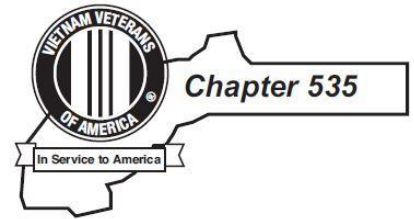




INCOMING

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

CHAPTER 535



Website: www.vva535.org

Volume 33 Issue 3

March 2023

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 535 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

March 2023

VVA-535 Officer and Director Responsibilities

VVA-535 transition time to a new cadre of officers is nearly upon us. Nominations for Officers and Directors is set for our March meeting. Elections will be held in April.

Why should you serve VVA-535?

Here are a few good reasons:

- Becoming an officer will develop your communication skills, problem-solving skills, and enhance your ability to move forward regardless of any hardship.
- Leadership will permit you to take our organization in new directions, thus invigorating our presence in our community.
- Serving your brotherhood of veterans will give you a sense of pride.
- New leaders will have reliable consultation opportunities with outgoing officers. There is nothing to fear about rising to the challenge.

Bart Ruud

President's Responsibilities:

- Preside at Board of Directors' meetings.
- Preside at General Membership meetings.
- Provide organizational leadership; interface with those ill or otherwise incapacitated.
- Develop and distribute meeting Agendas.
- Delegate various tasks to others: Membership Chair; Speakers Bureau Chairman; NCCVC representative; State Council Representative, etc.
- Coordinate with VVA Regional Director, as needed.
- Write brief "Words of Wisdom" for each monthly edition of INCOMING.

Vice-President's Responsibilities:

- In absence of the President, preside at Board and General Membership meetings.
- Assist the President and other Officers with miscellaneous tasks related to organization policy and operations.

Treasurer's Responsibilities:

- Maintain financial accounting records.
- Assume responsibility for collection of and disbursement of organizational funds.
- Chair Audit Committee.

- File miscellaneous reports, e.g., State Board of Equalization; IRS.
- Coordinate with Nevada County for reservation of Remembrance Room and kitchen; coordinate with County regarding insurance matters; coordinate with Nevada County Fair Manager to reserve a site for VVA-535.

Secretary’s Responsibilities:

- Assist the President with recording minutes of Board and General Membership Meetings.
- Distribute minutes as determined by the President.
- Maintain records of organizational activities.
- Serve on the Finance Audit Committee.

Director Responsibilities:

- Establish policy and provide overall direction for all organizational activities.
- Assist with development of a long-term calendar.
- Assist with organizational projects.

VVA Chapter 535 Mission Statement

To foster camaraderie among members and assist those with disabling mental and physical injuries, to promote the welfare of our brethren affected by the war, and to engender public understanding of the sacrifice, patriotism and bravery of those who served, those who gave all, and those left behind.

Veterans Crisis Line
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1
(Put this number into your phone)

Attention

If you do not drive and need a ride to a meeting or any VVA-535 function, please contact Bart Ruud or any local VVA-535 member and we will do our best to arrange transportation for you.

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Upcoming Events

- NCCVC Meeting – March 2, 2023
- VVA 535 General Meeting – March 2, 2023
- National Vietnam Veterans Day – Trailblazer Pizza, Alta Sierra 11:30 a.m.
- CSC: April 6-8, 2023 – Visalia
- Chapter 535 Elections - April 6, 2023
- CSC: June 9-11, 2023 – Visalia
- Nevada County Fair – August 9 – 13, 2023
- CSC :Oct. 27-29, 2023 - Visalia

Chapter 535 Officers

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1-530-269-1431

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kgberg0178@sbcglobal.net
916-425-1121

Treasurer
Ralph Remick 530-559-7716

Secretary
Bart Ruud 530-305-0493

Directors

Dick Corn 530-277-8856
Enrique Vasquez 530-575-4416
Ray James 530-478-1126
Ric Sheridan..... 530-274-1413
Corbin Smith 916-833-7860

Committee Chairs

Finance ...Ralph Remick & Dave Johnson
Parade and Honor Guard Dick Corn
Membership AffairsRic Sheridan
Newsletter Interim Editor Bart Ruud
Victorian Christmas Cancelled for 2022
Nominations Ralph Remick
Veterans Assistance..... Dave Chaix
NCCVC Dave Chaix; Dick Corn
Speakers Bureau Ray James
Web Master Ralph Remick
Quartermaster Dick Corn
Facebook Master Mike Laborico
Nevada County Fair Open
CA State Council Rep..... Open

Nevada County Veterans Services Officer

David West II
Nevada County Veterans Service Officer
988 McCourtney Rd.
Grass Valley, CA 95949
David.West@co.nevada.ca.us
(530) 265-1446 (Office)
(530) 913-5046 (Cell phone)
“Walk-In” opportunities are available M – F.

Placer County Veterans Services Officer

Matthew Galvin ... 916-780-3290.
1000 Sunset Blvd., Suite 115, Rocklin, CA
Mon. – Fri., 8:00 – 12:00 and 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. The
Auburn office, at 11562 B Avenue, Auburn, CA 95603, is open every
Tuesday 8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. The Carnelian Bay
office, at 5252 N Lake Blvd, Carnelian Bay, CA 96140, is now open every
3rd Monday (excluding Holidays) 9:30 a.m. -12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m.-
3:00 p.m.

County VSO Resource Closet Needs

Sleeping bags, duffel bags, small lightweight
tents, socks, briefs, bras, tee shirts (white/olive
drab), sweatshirts, sweatpants, jeans, shoes,
boots, hygiene supplies, grocery store gift cards,
gas cards, blankets.

These kinds of items will become components of
life packs to assist those in need that are seen by
staff at VSO David West’s office. Thank you for
your assistance with this project.

Matters of Interest as outlined at the Meeting of February 2, 2023

VVA-535 was the recipient of \$1,000 donated by
JoAnne Middleton and her family in memory of
deceased VVA Life Member and U.S. Army
helicopter pilot Dave Middleton.

Spearheaded by VVA Life Member and American
Legion Post 130 Adjutant **Mike Hauser**, an
effort is being made in the community to
develop a plan to better communicate with
seniors. A planning meeting is scheduled for
February 15, 2023.

Discussion regarding changing from evening to
daytime meetings resulted in a plan to gather at
Trailblazer Pizza in Alta Sierra on March 29,
2023 to scope the setting as a possible meeting
venue.

Fundraising activities including the possibility
of a community Spaghetti dinner, and an ocean
cruise as a raffle prize evolved. New VVA 535
member **Dennis Hauge** volunteered to so some
preliminary planning regarding a spaghetti feed.
Dale Ferguson volunteered to investigate
short-term ocean cruises, with a focus on a
Jimmy Buffet cruise in Florida.

How Did Vietnamese Forces Block U.S. Firepower? With a Hug

**Both the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong
sought to get very close to Americans to engage them
in combat.**

By Warren Wilkins. Vietnam magazine. 2/14/2023

Both the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet
Cong sought to get very close to Americans to
engage them in combat.



Pitted against the combined arms capabilities of the U.S. military, the light infantry forces of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army developed a variety of tactics to minimize the destructive effects of American firepower. Staying close to or “hugging” American units in battle (also known as “grabbing or clinging to the enemy’s belt”), a tactic the Viet Minh employed in the First Indochina War, was arguably one of the most effective.

Gen. Nguyen Chi Thanh formalized the use of “hugging” tactics while serving as party secretary of the communist Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) in 1965. Thanh, upon learning that a squad leader in a Viet Cong main-force regiment had shouted, “Grab the enemy’s belts to fight them,” while fighting the South Vietnamese, ordered all communist units to adopt the rallying cry as a slogan when fighting U.S. forces.

If their troops could move in quickly and engage at close range, Thanh and other communist leaders concluded, American commanders would not be able to call in air strikes or artillery fire without risking friendly casualties. “But in order to fight the Americans, you had to get close to them,” recalled one Viet Cong veteran. “You couldn’t fight them from a distance.” Close-quarters infantry fights between two otherwise evenly matched opponents thus offered the opportunity to win battles and kill Americans at an acceptable cost.

The Vietnamese word for hug—ôm—is used frequently in lots of different situations. A

motorbike taxi is a xe ôm, or hug bike; a common herb that’s a bit of an aphrodisiac is called ngò ôm, while a hostess bar is a bia ôm, or hug bar. Thus, it’s only natural that ôm might get attached to a war-fighting strategy, as it gets attached to so many concepts.

In a 1966 summary, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam acknowledged that “during attacks the NVA/VC used hugging tactics as a means of protecting themselves from Allied artillery and air strikes.” To counter this approach, some American units attempted to pull back from contact to allow for the delivery of close-in supporting fire. Senior Col. Hoang Cam witnessed the technique firsthand. Commanding the 9th Viet Cong Division at the time, Cam noted the Americans “usually tried to achieve separation between their forces and ours to provide a fire support zone in which their heavy fire support weapons could inflict casualties on their opponents.”

Lt. Col. George Shuffer’s 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry (1st Infantry Division) succeeded in doing exactly that at Ap Nha Mat in December 1965. As the lead elements of the battalion approached an enemy base camp north of the hamlet, a regiment from Cam’s 9th Viet Cong Division attacked the startled Americans.

“THE ENEMY, PRACTICING HIS NEWLY ADOPTED ‘HUGGING TACTICS,’” WROTE SHUFFER, “CAME OUT OF HIS CRAFTILY FORTIFIED CAMP IN FORCE TO MEET US.”

While his infantry unleashed a torrent of small-arms fire, keeping the Viet Cong back and preserving the space required to bring in supporting arms, Shuffer hammered the attackers with artillery, air strikes, and helicopter gunships. Later that afternoon, the Americans counterattacked and routed the enemy. Badly beaten, the Viet Cong withdrew, leaving some 300 dead behind. Shuffer suffered 39 killed.

More often than not, however, the enemy's ability to "hug" U.S. units prevented the latter from leveraging all their available firepower. That failure to maintain tactical separation, for example, delayed the delivery of critical fire support at Landing Zone Albany in November 1965. Charging out of the grass and jungle surrounding the modest clearing, a composite battalion of the 66th NVA Regiment ambushed the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry (1st Cavalry Division Airmobile).

Within minutes, a savage and close-quarters struggle—some of it hand-to-hand—engulfed the entire American column. An American fire support officer circling overhead in a helicopter recalled that he had artillery, gunships, and air support on hand to assist the embattled cavalymen but "couldn't do a damn thing" because of the intimate nature of the fighting.

The cavalry battalion fought for over an hour before soldiers on the ground or in the air could bring any of that firepower to bear. When the battle finally ended, an estimated 151 Americans had been killed and 121 wounded—figures that added up to a casualty rate of nearly 70%. North Vietnamese losses, though almost certainly less than American estimates, were nevertheless significant.

Interestingly, Lt. Col. (later Maj. Gen.) George Smith Patton, son of the famed World War II commander, published an article in late 1965 highlighting the results of a questionnaire he had forwarded to dozens of American and Vietnamese servicemen, government officials, press, and other individuals who had either served in Vietnam or were in some way connected to the conflict. Patton inquired about the factors that motivated Viet Cong main-force soldiers and solicited comments on their "willingness to close with and destroy the enemy."

Addressing the question of close combat, one high-level American military adviser echoed an

opinion shared by many of the respondents. "This willingness varies directly with the Viet Cong's tactical chances of success," the officer explained. "Viet Cong units will not normally close unless chances for success are in their favor."

What social media is saying about Fort Bragg's pending new name

By Rachael Riley. Army Times. Feb 14, 2023



A sign is seen at Fort Bragg on Feb. 3, 2022, in Fort Bragg, N.C.

While Fort Bragg, North Carolina will be renamed later this year, some social media users are still mulling why it won't be renamed after a person.

Earlier this month, a Reddit user asked the question that many others have pondered, "Why is Fort Bragg the only one getting an abstract name instead of being named after a person?"

Background

The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act mandated the Naming Commission to identify assets, including Army installations, that commemorate the Confederacy.

Fort Bragg is currently named after Gen. Braxton Bragg, a Confederate general associated with being a slave owner and losing battles during the Civil War.

The local post is among nine Army installations identified for a name change.

What's being said on social media

In response to the Reddit post about Fort Liberty, users chimed in.

"You can't name the center of the universe after a single person," one user wrote.

Another person speculated that the decision to rename Fort Bragg to Fort Liberty was because the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and 82nd Airborne Division "wanted it named after one of their guys and neither could agree on one."

"The Naming Commission was like, "Fine, if you babies can't compromise, you're gonna be Fort Liberty," the user said.

Another user shared a similar sentiment.

"They were like, 'We're gonna turn this Naming Commission around if you can't agree and get along.'"

A few Reddit users referenced Liberty Mutual Insurance's commercials.

"Liberty Bibberty," two people commented.

Others said they would have preferred the home of the airborne and Special Forces to be renamed after Medal of Honor recipient Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez, who was a top 10 consideration by the Naming Commission.

"I'm just gonna call it Fort Benavidez," one person wrote.

One individual said Benavidez "seemed like the perfect choice," since he served in both Special Forces and the 82nd Airborne Division.

Another agreed. "Getting the post named after Roy should've trumped all disputes between 82nd and USASOC," they wrote.

But why is it being called Fort Liberty?

In a June letter to the editor, retired Maj. Gen. Rodney Anderson said he participated in stakeholder meetings about the renaming process.

"The task and purpose of the soldiers, families, paratroopers and operators who live among us is to be the liberators," Anderson wrote.

At the final meeting, Anderson said the group of 50 community leaders "concluded that Fort Liberty was the right choice."

According to the Naming Commission's report to Congress, "Fort Liberty symbolizes the U.S. Army's defense of liberty."

The word liberty, the report states, is featured in the 82nd Airborne Division's song and is part of the Army Special Forces' motto.

In May, the commission announced that after community stakeholder meetings, it was recommending renaming Fort Bragg to Fort Liberty, which Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin agreed with.

Col. John Wilcox, Fort Bragg's garrison commander, said in a radio interview last month that he expects the name change to happen in June.

**Editor's Note: This article was published as part of a content-sharing agreement between Army Times and The Fayetteville Observer.*

Bill would launch clinical trials on cannabis use for vets pain, PTSD

By Leo Shane III. Military times. February 16, 2023



A grower displays cannabis at the Higher Path medical marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles in December 2017

A key Senate panel on Thursday advanced legislation for the first time which would require Veterans Affairs officials to hold clinical trials on using medicinal cannabis for the treatment of chronic pain and post-traumatic stress.

The measure, dubbed the Medicinal Cannabis Research Act, passed out of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in a closed session after a brief discussion among lawmakers. Related legislation has advanced in the House in recent years, but Thursday marked the first significant movement for the proposal in the upper chamber.

In a statement accompanying the bill introduction last week, committee chairman Jon Tester, D-Mont., called the proposal an important step in giving veterans more options in how to deal with lingering health issues.

"Our nation's veterans deserve options when it comes to treating the wounds of war, which is why VA needs to have a better understanding of how medicinal cannabis plays a role in their healing," he said.

"Our bipartisan bill ensures VA is listening to the growing number of veterans who find critical relief from alternative treatments like medicinal cannabis, while working to empower veterans in making safe and informed decisions about their health."

The measure was co-sponsored by Alaska Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan and could be considered by the full Senate in coming weeks. Companion legislation has been introduced in the House by Reps. Lou Correa, D-Calif., and Jack Bergman, R-Mich.

It would authorize VA to implement a comprehensive research plan into medicinal cannabis, to include how its use can impact veterans overall quality of life.

The clinical trials would look at not only the direct impact on specific ailments but also the effects of different forms, potencies and methods of cannabis delivery. The legislation does not specify how many veterans would be involved in the research, but calls for a "large scale" study into the issue.

In 2017, the National Academy of Sciences found "conclusive or substantial" evidence that cannabis is helpful in treating chronic pain problems, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders.

But federal research into marijuana-based products has been stalled by the Food and Drug Administration's classification of the drug as a Schedule I controlled substance, reserved for chemicals with the potential for high abuse risk and considered having no clinically accepted medical use.

Veterans groups and cannabis activists have pushed for changes to that status for years, saying that anecdotal evidence shows significant health benefits for individuals who use medical cannabis.

"Medicinal cannabis is already in use by thousands of veterans across the country, but we don't yet have the data we need to understand the potential benefits and side effects associated with this alternative therapy," Sullivan said in a statement.

VA doctors cannot prescribe marijuana, even in the 37 states where it is legal to use. Department officials have said that participation in “state marijuana programs” will not affect veteran eligibility for department care or services.

Thursday’s move drew praise from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, one of 20 veterans groups to sign a letter of support for the legislation late last year.

“Since 2017, IAVA has made it one of our top priorities to empower veterans who are calling for the medicinal use of cannabis,” said Jeremy Butler, CEO of IAVA, in a statement. “Eighty-eight percent of IAVA members support the research of cannabis for medicinal purposes and veterans consistently and passionately have communicated that cannabis offers effective help in tackling some of the most pressing injuries we face when returning from war.”

More pharmacies rejoin Tricare network. Are there enough?

By Karen Jowers. Military Times. Jan 11, 2023



Fewer independent retail pharmacies are in the Tricare network this year, but some will rejoin effective Jan. 15, 2023. Pictured here in 2013, a Walgreens pharmacy, which is part of the Tricare network.

Nearly a third of the independent pharmacies that were dropped from the Tricare retail pharmacy network in October have opted to

rejoin the network, according to officials from Express Scripts, which manages the prescription plan.

“We are pleased that an additional 4,356 independent pharmacies accepted the contract terms we offered in December and will rejoin the Tricare network this month,” said Justine Sessions, spokeswoman for Cigna/Express Scripts. As of Jan. 15, there will be more than 42,000 pharmacies in the Tricare network, including nearly 12,000 independent pharmacies, she said.

In October, 14,963 independent pharmacies — out of a total of 55,586 retail pharmacies in the network — dropped out of Tricare, mostly because of what they perceived as low reimbursement rates. But a number of community drug stores never even received the proposed 2023 contract, which Express Scripts sent by fax earlier in 2022, according to the National Community Pharmacists Association.

In addition to fewer independent retail pharmacies, all of the more than 2,200 Kroger pharmacies left the network Jan. 1. Kroger officials described the Express Scripts drug pricing model as “unsustainable” for Kroger and its customers.

Reimbursement rates have been the key issue for the independent pharmacies, too, although earlier in 2022, more than 7,000 independent pharmacies accepted the proposed Tricare network rates for 2023.

Although the number of pharmacies has gone from 55,586 to 42,000, “approximately 98% of all Tricare beneficiaries have an in-network pharmacy within a 15-minute drive of their home,” said Peter Graves, spokesman for the Defense Health Agency.

Under the new Tricare pharmacy contract that began Jan. 1, Express Scripts must have at least one pharmacy within 15 minutes driving time of 90% of the beneficiaries.

Graves said Express Scripts ‘has consistently exceeded Tricare’s access standards established in their government contracts with the [Defense Health Agency] over time. The access standard is measured across the entire network and the DHA remains confident in our ability to meet and exceed those standards.”

The contract allows Express Scripts “to use its own discretion in contracting with pharmacies to establish a competitively priced network that meets contract access standards,” he said, and any realized savings are passed directly to the government.

Not everyone is pleased with the outcome.

The decisions made by the Defense Health Agency and Express Scripts/Cigna “have resulted in thousands of active duty and retired service members losing access to their established and cherished local community pharmacies, forcing veterans to travel sometimes long distances to access their medications,” wrote Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., in a Jan. 3 letter to officials at the Defense Health Agency, Express Scripts and Cigna Corp.

“In this instance, money has truly come before health of service members, which is disappointing to see in real time.”

Over the past few months, other lawmakers have written to defense officials expressing concern over the shrinking pharmacy network. Lankford urged the officials to “be up front about how you are actually rolling out the new contract — without negotiation, favoring large chain pharmacies and urban communities, and without real action to remedy any of the problems raised by dozens of members of Congress.”

He noted that even with the temporary reopening of the network, allowing pharmacies to rejoin, “there were very few to no changes made to contracts offered to pharmacies who were previously cut from the network. ...

Pharmacies were overwhelmingly offered non-negotiable contracts with reimbursement rates far below cost that would have resulted in significant losses for nearly every prescription filled,” Lankford wrote.

While the vast majority of beneficiaries still have access to a retail pharmacy, among those who are negatively affected are people with chronic, serious health conditions, said Karen Ruedisueli, director of health affairs in government relations for the Military Officers Association of America.

“We’re hearing that their access has been reduced,” she said, and for the elderly who have challenges with transportation and mobility, reduced access hits them much harder.

“People assumed this benefit was out there and would protect them in the event of a catastrophic diagnosis or accident, or with increased needs once they got older,” Ruedisueli said. “This change has really cut the value of the benefit in that regard.”

The previous Tricare contract had retail pharmacy access standards specific to urban, suburban, and rural areas, she noted.

Those tiered standards are still required in Medicare Part D plans, she said, which also have requirements for long-term-care pharmacies to be included in the network. And the Blue Cross Blue Shield federal employee health plan has more than 55,000 pharmacies in its retail network, similar to the previous size of the Tricare network.

“Now we have a Tricare network that’s much worse than the benchmarks that are out there,” Ruedisueli said.

Untreatable Deadly Marburg Virus Spreading - Here's What To Know

By Jason Hall. iHeart News. February 16, 2023



The first-ever public **outbreak** of Marburg disease, which has been described as an Ebola-related **deadly virus**, has been confirmed in the Western African country of Equatorial Guinea, the World Health Organization announced in a statement obtained by **USA TODAY** this week.

At least nine people have died and 16 cases have resulted in symptoms including fever, fatigue, diarrhea and vomiting, according to the WHO, which confirmed it was sending medical experts to help local officials, as well as protective equipment for workers in the country. The United Nations' health agency confirmed the epidemic after receiving and observing samples of the virus at a lab in Senegal, which occurred after an alert was sent from a local health official in Equatorial Guinea last week.

The Marburg virus, like Ebola, is reported to have originated in bats and is capable of spreading between humans through close contact with bodily fluid of those infected, as well as surfaces such as contaminated bed sheets, according to **USA TODAY**. Marburg disease leads to Marburg virus disease, which is reported to be a hemorrhagic fever that can damage the body's organs and result in bleeding, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control.

Marburg virus is considered zoonotic as it can spread between humans and animals and, along with the six species of Ebola virus, is part of the filovirus family, which causes severe hemorrhagic fevers in humans and primates. The rare disease was initially identified in 1967 following simultaneous outbreaks in laboratories in Marburg, Germany, as well as Belgrade, Syria, which resulted in seven deaths among 31 infections, according to the CDC.

The incubation period for Marburg disease is reported to be anywhere between two days and three weeks, according to the WHO. Symptoms, including intense fever and headache, are reported to start abruptly, while many patients have experienced vomiting diarrhea and stomach pain a few days after the onset, which is reported to last up to a week.

Severe cases could result in bleeding within the first week as some patients vomit blood or have it present in their stool, as well as from their gums, nose and genitalia. Marburg disease is reported to spread through the nervous system, which leads to patients experiencing confusion, irritability and aggression.

Inside the U.S. Army Plant Making Artillery Shells for Ukraine

BY W.J. HENNIGAN TIME MAGAZINE. FEBRUARY 2, 2023



Artillery shells stand over an oil “bath” that’s designed to cool them before the final stages of assembly.

A batch of artillery rounds destined for the Ukrainian battlefield twists and turns its way down a serpentine production line in northeastern Pennsylvania. Here, inside a series of red brick buildings where steam locomotives were repaired a century ago, teams of workers toil around the clock to ensure the industrial grinders, lathes and furnaces don't stop rumbling.

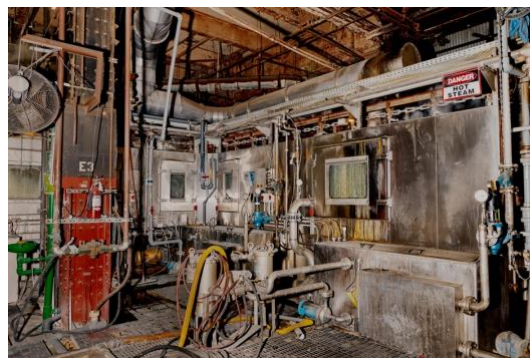
“Everything is very large. It’s very complex, a lot of moving parts, tremendous amounts of heat,” says Richard Hansen, who oversees manufacturing operations at the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant. “You have to continually... keep it running. And it’s

important for us to do that because we're making ammunition."

The 155-millimeter shells, which are fired from howitzers several miles from their targets, are critical to the Ukrainian military's nearly yearlong defense against the Russian invasion. Thousands of the unguided projectiles are fired each day in the conflict—a consumption rate that U.S. and Ukrainian officials compare to World War II—draining existing U.S. Army stockpiles.



Industrial panels for the machines at the 495,000-square-foot Scranton manufacturing facility.



The Scranton plant was first constructed in 1908 by the DL&W Railroad as a steam locomotive repair shop.

The Biden Administration has already given Ukraine more than 1 million 155-millimeter shells. With hundreds of miles of contested frontlines, the Ukrainian military depends on firing the rounds from about 300 155-millimeter howitzers to repel Russian positions. With no end to the fighting in sight, the U.S. Army plans to boost its current production rate of around 14,000 155-millimeter howitzer shells per month to 20,000 by this spring and as many as 90,000 by 2025, spending \$1.9 billion this year alone in the process.

The Scranton plant, which is contracted to crank out 11,040 shells per month, finds itself at the center of the Army's planned industrial transformation. Roughly 300 employees work across the 15-acre complex, where hulking machinery cuts, melts, reshapes and refines 2,000-pound steel rods into sleek, two-foot-tall projectiles. The plant is owned by the Army but is operated by General Dynamics Corp.'s ordnance unit and currently runs 24 hours a day, five days a week with a weekend shift.

Each day, trucks deliver 20-foot-long steel rods weighing 2,000 pounds to the factory. The rods are left outside where a massive magnet hoists them into a red brick building known as the "forge shop," where robotic saws slice the rods into foot-long chunks called "billets."



After the shells are completed, they're loaded onto trucks and driven to another plant in Iowa, where they're filled with explosives.



One by one, billets are carried around in a large empty room for four hours during the cooling process.

Step inside the shop, away from the Pennsylvania winter winds, and you'll immediately feel the warmth emanating from the three massive furnaces heated to

2,000 degrees. Each billet is fed into the fire where they stay for an hour, before emerging like red-hot coals that slide to a stop inside a darkened room with robotic arms.

The metal arms snatch each billet with smooth efficiency and move them to three individual stations. Over a 90-second period, the billet is pierced, stretched, and pressed into three-foot lengths against extreme heat. This happens hundreds of times each day. "Speed is key," Hansen says, watching the process.

In the last stage, a robotic arm grasps the billet and places it over a round door where it's neatly pushed into an underground conveyor system, called "the subway." Each billet, still scorching hot, falls onto a gravity rolling line. "Don't touch it," Hansen says. "It won't just burn your hand. It will take it off—bone and everything." The billets are collected by hanging claws that carry them one by one around a large empty room along a track for four hours. Later, each billet is inspected to ensure its shape and consistency are up to specifications so it can become a projectile.



Each billet, still burning hot, falls onto a conveyor to make its way down an underground line, called "the subway."



Protective coverings are affixed to a band at the base of each 155-millimeter shell.

The last building is a 60-foot-tall warehouse the size of a city block. Exterior light streams in from the windows, which were installed before the widespread availability of indoor lighting. A successive series of machines gradually shave 30 pounds of excess metal from the ribbed, dark gray billets until they emerge as polished shells with tapered noses. "We work in specifications that are thousandths of an inch," Hansen says. "Essentially, we're taking a tube and turning it into a projectile."

Each shell is hung on a hook where it's automatically rotated to receive an even coat of Army green paint. The entire process takes about three days, but it could take several months before the shells are loaded

onto pallets, driven 10 hours away on a big rig to another plant in Iowa, where they're filled with explosives and affixed with fusing—effectively converting them into oversized bullets, ready to be fired from a howitzer.

The Ukraine conflict has exposed serious problems in the U.S. defense industrial base, according to Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel who's now a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington. The Pentagon has spent the past quarter-century investing in expensive, high-tech weaponry. "The increased production will take months to come online and still will not fully cover the current artillery expenditure rates," he writes. "Encouraging NATO countries and other close allies to provide stocks would help, and the United States has been pursuing this effort aggressively."



Roughly 300 employees work across the 15-acre Scranton Army Ammunition Plant complex.





Finish turn-line operator looks over the conveyer system as artillery shells come down the line.

Congress has stepped up. Since August, alone, Scranton and its sister-facility in nearby Wilkes-Barre have received more than \$420 million in federal funding for a new building, additional equipment and improved automation that the Army hopes will boost production rates. The flood of money is a welcome turn for the Scranton plant, which was first constructed in 1908 by the DL&W Railroad as a steam locomotive repair shop. The Army acquired the property in 1951 at the onset of the Korean War and converted the facility to manufacture artillery shells.

Back then, the U.S. had 86 military ammunition plants as part of an industrial mobilization designed to meet wartime ammunition needs. Over the decades, the number of facilities dwindled. Today, the Pentagon has just five so-called “government-owned, contractor-operated” plants that supply the military with most of its conventional ammunition, propellants and explosives. General Dynamics has been enhancing recruitment efforts in anticipation of additional artillery orders for the Scranton plant.

Douglas Bush, an assistant secretary of the Army who is the service’s top acquisition official, said the Army might establish a new 155-millimeter assembly line in Texas and

has invested \$68 million in Canada “for them to stand up to retool a facility” to aid in artillery shell production. “We are sourcing and looking worldwide and a lot of that’s now actually flowing through,” he told reporters Jan. 25. “So, that’s going to be critical because production ramp-ups do take time and we are looking at various sources, including foreign production, to make sure Ukraine has what it needs.”

Writing Your Story for INCOMING

(Ongoing repeat solicitation)

Ideas for your story:

- Think about what you appreciated about the Vietnam experience. There is surely a means to segue into that with very little reflection on the negative aspects of war.
- What did you appreciate about the Vietnamese people during your deployment?
- Can you steer away from the bad stuff and reflect on the best experience you had in the Nam?
- Surely you had a close buddy and you supported each other. Maybe there is a story in that.
- What really got you through the day-to-day anxieties and fears? There might be a positive recollection in that regard.
- How did your experience instill in you a sense of patriotism that you possibly express every day of your life.

So far we have heard from Ruud, Epps, Chaix, Hamer, Chuck Holmes, current Marine LCpl. Jesse Hernandez, Kent Hawley, Mike Laborico and Dave Johnson. (Thank you!)

No writer needs to dwell on the negatives of war. Each of us who was there lived the negatives, and all of us are better people for having served, especially when we look at how we matured as a result of our experiences. Each of us has derived a sense of being and an energy that is different from

what it might have been had we not been sent across the pond.

Do share with us, in your own words, something of that chapter of your life. And, thank you for your service.

Forward your story to Bart Ruud at bruud45@gmail.com or hand deliver to Bart.

VVA 535 Member Biographies

Do you know _____

Now, our readership and Brotherhood knows _____ better than we might ever have known this man, this leader.

Who will be next to share?

Application for Membership
VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC., CHAPTER 535

P.O. Box 37, Grass Valley, CA 95945

Membership is open to U.S. armed forces veterans who served on active duty (for other than training purposes) in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975, or in **any duty location** between November 1, 1955 and May 7, 1975.

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: (_____) _____ Cell Phone: (_____) _____

Email Address: _____ Gender: _____

(Optional) Chapter Number: _____ Sponsor: _____

_____ I am already a VVA member and I want to become a Life Member. My VVA Number is _____.

Membership: Individual Life Membership: \$50. (Effective Oct. 20, 2018)

ATTENTION New members: You must submit a copy of your DD-214 form along with this application and dues payment.

Payment Method: ___ Check ___ Money Order ___ Credit Card (Visa, MasterCard, AMEX, Discover)

Credit Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Return your completed application, payment and a copy of your DD-214 to:

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., Chapter 535
P.O. Box 37
Grass Valley, CA 95945

Revised: January 2021

February

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 VVA-535 Board & General Meeting Groundhog Day	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14 Valentine's Day	15	16	17	18
19	20 Presidents' Day	21	22 Ash Wednesday	23	24	25
26	27	28				

March

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 VVA-535 Board & General Meeting Operation Rolling Thunder Begins (1965)	3	4
5	6	7	8 First Marine Battalion arrives in DaNang (1965)	9	10	11
12 Daylight Saving Time Begins	13	14	15	16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18
19	20 First Day of Spring	21	22 Ramadan Begins	23	24	25 Medal of Honor Day
26	27	28	29 National Vietnam War Veterans Day Meet at Trailblazer's Pizza	30	31	

April

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2 Palm Sunday	3	4	5 Passover Begins Gold Star Spouses Day	6 VVA 535 VVA 535 Elections CSC Meeting	7 Good Friday CSC Meeting	8 CSC Meeting
9 Easter Sunday	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 Patriot's Day	18	19	20	21	22 Earth Day
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

May

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4 VVA 535	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14 Mother's Day	15	16	17	18	19	20 Armed Forces Day
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29 Memorial Day (observed)	30	31			