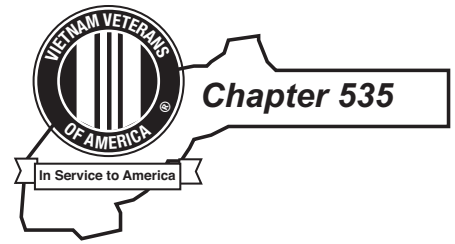




# INCOMING

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
**CHAPTER 535**



Chapter 535 Web Page [www.vva535.org](http://www.vva535.org)

*"It Feels Good to Get Involved"*

Volume 25 Issue 5

*In Service To America and the Gold Country*

May 2015

## **President's Message**

Greetings all. Well I'm back again. This being my first message in a few years, I will be brief. I will get more long winded as the months go on, and as our busy seasons ramp up . First up is a change in our board of directors scheduled meeting nights. They have been moved to the 3rd Wednesday of the month with the time staying at 6:00 p.m..

This month we will remember all those who have paid the ultimate price in service for our nation. I expect and hope all of you will join our chapter in attending the services at our Vets building on the 25th of may, also on that day we will have several of our members standing as honor guards at several of the viet vet plaques that afternoon.

Please, please try to attend our meetings Chapter 535 meetings. Our annual election meeting barley had a Quorum to allow a vote.

I hope to see you all on May 7th at our next meeting. I need input and suggestions.

**Pete Burrelle, President 274-3787**

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## **Investigator says Oakland VA office sat on claims**

WASHINGTON — A federal investigator looking into why thousands of veterans' benefits claims were found languishing in a filing cabinet in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Oakland office contradicted a top agency official's testimony that all the claims had been processed correctly.

"I don't know what her definition of action is," Brent Arronte, an official with the VA inspector general's office, said Wednesday, referring to a statement last month by Allison Hickey, the agency's undersecretary for benefits, that the 13,184 claims were duplicates and had all been processed.

Testifying before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Arronte said there was "no paper trail" for investigators to follow, but that an audit of 60 of the claims showed that many were "not duplicates" and that "several required action."

Rep. Jerry McNerney, a Stockton Democrat on the committee, said that "clearly there's a contradiction here," to which Arronte replied, "Absolutely."

The committee is looking into charges of mismanagement at the Oakland and Philadelphia offices of the Veterans Affairs Department. The Oakland VA office has been under fire since a former employee turned whistle-blower revealed last year that compensation and disability claims were discovered stashed in a filing cabinet in 2012.

### Setting claims aside

The whistle-blower, Rustyann Brown, told the House committee Wednesday that the claims were often labeled "no action necessary" and put aside.

"Nothing was done to protect these claims," Brown said. "Nothing was done to put them in the system. There were no letters to survivors." Letters or claims from veterans who had died "were just put aside," she said.

Continued on page 2

Brown had been assigned to the project of looking at the claims and said the oldest one she saw dated to 1996.

Among the most heartbreaking, she said, was a letter from an elderly woman whose husband had served in World War II. The widow wrote to the agency that her husband had reassured her that when he died, the VA would see to it that she received the benefits he had earned.

“Baby, they’re going to take care of you,” the man promised his wife, according to Brown.

“She was dead six years by the time I read that letter,” Brown testified. “I can’t tell you how many were like that.”

‘It breaks my heart’

Rep. Doug LaMalfa, a Butte County Republican, became emotional while recounting the episode. “She wasn’t even aware there were widow benefits,” LaMalfa said. “This little lady writing that down on a flowery piece of paper. It breaks my heart.”

Julianna Boor, who became the director of the Oakland VA office in May, conceded that Brown was right on many counts, but that the agency is now “headed in the right direction,” having hired 58 claims processors and converted to an electronic benefits system.

“It’s correct (that the World War II veteran’s widow) may have passed away and there may not have been another action” by the agency, Boor said.

When the 13,000-plus benefits claims were found, the agency wasn’t sure what they were, so it checked them against electronic payments, Boor said. After that step, 2,100 had to be checked against paper records.

“Admittedly it took too long,” Boor told The Chronicle during a break in the hearing. She said that at the time the agency was “inundated with paper.”

Boor pointed out that more than half the Oakland office’s staff is made up of veterans, who she said are “wanting to do the right thing.”

Philly even worse?

By most accounts the problems at the Philadelphia office are even worse than in Oakland. Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., focused on a \$309,000 relocation payment for Philadelphia regional office Director Diana Rubens to move

from nearby Virginia to take the job, suggesting that Rubens would have moved there anyway to be close to her mother. Rubens denied the charge.

Miller said he would try to abolish the relocation bonus program, which he said has turned into an entitlement for well-paid agency executives.

Miller said a “pattern of abuse and incompetence” was apparent at both offices, including evidence of manipulating claim dates in Philadelphia to make backlogs look smaller. He said he would issue subpoenas within a week if the VA doesn’t produce additional documents he has requested.

“It’s absolutely inexcusable that the Oakland office ignored more than 13,000 claims, some dating from the mid-’90s,” Miller said.

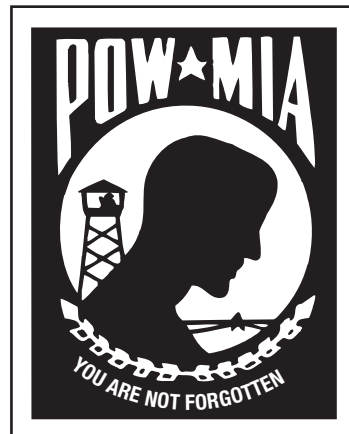
Pressure to speed up

The committee heard from other former employees who described a VA claims processing system where employees are awarded points for processing claims quickly — a reaction to earlier scandals that found extensive claims backlogs at the agency.

Brown said the pressure of the new system encouraged employees to move claims too quickly.

“You should do the right thing for the veteran whether it takes you 15 minutes or an hour,” she said.

McNerney said he is “not quite ready to believe there’s nefarious conduct” at the Oakland office. But if the VA doesn’t come up with a concrete plan to reform its operations, he said, “it will require us to really start cracking down.”



# Chapter 535 Information Center

## Chapter 535 Officers & Board of Directors

### Officers-Phone

**President**  
Pete Burelle .....274-3787

**Vice-President**  
Al Hernandez .....265-6765

**Secretary**  
Dave Johnson .....885-1230

**Treasurer**  
Ralph Remick.....887-8297

**Past President**  
Dick Corn

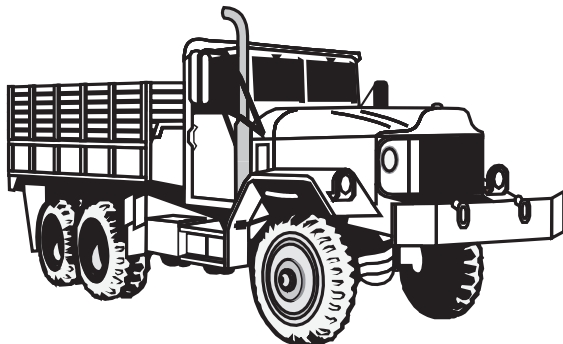
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Ric Sheridan rfsheridan@sbcglobal.net.....274-1413  
Dave Chaix .....269-1431  
Bill Holman bholman@succeed.net.....265-8387  
Kent Hawley..... 432-3551  
Bart Ruud .....823-1368  
Dale Epps.....368-6156  
Harold Graves .....470-8507  
Dick Corn.....272-5922

**CA State Council Delegates**  
Pete Burelle

### Chapter 535 Committees Chairs

Finance.....Ralph Remick & Dave Johnson  
Parade and Honor Guard ..... Pete Burelle  
Membership Affairs.....Ric Sheridan  
Newsletter..... bholman@succeed.net, 265-8387 Bill Holman  
Nominations.....Harold Graves  
Christmas Year Round.....Harold Graves  
NCCVC..... Ken Farmer  
Web Master ..... Ralph Remick

**Nevada County Veterans Affairs Rep.**  
Victor Ferrera.....(530) 273-3396



## Moments in US History

Last Florida Civil War Vet 1955



Florida's last Civil War veteran, Bill Lundy, poses with a jet fighter, 1955



The Vinh Son Orphanage, has a new web site

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

### Membership Facts Chapter 535

<b>VVA</b>	
Individual members	31
Life members	39
<b>AVVA</b>	
Individual members	1
Life member	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>



### Upcoming Dates and Events

May	7	General Chapter Meeting 6 pm
May	25	Memorial Day



## 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.....202-565-8124  
Freedom of Information/Privacy Act .....202-233-3616  
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

## Conceal Carry Weapons Class

*Dennis Fruzza, American Legion*

If anyone is interested in attending the CCW course that we hold monthly in the Remembrance Room at the Grass Valley Veterans building, please contact Gary Weber at 274-7664 or <<http://weberfirearms@gmail.com/>>weberfirearms@gmail.com. Gary will then send notification emails for the next course and all of the material to the interested parties. We are charging 1/2 price for Veterans and their spouses, which at this time is \$50.00 all others \$90.00. Everyone pays the \$10.00 range fees.

Recommendation is to download the CCW Application from the mynevadacounty web site, print it out, or obtain one from the NCSO, follow their instructions. Then take the application to the NCSO on the second floor of the Rood Bldg. Once the course is taken and the qualifying is completed, then add the certificate to the application and wait for them to call.

Three firearms can be put onto the CCW permit, qualifying with all of them, shooting 50 total rounds between the firearms.

## 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 newsletter's or hearing from us, please contact Bill Holman at 265-8387.



## **Commissary Funding Proposed \$300M Cut Death Spiral**

The Defense Department proposal to cut funding for its commissaries would cause hardship for service members and threaten the livelihood of tens of thousands of civilian workers, according to the American Federation of Government Employees. “The cut is a badly-disguised attempt to put the commissaries into a death spiral,” Beth Moten, the legislative director for AFGE, wrote in a letter to the leaders of the Senate and House Armed Services personnel subcommittees 20 MAR. The proposed \$300 million cut for fiscal 2016 would force the commissary to reduce hours of operation and increase costs for service members, according to Moten. The end result would be the “Walmartizing” of the commissary workforce, she wrote. “The commissaries and exchanges are an earned benefit treasured by military families and an important contributor to their quality of life,” Moten wrote. “Commissaries would no longer be a convenient bargain for military families.”

Commissaries would be pushed into a “death spiral” if the Defense Department proposal is adopted, AFGE union says. The Defense Department eventually wants to cut the Defense Commissaries Agency by \$1 billion, according to AFGE, even as DoD increases spending on service contractors. Defense Department spending on professional services contractors has grown by 116 percent since 2000, while spending on civilian personnel has only increased 25 percent, according to AFGE. A proposal to convert commissary employees to “non-appropriated fund” (NAF) status would also result in dramatic pay cuts for those civilian workers, according to AFGE. In many areas NAF workers make 30 percent less than current commissary civilians – and even in the best case scenario make 10 percent less. “These trends play out all over the nation, from locality to locality—prevailing rates for NAF employees are consistently lower than for appropriated fund employees. In other words, NAF-ing the [Defense Commissary Agency] workforce means a whopping pay cut for many employees for doing the same work,” Moten wrote.

The letter was addressed to Joe Heck (R-NV), chairman of the House armed Services subcommittee on military personnel, and Susan Davis (D-CA), the ranking member. The letter was also sent to Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), chairman of the Senate subcommittee on personnel, and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), the ranking member of the subcommittee. [Source: FederalTimes | Andy Medici | March 20, 2015 ++]

## **Agent Orange C-123 Aircraft Update**

“It is an outrage that the VA, in effect, is continuing to deny these veterans justice,” said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. “These VA bureaucrats attempting to delay justice ought to be relieved of their duties so that they can no longer abuse veterans with their tactic of ‘delay, deny, until they die.’ There is no excuse for why these worthy veterans are still not being treated with the appreciation and the respect their service warrants.” Rowan praised Wes Carter, the leader of the C-123 Veterans Association, for his spunk and spirit: “You’ve got to keep on keeping on,” Rowan urged, “and VVA will be at your side to convince the VA hierarchy that to continue to delay justice is to deny justice.”



For over five years, retired Air Force Reserve Major Wes Carter has led the fight of his life: to get the Department of Veterans Affairs to acknowledge that the C-123 Provider military cargo planes which transported Agent Orange to and from Vietnam had, in fact, been contaminated with dioxin. A number of reputable scientists and epidemiologists at federal agencies have gone on record, endorsing Carter’s stance that these craft remained hazardous to the health of the 2,100 crew members, flight nurses, and maintenance workers who serviced them between 1972 and 1982. “Yet the VA, in all its wisdom, maintained that these men and women who had been exposed to Agent Orange ought not be eligible to receive the same healthcare and disability compensation benefits that boots-on-the-ground veterans of Vietnam receive,” Rowan noted.

“VVA has long supported Major Carter in his quest for justice,” Rowan said. “When the Institute of Medicine (IOM) concluded, in a study funded by the VA, that the planes were actively contaminated when Air Force Reservists flew them, we were as pleased as Wes Carter, who exulted, ‘We won!’ The IOM report was released in January 2015, yet Major Carter and those who have been sickened with maladies the VA concedes are associated with exposure to Agent Orange have still not received the justice they deserve. Why? Because a few bad actors in the office of Public Health & Environmental Hazards at the VA continue their attempts to delay justice despite the conclusive report by the IOM.”

## **VA Rural Access**

### **Overcoming Health Care Challenges**

Between fiscal years 2006-2014, the number of enrolled Veterans who live in rural communities increased by seven percent. Thirty-five percent (3.2 million) of the Veterans who are enrolled in and obtain services from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enjoy residing in rural America. Following active careers or debilitating injury, many Veterans opt for a rural community for a variety of reasons—cost of living, proximity to family, open space or independence. The Office of Rural Health (ORH) recently unveiled a new video, “Caring for Rural Veterans,” about VA’s programs that improve and increase Veterans’ access to care in rural communities. The three-minute video tells the story of a Community Based Out-patient Clinic in the small town of Cumberland, Maryland, where VA innovations in telehealth technology allow Veterans to meet with specialists who are hours away. Take a look at <http://youtu.be/yyIjKAa-kv0>.

Rural Veterans and their caregivers face unique barriers to care, such as lack of public transportation, lack of broadband coverage, distance to VA health care facilities and a shortage of care providers. As VA’s lead proponent for rural Veterans’ health and well-being, ORH plays a unique role in VA’s transformation to provide Veterans personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care. ORH works to remove barriers to care through a variety of local efforts, including projects that focus on telehealth, transportation and mental health. If you have any questions or would like additional information about ORH, contact ORH Communications at <https://us-mg204.mail.yahoo.com/neo/b/launch?mcrumb=TIzg9Ckn6Np>. The mission of ORH is to improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans by increasing access to care and services. Learn more at <http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov>. Source: Veterans Health

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## **VA Medical Marijuana Bill Gains Momentum in Senate**

A push to legalize medical marijuana at the federal level is gaining momentum in the Senate, drawing a growing roster of co-sponsors from both parties just over a week after it was unveiled. Though 23 states have legalized medical marijuana, the federal government classifies pot as a Schedule I narcotic, recognizing no appropriate medical uses for the drug. The Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States (CARERS) Act, introduced 17 MAR by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Cory Booker, (D-NJ), and Rand Paul (R-KY), would reclassify marijuana as a Schedule II drug, providing dispensaries in states that permit medical marijuana with access to the banking system and potentially fueling greater medical research of the drug.

Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV) signed onto the proposal last week, declaring in a statement, “The time has come for the federal government to stop impeding the doctor-patient relationship in states that have decided their own medical marijuana policies.” “This bipartisan legislation puts Americans who are suffering first by allowing Nevada’s medical marijuana patients, providers, and businesses that are in compliance with state law, to no longer be in violation of federal law and vulnerable to federal prosecution,” he said. Heller’s release noted that the bill would also allow doctors at Department of Veterans Affairs to prescribe medical marijuana as a form of treatment in states that allow it.

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), threw her support behind the measure on 18 MAR. “Senator Boxer is a strong supporter of California’s medical marijuana law and she believes that patients, doctors and caregivers in states like California should be able to follow state law without fear of federal prosecution,” Zachary Coile, Boxer’s communications director, said in a statement.

Boxer’s fellow Californian, Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, is on the fence about the proposal. She told Roll Call she remains concerned about the potency of some types of marijuana, and she’d like to see greater research into derivatives of the drug that provide the medical benefits but not the psychoactive effects. “I think states can do what states can do. I think the federal law is another thing, and, you know I just hate to see this because there’s marijuana, then there’s marijuana,” Feinstein said. “There’s very strong marijuana, and there’s marijuana that isn’t. And then there’s marijuana that may be medically beneficial, and this is what we are trying to pursue.”

Demonstrators protest the federal government’s crackdown on medicinal marijuana dispensaries during a rally in Sacramento, Calif. on Nov. 9, 2011.

As the bill gains steam, it still faces an uphill battle to passage in a Republican-dominated Congress. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, is opposed to the measure, and he has said he’s unlikely to schedule it for a hearing. “It’s a matter of what are our priorities,” Grassley told Roll Call. The senator said President Obama’s recent comment that Congress could reclassify the drug if enough states decriminalize it “absolutely won’t” affect his decision. At least one Republican on Grassley’s committee, Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, wasn’t so sure. “I think it does increase the pressure,” Flake told Roll Call about Obama’s suggestion. “He’s probably right...if you get to a majority of the states that are doing it, then people are going to say, ‘What’s Congress going to do? How can these states act in ways that are not congruent with federal law?’”





**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 \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_  
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, \$25/mo Until paid in full  
**Select Age Group**  Ages 56-60 \$200     Ages 61-65 \$175  
    Ages 66 and over \$150     Ages 72+ \$100

◆ **Payment Method:**     Check             Money Order             Visa             MasterCard  
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◆ **Card Number** \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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