For the past two decades, however, the VA has offered instruction about benefits to soon-to-be-separating servicemembers. Legislative changes have made such sessions mandatory.

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## **VA Burial Benefit Update**

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 14 JAN the availability of the new online funeral directors resource kit. Funeral directors nationwide may use the kit when helping Veterans and their families make burial arrangements in VA national cemeteries. "We recognize that Veterans and their families need compassion when they approach funeral directors for help," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We want to assist directors by giving them the information and tools they need to aid these families." The website was created to enable funeral directors to find the most pertinent information to help families plan burials and apply for VA memorial benefits quickly. It has links about eligibility, benefits and services plus videos and information regarding services offered with and without military funeral honors. The videos are available in English and Spanish. The website is available at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/funeraldirector.asp>. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at the time of need at a VA national cemetery, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117.

## **Operation Homecoming**

Forty years ago, a C-141A Starlifter transport jet with a distinctive red cross on its tail lifted off from Hanoi, North Vietnam, and the first flight of 40 U.S. prisoners of war began their journey home through Operation Homecoming.



Newly freed prisoners of war celebrate as their C-141A aircraft lifts off from Hanoi, North Vietnam, on Feb. 12, 1973, during Operation Homecoming.

The mission included 54 C-141 flights between Feb. 12 and April 4, 1973, returning 591 POWs to American soil. By the day's end, three C-141A aircraft would lift off from Hanoi, as well as a C-9A aircraft from Saigon, South Vietnam. In a steady flow of flights through late March 1973 under terms set through the Paris Peace Accords, 591 POWs returned to American soil.

Americans were spellbound as they watched news clips of the POWs being carried in stretchers or walking tentatively toward U.S. officers at the awaiting aircraft for the first flight from Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport. Newly freed prisoners of war celebrate as their C-141A aircraft lifts off from Hanoi, North Vietnam. The POWs ranged from privates first class to colonels, all wearing new gray uniforms issued by the North Vietnamese just before their release. Air Force Tech. Sgt. James R. Cook, who suffered severe wounds when he bailed out of his stricken aircraft over North Vietnam in December 1972, saluted the U.S. colors from his stretcher as he was carried aboard the aircraft. Also on the first flight was Navy Cmdr. Everett Alvarez Jr., the first American pilot to be shot down in North Vietnam and, by the war's end, the longest-held POW there. He spent eight-and-a-half years in captivity. Celebration broke out aboard the first aircraft – nicknamed the "Hanoi Taxi" – as it lifted skyward and the POWs experienced their first taste of freedom. Historian Andrew H. Lipps captured the magnitude of the moment in his account, "Operation Homecom-

*Continued on Page 6*

ing: The Return of American POWs from Vietnam.” “Imagine you’re imprisoned in a cage; imagine the cage surrounded by the smell of feces; imagine the rotted food you eat is so infested with insects that to eat only a few is a blessing; imagine knowing your life could be taken by one of your captors on a whim at any moment; imagine you are subjected to mental and physical torture designed to break not bones but instead spirit on a daily basis. That was being a prisoner of North Vietnam,” Lipps wrote. “Then imagine one day, after seemingly endless disappointment, you are given a change of clothes and lined up to watch an American plane land to return you home. That was Operation Homecoming.”

Aeromedical teams assigned to each aircraft tended to the former POWs during the two-and-a-half hour flight to Clark Air Base in the Philippines, the first stop on their trip home. Meanwhile, many of the POWs joked and smoked American cigarettes as they caught up on all they’d missed while in captivity: fashion trends and the women’s liberation movement, among them. “Everything seemed like heaven,” recalled Air Force Capt. Larry Chesley, who, after being shot down over North Vietnam, spent seven years in the notorious “Hanoi Hilton” and other POW prisons. “When the doors of that C-141 closed, there were tears in the eyes of every man aboard,” he said. Air Force Maj. Gen. Ed Mechenbier, the last Vietnam POW to serve in the Air Force, recalled the emotion of his own journey out of North Vietnam on Feb. 18, 1973. “When we got airborne and the frailty of being a POW turned into the reality of freedom, we yelled, cried and cheered,” he said. The POWs arrived to a hero’s welcome at Clark Air Base, where Navy Adm. Noel Gayler, commander of U.S. Forces Pacific, led their greeting party. Joining him were Air Force Lt. Gen. William G. Moore Jr., who commanded 13th Air Force and the homecoming operation at Clark, and Roger Shields, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/MIA affairs.

Speaking to the crowd that lined the tarmac to welcome the aircraft, returning POW Navy Capt. Jeremiah Denton – who would go on to earn the rank of rear admiral and later was elected to the U.S. Senate, representing Alabama – elicited cheers as he thanked all who had worked for their release and proclaimed, “God bless America.” Air Force Lt. Col. Carlyle “Smitty” Harris, who spent almost eight years as a POW after being shot down over North Vietnam, joined the many other POWs who echoed that sentiment. “My only message is, ‘God bless America,’” he said, dismissing assertions in the media that the POWs had been directed to say it. “With six, seven or eight years to think about the really important things in life, a belief in God and country was strengthened in every POW with whom I had contact,” he said. “Firsthand exposure to a system

which made a mockery of religion and where men are unable to know truth made us all appreciate some of the most basic values in ‘God bless America.’” Air Force Col. Robinson Risner, the senior Air Force officer at the infamous “Hanoi Hilton” honored today by a statue in his likeness at the U.S. Air Force Academy, choked back emotion as he arrived on the second C-141 flight from Hanoi. “Thank you all for bringing us home to freedom again,” he told the crowd.

After receiving medical exams and feasting on steak, ice cream and other American food, the former POWs received new uniforms for their follow-on flights home. Their aircraft made stops in Hawaii and California. The first group of 20 former POWs arrived at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., on Feb. 14, 1973. News clips of the arrival reveal the deep emotion of the freed POWs as they arrived on the U.S. mainland. Navy Capt. James Stockdale, who went on to become a vice admiral and vice presidential candidate, was the first man to limp off the aircraft. Stockdale paused to thank his countrymen for the loyalty they had showed him and his fellow POWs. “The men who follow me down that ramp know what loyalty means because they have been living with loyalty, living on loyalty, the past several years – loyalty to each other, loyalty to the military, loyalty to our commander-in-chief,” he said. Of the 591

POWs liberated during Operation Homecoming, 325 served in the Air Force, 138 in the Navy; 77 in the Army and 26 in the Marine Corps. Twenty-five of the POWs were civilian employees of U.S. government agencies. In addition, 69 POWs the Viet Cong had held in South Vietnam left aboard flights from Loc Ninh. Nine other POWs were released from Laos, and three from China. Forty years after their release, two of the former POWs serve in Congress: Sen. John McCain of Arizona and Rep. Sam Johnson of Texas. A dinner and ceremony being planned for late May at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in California will honor the POWs, recreating the dinner the president hosted for them at the White House in 1973.



# March - 2013



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Ron Bost			General Membership Meeting 6 pm		
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Daylight Savings Time Begins 	Donald Mattson					
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
St. Patrick's Day	Jose Gonzales					
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
				Jerry Molloy		Diane Meyers
24						
Easter						
31	25	26	27	28	29	30

**Application For Membership**  
**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC., CHAPTER 535**  
P.O. Box 37, Grass Valley, CA 95945

Individual membership is open to all Vietnam-era veterans who served on active duty for other than training purposes between August 5, 1964 – May 7, 1975 and In-Country Veterans: February 28, 1961 – May 7, 1975.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone (        ) \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone (        ) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Chapter No. **535**                      Sponsor \_\_\_\_\_ ID No. \_\_\_\_\_

- ◆ **Membership Type:**     Individual – 1 year @ \$20 annual     Individual – 3 years @ \$50  
(select one)                       Life Member    **Payment Plan**     \$50 down, 8 monthly payments of \$25  
**Select Age Group**     Ages 49 and under \$250     Ages 50-55 \$225  
 Ages 56-60 \$200     Ages 61-65 \$175     Ages 66 and over \$150

- ◆ **Payment Method:**     Check             Money Order             Visa             MasterCard  
(select one)

◆ **Card Number** \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Individual members **must** submit a copy of their DD-214 along with this application and dues payment. Associate participation is open to family, friends, all veterans, and other interested persons.

*In Service To America*

Address Correction Requested

