



VA MID-ATLANTIC HEALTH CARE NETWORK • VISN 6

Vol. 2, No. 8

"Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here"

Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around *your* VISN

May 31, 2012

VISN Medical Centers Commemorate Memorial Day

Memorial Day, formerly known as Decoration Day, originated after the American Civil War to commemorate the Union soldiers who died. Today Memorial Day is observed on the last Monday of May and commemorates all the men and women who died while in military service. In observance of the holiday, many people visit cemeteries and memorials, and volunteers often place American flags on graves at national cemeteries. A national moment of remembrance takes place at 3 p.m. More photos of the honors rendered around VISN 6 this year can be found on page 5.

Right: Joint Base Langley-Eustis Joint Color Guard renders honors at the Hampton National Cemetery in Hampton, Va.

Dr. Bill Grunow



Seekins To Lead Durham Medical Center

Ms. DeAnne Seekins has been selected to become the new director of the Durham VAMC. She will oversee delivery of health care to more than 56,000 Veterans living in eastern N.C. and an operating budget of approximately \$400 million.

"We are thrilled to bring Ms. Seekins on board as the new medical center director in Durham," said Daniel F. Hoffmann, Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network (VISN 6) Director. "Her strong leadership qualities, experience leading other facilities here and familiarity with our network will yield hefty returns for the employees, volunteers, and most importantly, the Veterans we are privileged to serve. I am confident that under her leadership, the medical center will be in good hands."

Ms. Seekins has served Veterans in numerous capacities since joining VA in 1984, most recently as director of the Hampton VAMC. Prior to that

appointment, she served as associate director of the Richmond VAMC from January 2007 – July 2009; including service as acting director from July 2008 – February 2009. She has served in the medical administration and physical medicine and rehabilitation services, as well as having served as administrative officer to the associate chief of staff for ambulatory care, administrative assistant to the chief of staff, and as executive assistant to the director.

Ms. Seekins holds a Bachelor of Business Administration Degree in Healthcare Administration and a Master of Business Administration degree in Strategic Management. She is also a graduate of the VA Executive Career Field program, the Health Care Leader Institute and the Senior Executive Strategic Leadership program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is an active member of the American Col-



lege of Healthcare Executives and the Central Virginia Healthcare Executives Group. She has been featured in FedTech Magazine and Partners, a Press Ganey publication, for her work with the Electronic Health Record and customer satisfaction.

Benita Stoddard, associate director of Hampton VAMC, will assume the interim role of medical center director while a search for Seekins' replacement is conducted.

Inside in Brief

- Pg 3** New program enhances VA services for caregivers.
- Pg 4** Senior Navy leader visits Charlotte; Lynchburg Veterans hold rally.
- Pg 5** Memorial Day activities around VISN 6 honor the fallen.
- Pg 6** VA Celebrates National Nurses Week May 6-12; Nursing a passion.
- Pg 8** National D-Day Memorial honors heroism of Allied Forces.
- Pg 9** VA awards \$2.7 million Energy Improvements contract.
- Pg 10** New form for grave marker medallion; VA to host small business conf.
- Pg 12** VISN 6 Sites of Care with addresses and phone numbers for each location.

From the Director

Although the 2012 hurricane season in the Atlantic doesn't start officially until June 1, we've already experienced some surprisingly early storm activity. Alberto, which national hurricane center officials announced as the earliest-forming tropical storm in the Atlantic since 2003, was followed in short order by Tropical Storm Beryl. Now seems like a great time to talk about the VISN Emergency Management Readiness Program and our ability to respond when needed.



The geography of this network leaves us susceptible to a variety of natural disasters – from hurricanes on the eastern seaboard to snow and ice in Asheville, N.C., Salem, Va., and Beckley W. Va. Additionally, our region has experienced tornados, earthquakes, floods, fires and power outages, all of which can dramatically impact the delivery of health care.

Our commitment to provide a continuum of service to our Veterans and their families isn't restricted just to good times and fair weather. In emergencies, VA plays an important role for those who served. Furthermore, we are often called upon to support DOD's health care during war or national emergency. We must be prepared to deal with whatever comes our way. That's the primary aim of our readiness program.

We are constantly examining our ability to provide continuity of operations during a crisis. The attack on Sept. 11 refocused efforts on ensuring our readiness posture meets the need when put to the test. While there is always room for improvement, VISN 6 has made dramatic advances in our readiness program over the past three years. For example, in line with VHA's expansion of the Office of Emergency Management as an area of focus, we added a full time position here at the VISN dedicated to improving emergency management support and continuity of service to the medical centers.

And, while people make it happen, they must have the right tools and training to be successful. Under emergency operating conditions, maintaining the continuum of care requires robust logistics over an extended geographic area. With our combined assets, we have to be able to safely evacuate, transport, monitor and track patients from the point of departure to the point of arrival and back again. We can do this because the emergency management teams are better trained, equipped and staffed than ever before. We now have ambulance buses, decontamination equipment, state-of-the-art communication gear and links to services such as Accuweather and SkyGuard. As a matter of fact, for fiscal 2012, we will spend nearly \$2 million on readiness enhancements including more communication equipment, generators, snow removal gear, and training for our people.

I am especially proud of the successful completion of the latest Federal Emergency Management Agency training by dozens of VISN employees. Our people have attended classes across the country, bringing back the knowledge and current wisdom as to best emergency response practices. Perhaps partnerships we've made along the way will prove to be the real key to future suc-

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Questions or comments about the newsletter, e-mail Bruce Sprecher@va.gov or call 919-956-5541.



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Network Seeks Health Care Providers

The VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network is looking for highly qualified health care providers. If you or someone you know is looking for a challenging and rewarding opportunity, please contact Harold "Keith" Liles Jr., Mid-Atlantic Region's National Healthcare Recruitment Consultant, for additional information. Liles can be reached via email at Harold.Liles@va.gov or by phone at 919-408-4741.

Current Vacancies

Psychologist - Salisbury, N.C.

Clinical Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Primary Care Provider - Fayetteville, Wilmington, Hamlet, and Brunswick County N.C.

Pharmacist - Hampton, Va.

Dermatologist, Gastroenterologist, Urologist - Salem, Va.

Psychologist, Gastroenterologist - Beckley, W. Va.

cess. We are now routinely training and collaborating with our community partners to ensure that when the time comes, we have established the communication links and understanding between agencies that will allow all of us to come through any disaster or mishap as safely as possible.

It's important for you to know how serious we are about emergency management. We're doing our best to educate, train and equip our workforce to be able to provide the continuity of care for all our Veterans, no matter what comes our way.

Sincerely,

Dan Hoffmann



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century



New Program Enhances VA Services For Caregivers

By Jeff Melvin
VISN 6 public affairs

Our nation's nearly continuous engagement in combat since Sept. 11, 2001 has prompted the rise of a new generation of heroes, perhaps none more deserving of recognition than the selfless family members providing comfort and care to the legions of men and women who suffered serious injuries in the line of duty.

Consider these staggering figures: more than two million servicemembers have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and more than 40,000 have been injured, including 5,500 with severe Traumatic Brain Injuries. While Defense Department, Department of Veterans Affairs and civilian health professionals work tirelessly to restore the health and well being of so many injured warriors, the role family caregivers play can't be understated, said Debra Volkmer, one of the organizers of the Caregiver Support Conference held at the network headquarters April 18 and 19.

The conference brought nurses and clinical social workers serving as caregiver support coordinators together for face-to-face training to enhance their knowledge and skills.

"Family caregivers are the lifeline, allowing Veterans with TBI and other injuries to not only reintegrate back into the community, but to do so in the comfort of their own homes," said Volkmer, a licensed clinical social worker who is the caregiver support coordinator at the Salisbury VAMC as well as the VISN 6 Lead Caregiver Support Coordinator.

According to Volkmer, VA offers roughly two dozen supportive programs to Veterans of all eras, including a National Caregiver Support Line and its most recent initiative spurred by the enactment of Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. Along with the comprehensive assistance that the new program offers to general caregivers for Veterans of all eras, the new program provides additional support to eligible post-9/11



Luke Thompson
Kevin Donnelly, Salisbury VAMC OEF/OIF social work case manager; left, speaks with Brooke and David Brown prior to the start of a monthly caregivers support group meeting..

Veterans who elect to receive their care in a home setting from a primary family caregiver.

"The new program builds on the foundation of caregiver support now provided at VA and reflects what families and clinicians have long known: that family caregivers in a home environment can enhance the health and well-being of Veterans under VA care," the VISN 6 Lead CSC said.

As a result of the new legislation, since May 2011 eligible post-9/11 Veterans and their family caregivers have been able to apply for the new services at www.caregiver.va.gov. Support coordinators are also available at all VA medical centers to assist with the application process and direct Veterans and their family caregivers to other support programs VA offers.

The number of caregivers throughout VISN 6 has grown considerably since the enactment of the new legislation and the subsequent enhanced benefits. Currently, within the network there are 256 approved family caregivers, with about 60 more applications in progress along with more than 300 general caregivers. These figures represent a marked contrast from figures from December 2011 when there were only 140 approved family caregivers with about 35 more applica-

tions in progress along with about 50 general caregivers.

One of these family caregivers is Brooke Brown, whose husband David, a Marine lance corporal, survived a mortar attack in Iraq in October 2006. Despite having five mortars explode beneath him, the 19-year old warrior initially appeared to have emerged miraculously unscathed.

By the end of his second tour in the war zone in May 2008, something was obviously wrong. He was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury traced back to the mortar attack on his first deployment.

He began experiencing PTSD-like symptoms and frequent memory loss and speech problems. David's condition continued to deteriorate but somehow he was separated from active duty with the severity of his condition unrecognized despite Brooke's efforts to get him help.

David's health deteriorated and the couple's financial struggles began to mount as Brooke was forced to give up her job to provide around the clock care fearful to leave him alone for more than a few minutes at a time.

Thanks to Brooke's determination and assistance from the Marine Corps Wounded

Continued on Pg 8

Program Facts

What services are provided?

General caregivers are provided support, training, and referrals to VA and community services (home health aides, skilled nursing homecare, respite, adult day health care, home based primary care, contracted nursing facilities, support groups, eligibility and benefits).

Family caregivers are provided the same support as well as guidance and coordination during the stipend/healthcare application process. Core training, as well as travel and lodging costs (if required) during training sessions and Veterans' appointments, are additional benefits. If the Veteran and their caregiver successfully complete the application process, monthly stipend checks will be awarded along with healthcare benefits if needed.

Who is Eligible?

Veterans of all eras are eligible for support, referrals for in-home supports, resources, training, and regular follow up under the general caregivers program. A veteran with a line-of-duty injury incurred or exacerbated on or after 9/11 may be eligible for family caregiver benefits and, in addition, may qualify for a monthly stipend and healthcare benefits based on activity of daily living deficits and care giving needs.

How does one apply?

Applying for either program can be done over the internet at www.caregiver.va.gov/, or by calling VA's Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 11p.m., and Saturdays 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., or in person at the Veteran's servicing VA medical center. Veterans and/or their caregivers can get contact information for their local caregiver support coordinator through the Help Near Home page locator on the caregiver support website.



Carol Waters

Vice Adm. Kevin McCoy receives a tour of the Charlotte CBOC and an overview of services offered at the clinic.

Senior Navy Leader Visits Charlotte VA Clinic

Vice Adm. Kevin M. McCoy, commander, Naval Sea Systems Command, visited the Veterans and staff at the Charlotte VA outpatient clinic, May 16

During his visit, Admiral McCoy met with Dr. Kathleen Wolner, medical director, and staff for an overview of services offered at the clinic, followed by a tour of the facility. Areas visited included imaging, primary care, endo/minor outpatient surgery and mental health.

The admiral also visited with Veterans who were reporting for appointments, and thanked them individually for their military service.

McCoy was in Charlotte to participate in the Military Awareness Week activities sponsored by Mecklenburg County and Community Area Resource Team for Troops. Following his visit to the Charlotte VA clinic, he was the special guest speaker at the Armed Forces Career Expo, held at the Navy-Marine Corps Reserve Center. He provided information about the Naval Sea Systems Command Wounded Warrior Program and employment opportunities.

NAVSEA is the largest of the Navy's five system commands, with a fiscal year budget of nearly \$30 billion, which represents one quarter of the Navy's entire budget. NAVSEA is comprised of command staff, headquarters directorates, affiliated program executive offices and numerous field activities.



Rebecca Roberts

Lynchburg Veterans Hold Weekly Rally

Malcolm Perry, left, and Steve Bozeman, right, are among a group of Veterans from the Lynchburg CBOC who have been supporting our troops with a monthly rally in downtown Lynchburg for more than 13 years. The group meets every Friday from noon to 1 p.m. at Monument Terrace and hasn't missed a Friday since it all began. Veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, through present day Iraq and Afghanistan show their support for our men and women in uniform and remember those that have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation.

"All of the staff at the Lynchburg CBOC would like to thank these Veterans for standing up to support our troops, said Rebecca Roberts, licensed practical nurse, Lynchburg CBOC. "We are proud to serve our community by taking care of our Veterans both past and present that have so proudly served in the military. We uphold the mission of the VA to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and well-being."

Tobacco Cessation Support Available Via Web DoD and VA are collaborating to provide VA Veterans enrolled for care in the VA health care system with comprehensive tobacco cessation support via the web. Through the ucanquit2 website, Veterans can access proven quit techniques and tools to help them quit and stay tobacco-free.

At www.ucanquit2.org/thinkingaboutquitting/veterans/default.aspx, Veterans can:

- Chat live with a tobacco quit coach. Quit coaches are available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day to answer your questions about quitting smoking and chewing tobacco. Please indicate that you are a Veteran enrolled in the VA health care system.
- Talk to your VA health care provider about how to quit smoking, including getting medication to improve your chances of quitting and a referral to a VA smoking cessation clinic. Visit the Locate Support section to find the nearest VA health care facility.
- Enroll in Train2Quit, a confidential, interactive system that can double your chances of successfully quitting. Train2Quit offers

self-assessment questionnaires, a custom quit plan with calendar to track progress, and tips on how to beat cravings, overcome weight gain, and cope with the effects of nicotine withdrawal.

- Get the answers to frequently asked questions about how to get help to quit tobacco, what it means to be a Veteran enrolled for care in the VA health care system, and much more!
- Get support for staying tobacco-free, connect with others who are quitting, and receive important tobacco-related news.

Find more "ucanquit2" material on Facebook and Twitter.

To learn more about health benefits for all enrolled Veterans visit: www4.va.gov/healtheligibility/coveredservices/Standard-Benefits.asp.

Honors Rendered Throughout VISN 6 On Memorial Day



Brad Garner

A lone trumpeter, Veteran Mickey Miller, plays taps at the Fayetteville VAMC Memorial Day ceremony.



Dr. Bill Grunow

Soldiers, Spec. Criswell and CW5 Stephens, place a wreath in front of a grave marker at the Hampton National Cemetery on the grounds of the Hampton VAMC.



Dr. Bill Grunow

Capt. Freeman honors fallen Marines during the Hampton National Cemetery ceremony.



Jon Lakey, Salisbury Post

Wreath laying ceremony at the Salisbury National Cemetery on the grounds of the Salisbury VAMC.



Dr. Bill Grunow

A young girl admires the flowers following the ceremony at the Hampton National Cemetery.



Dr. Bill Grunow

Two USS Theodore Roosevelt Sailors honor fallen Sailors at the Hampton National Cemetery ceremony. Left: A Joint Service Rifle Team from Joint Base Langley-Eustis performs a 21-gun salute from Va.

Dr. Bill Grunow

VA Celebrates National Nurses Week May 6-12

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the nation's largest single employer of nurses, joined the American Nurses Association in honoring America's nurses dedicated to saving lives and maintaining the health of millions of individuals during National Nurses Week, May 6-12.

"Nurses: Advocating, Leading, Caring" was this year's Nurses Week theme as VA health care facilities throughout the country paid tribute to the nearly 80,000 nurses who Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network Director Daniel F. Hoffmann calls "the compassionate backbone of VA's world-class health care system."

Annually, National Nurses Week begins May 6, marked as Nurse Recognition Day, and ends on May 12, the birthday of Florence Nightingale, founder of nursing as a modern profession. Dur-

ing this week, nurses throughout the VISN were honored with activities such as recognition ceremonies, receptions, dinners, essay contests, photo displays, guest speakers, "Retro Days" and "Blessing of the Hands" ceremonies.

National Nurses Week highlights the diverse ways in which registered nurses, the largest health care profession, work to improve health care. From bedside nursing in hospitals and long-term care facilities to the halls of research institutions, state legislatures, and Congress, the depth and breadth of the nursing profession is meeting the expanding health care needs of American society and its Veterans.

For more about VA nurses, check the web at www.va.gov/nursing/.

VA Nursing: A Profession & Passion

Since its establishment in 1930, VA has been the largest employer of nurses in the country. Nearly 80,000 nursing personnel – including registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, health technicians and nursing assistants – work in VA's national medical system.

In 1921, about 1,400 hospital nurses from the Public Health Service were transferred to the new Veterans' Bureau, the forerunner of VA. Long term care dominated the bureau's health-care mission. Forty-one percent of its Veteran patients had tuberculosis, 39 percent had neuropsychiatric disorders and 20 percent had general medical and surgical problems.

VA Nursing Service took its present shape in 1930 when three federal agencies responsible for Veterans programs consolidated into the new Veterans Administration. Approximately 2,500 registered nurses assigned to the U.S. Civil Service went to work for VA.

In 1942, VA launched a large-scale, clinical training program for student nurses. During World War II, approximately 1,000 student cadet nurses were assigned to VA hospitals, spending six months or more of their academic programs gaining clinical nursing experience.

In 1945, VA nurses were given professional status within the U.S. Civil Service personnel system. The following year, Public Law 293 (Title 38 U.S.C.) reorganized and modernized the VA health-care system. The law removed VA nurses, physicians and dentists from civil service, placing them

in their own "Title 38" personnel system under unique and specific personnel policies. Under this system, VA nurses were compensated according to experience, education and competencies, regardless of position assignments, i.e., clinical or administrative.

Continuing education became a hallmark of VA nursing during the 1950s. VA's first chief of nursing education was appointed in 1950. Affiliations with schools of nursing expanded, resulting in a steady growth in the number of nursing students receiving VA clinical experience. New educational requirements stressed the importance of academic preparation for registered nurses.

VA hospital affiliations with schools of nursing mushroomed during the 1960s. Similarly, new medical technologies of the '60s stimulated specialization within VA Nursing Service. Also of note, nursing school deans were added to VA hospital dean committees and VA introduced nurse intern and nurse residency programs.

The number of VA clinical nurse specialists and nurse practitioners grew during the '70s. By 1973, VA nurses were performing a wider variety of health care functions than ever before through a growing number of nurse administered patient care units and satellite clinics. In 1973, in the first major use of nurse practitioners in VA, 43 nurse practitioner positions were added to improve patient care in admissions areas. Today, VA has about 4,000 nurse practitioners.

Continued on Pg 7



Courtesy Photo
Asheville VAMC operating room nurses Allison Walsh, Courtney Anderson, Christie Anderson, Caroline Escobar are recognized during Nurses Week.



Steve Riddick
Hampton VAMC registered nurse Josie Gurganus speaks with Veteran Frederick Hogue about his medications. Gurganus recently received the Hands and Heart Award for her nursing excellence and dedication.



Fayetteville VAMC nurses wear traditional white uniforms as part of Nurses Week activities

Brad Garner

Nursing continued from Pg 6

The '70s saw other significant changes. For example, in 1973 the position of VA Director of Nursing Service was elevated to the same level as other clinical service directors within the Department of Medicine and Surgery (now the Veterans Health Administration) and in 1976, registered nurses outnumbered nursing assistants for the first time.

The '80s began with another change representative of the growing recognition of nurses' value, the elevation of the VA Director of Nursing Service to a new title, "Deputy Assistant Chief Director for Nursing Programs."

The VA Health Professional Scholarship Program was established in 1982 to provide awards to students in nursing and other shortage-category positions in return for their full-time employment by VA following graduation.

Since 1980, a program for master's level nurse specialists from affiliated schools has provided advanced, clinical experience at VA facilities in geriatrics, psychiatric and mental health, critical care, rehabilitation and adult health.

The VA Learning Opportunities Residency Training Program has attracted the best and brightest nursing students to VA since its inception in 1990. The program provides selected well-qualified baccalaureate nursing students between their junior and senior years a paid VA medical center assignment, where they receive clinical experience under the direct supervisor of an experienced RN preceptor.

Each fiscal year, VA provides clinical experiences for nearly 30,000 student nurses. VA provides clinical experiences to one out of every four professional nurses in the country through affiliations with more than 450 nursing schools.

VA initiated the post-doctoral nurse fellowship program in 1994.

As the end of the decade neared, in FY 1999 VA committed \$50 million to assist VA nurses seeking baccalaureate degrees in nursing and adopted new performance standards requiring a four-year degree for registered nurses by 2005.

To support of this initiative, the VA Nursing Strategic Healthcare Group launched a first of its kind Distance Learning Education Program with the Department of Defense. The VA/DoD Distance Learning Program provides a post-masters certificate for nurse practitioners and educates clinical nurse specialists across the country by the faculty of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. Today, VA also sponsors several students each year in the USUHS Doctoral Program for Nursing Sciences,



Courtesy Photo

Salem VAMC "Blessing of the Hands" ceremony.

Nurses By Category

VA had 77,160 nursing personnel (including nurse anesthetists) as of April 2010:

Registered Nurses (RN)	47,508
Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA)	649
Nurse Practitioners (NP) +	4,254
Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) +	538
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses (LPN/LVN)	13,001
Nursing Assistants (NA)	11,103

+These categories are included in the RN Total

*Source: VA Nursing Outcomes Database, VANOD, extracted 04/10; PAID File by Budget Object Code (BOC) - all skill mix.

providing tuition support for qualified VA nurses.

In recent years, to continue VA's mission toward addressing the nursing shortage, VA has instituted several other scholarship and tuition reimbursement programs that support nurses in continuing their education in order to increase their competencies as well as obtain degrees that would qualify them for positions in which recruitment and retention have been a problem.

In May 2008, VA celebrated the graduation of the 4,000th VA nurse through the employee incentive scholarship program. The program awards scholarships to employees pursuing degrees or training in health care disciplines for which recruitment and retention of qualified personnel is difficult.

In January 2009, ONS began piloting a multi-phased, 12-month registered nurse residency program at eight sites varying by complexity and geographic location.

In April 2009, five more nursing schools formed new partnerships with five VA medical centers and joined the VA Nursing Academy, bringing the total in this pilot to 15. VA Nursing Academy enables competitively selected VA-nursing school partnerships to expand the number of nursing faculty, enhance the professional and scholarly development of nurses, increase student enrollment by about 1,000 students and promote innovations in nursing education.

ONS has implemented the clinical nurse leader role nationally and continues to integrate the CNL role in every care setting of every VA Medical Center by 2016. Evidence suggests that a positive relationship exists between the numbers and educational level of professional nurses involved in direct patient care and the quality of the care outcomes.

Similarly, in 2009 ONS developed the assistant nurse manager role. The role is designed to offer aspiring leaders the opportunity to assume additional management responsibilities in preparation for a nurse manager position. (Source: www.va.gov/nursing.)

National D-Day Memorial Honors Heroism Of Allied Forces

On June 6, 1944, 150,000 Allied troops landed along a 50-mile stretch of heavily-fortified French coastline to fight Nazi Germany on the beaches of Normandy, France. General Dwight D. Eisenhower called the operation a crusade in which “we will accept nothing less than full victory.”

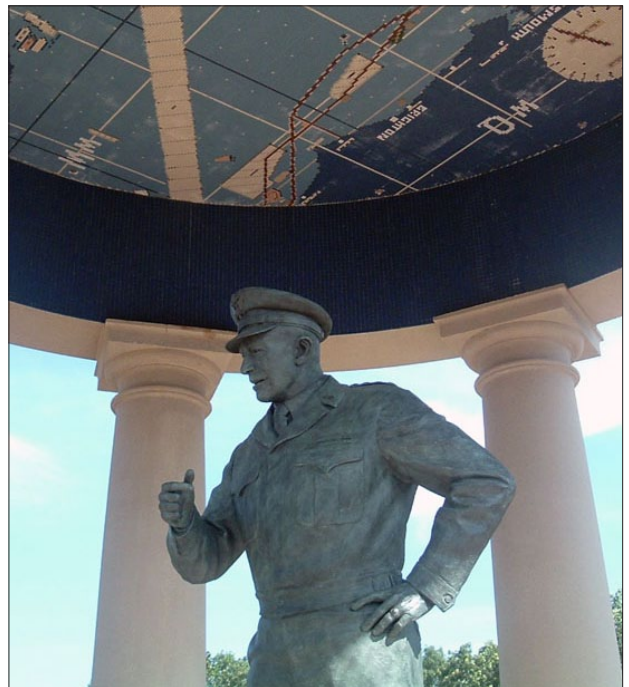


More than 5,000 ships and 11,000 aircraft supported the invasion, and by day’s end, the Allies gained a foot-hold in France. The D-Day cost was high with more than 9,000 Allied soldiers killed or wounded as the march across Europe to defeat Hitler began.

The National D-Day Memorial is located within VISN 6, in Bedford, Va. Bedford suffered the highest per capita D-Day losses in the nation. The National D-Day Memorial honors the Allied forces that participated in the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944.

With its stylized English Garden, haunting invasion tableau, and striking Victory Plaza, the Memorial stands as a powerful permanent tribute to the valor, fidelity, and sacrifice of D-Day participants. Surrounded by the beautiful majestic Blue Ridge mountains, this makes for a solemn and respectful tribute for our fallen heroes.

For more information, visit the National D-Day Memorial website at www.dday.org.



Caregiver continued from Pg 3

Warrior Program, David’s case caught the attention of Marine Corps officials who acknowledged that mistakes had been made in the handling of his case and brought him back to duty as a prelude to granting him a medical discharge and clearing the way for disability payments.

At the height of their struggles to obtain disability ratings and payment, Brooke heard about the Post 9-11 Caregiver Program and applied.

She said she applied and within a month, she received a call from Volkmer, on a Saturday. “Who in the government works on a Saturday,” Brooke remarked.

“I thought it was another scam,” the 23-year-old mother of four said. “I ate my words and I still eat my words to date. This VA program has made me realize that VA cares not only for the Vet but for the people that take care of the Vet as well.”

The stipend “helps replace some of the income that I would bring in if I was working. I can’t work; I can’t be away for a significant amount of time, maybe 30 minutes at the most,” she said.

Additional resources are also available such as occupational therapy and the “peace of mind” she receives from being a mem-

ber of her caregiver support group.

“It just helps to have that hour a month to be able to communicate with others and know that I’m not fighting this battle alone,” she said.

She reserves her highest praise for Volkmer, about whom she said, “There are no words to describe her. She’s a saint; she’s been there with me through every type of hardship.”

Brooke is so appreciative of Volkmer and the members of her caregiver support group that she wants to follow their example. She said to be able to give someone help and support like she has received would “make my day, my year.”

Assistance and information on additional resources are available to family caregivers through VA’s updated caregiver website, www.caregiver.va.gov or VA’s National Caregiver Support Line at 1-885-260-3274. In addition, All VA medical centers have caregiver support coordinators.

Veterans and caregivers with questions about the new program can contact Volkmer at 1-800-469-8262 Ext. 4499 or contact the CSC at their servicing VA medical center through the “Help Near Home” locator on the caregiver support website.

VA Awards \$2.7 Million Energy Improvements Contract

VISN 6 officials anticipate realizing sizable energy savings under a new contract VA has awarded to a national engineering consulting firm to provide retro commissioning services for the network's eight medical centers.

Engineering Economics, Inc., a Veteran-owned small business firm with branches in Raleigh, N.C. and Roanoke, Va., has been awarded a \$2.7 million contract to identify and recommend "low and no cost" energy conservation measures.

According to VISN 6 Energy Manager Mark Hudson, retro commissioning is a systematic process for improving and optimizing the operation and maintenance of buildings, primarily focused on energy efficiency and system performance.

"This process will resolve problems which occurred during the design, construction or that developed throughout a building's life," Hudson said.

He added that the Energy Independence and Security Act requires federal buildings over 50,000 square feet to undergo a retro commissioning or RCx process at least every four years.

A study by the Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory indicated commissioning of all sorts, including retro commissioning, can provide large reductions in carbon emissions. Commissioning, the LBNL study said, is "arguably the single-most cost-effective strategy" for cutting greenhouse-gas emissions from buildings.

Hudson said all eight VISN 6 medical centers will undergo RCx this year, with anticipated identified energy savings of \$1 to

\$3 million per year.

"Not only will energy efficiency be increased, but other internal issues such as comfort and indoor air quality will be improved," said the VISN energy manager. "As building systems operate over the years, control systems begin to fail, and building operators will make adjustments to the control system to compensate. Over time these issues begin to compound and RCx will identify the problems and develop a plan to correct them."

He said some problems can be corrected on the spot, some with a minor investment and others may require a project to fix.

He offered an example. "An RCx project at a VA facility in California found building systems operating simultaneously in 100 percent cooling mode and 100 percent heating mode, essentially fighting each. Once proper control was regained, the occupants were more comfortable and the energy consumption decreased by 30 percent. An RCx project will typically result in energy savings ranging from two to 18 percent, depending upon many factors, including age, maintenance practices, renovations and new technologies.

Due to the size of the project, EEI will partner with local contractors and add additional staff, creating jobs for local communities. An assessment of the sites will be performed by EEI, focusing on mechanical, electrical, plumbing and automation systems.

More information on EEI and its projects can be found on the firm's website at www.eeengineers.com.

Wheelchair Games Date Nears

In less than a month, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games return to Richmond where they began 31 years ago on the Richmond VAMC campus. The Games are set to take place June 25-30.

More than 650 athletes have registered their intent to participate in the 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games, co-hosted by Richmond VAMC and the Virginia Mid-Atlantic Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America. The first National Veterans Wheelchair Games featured 74 Veterans from 14 states.

Included in the total number of wheelchair athletes attending the Games in Richmond are 79 VISN 6 athletes – 24 athletes from North Carolina, 48 from Virginia and 7 from West Virginia. The number of registrants approaches a Games record.

"I can't believe the Richmond community's overwhelming response to the Games," said 32nd NVWG Director Alison Faulk. She added that the local organizing committee has been working for more than a year on coordinating activities.

She added that the event couldn't happen for the athletes without the dedication of a committed group of organizers. "The staff at Richmond has been incredible. They have been so committed to making the Games here an experience Veterans will long remember," Faulk said.

In addition to the core staff of volunteers, more than 2,000 people from the community and around Virginia and North Carolina have pledged their assistance to make the Games a success throughout the week. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki is expected to attend.

In 2011, athletes traveled from 45 states, Puerto Rico and Great Britain to attend the event. Any honorably discharged Veteran who uses a wheelchair to compete in sports and is eligible for health care in the VA system can compete in the Games.

The events are open to the public and admission is free. Organizers estimate the Wheelchair Games will generate approximately \$3 million in revenue for the Richmond community.

For more information call Alison Faulk, 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games local organizing committee chairperson at 804.675.5208 or email her at alison.faulk@va.gov. For volunteer information call Richmond VAMC at 804-675-5135 or email Janet Langhorne at janet.langhorne@va.gov.



Neil Glover

Veteran ID Card Unveiled

Virginia Gov. Robert F. McDonnell addresses an audience at the Richmond VAMC May 30 during a photo opportunity unveiling the state's new Veteran ID card available from the Department of Motor Vehicles in partnership with the Department of Veterans Services. The card will help Virginia Veterans identify themselves as Veterans and receive retail and restaurant discounts. The launch took place at the medical center where a DMV 2 Go mobile office on site to process veterans' applications for the ID cards. After the event, Governor McDonnell, a U.S. Army Veteran who served for a total of 21 years in active duty and reserve roles, visited the mobile office to apply for the new ID card. The new Virginia Veterans ID Card is convenient and fits in a wallet, cutting down on Veterans having to carry the DD 214 military discharge document as identification.

New Form For Grave Medallion

WASHINGTON – VA has streamlined the process for families of deceased Veterans to receive a medallion which can be affixed to grave markers at private cemeteries and indicates the Veteran status of the deceased.

“This new form streamlines the ordering process, making it easier for families to order the medallion,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The families want everyone to know that their loved one was a Veteran. We should help them do that in any way we can.”

Previously, families ordered the medallion using the form to order a government headstone or marker. VA has introduced a new form – VA Form 40-1330M – for use solely to order a medallion. The older form, VA Form 40-1330, remains in place to order a traditional government headstone or marker.

The medallion is a device furnished in lieu of a traditional Government headstone or grave marker for Veterans whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, and whose

grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. Under federal law, eligible Veterans buried in a private cemetery are entitled to either a government-furnished grave marker or the medallion, but not both.

The medallion is available in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in width. Each bronze medallion features the image of a folded burial flag adorned with laurels and is inscribed with the word “Veteran” at the top and the Veteran’s branch of service at the bottom. Next of kin receive the medallion, along with a kit that allows the family or the staff of a private cemetery to affix the medallion to a headstone, grave marker, mausoleum or columbarium niche cover.

Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment.

More information about the medallion or headstones and markers can be found at www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmorder.asp.

VA Eliminates Copayment For In-Home Video Telehealth Care

WASHINGTON – Since May 7, VA is no longer charging Veterans a copayment when they receive care in their homes from VA health professionals using video conferencing.

“Eliminating the copayment for this service will remove an unnecessary financial burden for Veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “We will continue to do everything we can to ensure that Veterans have access to the first-class care they have earned with their service to our Nation.”

This change will primarily benefit Veterans with limited mobility, such as spinal cord injury patients. Whenever medically appropriate, VA will make the home the preferred place of care for Veterans to ensure timely and convenient access to VA services.

For more information about telehealth, visit: www.telehealth.va.gov/.

www.telehealth.va.gov/.

Data has shown that expanded use of technology in the home enables patients with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, chronic heart failure and hypertension, to live independently, actively engage in managing their health, and prevents avoidable hospitalization of patients who otherwise may need long-term institutional care.

Home telehealth does not replace the need for nursing home care or for traditional noninstitutional care programs. However, it enhances the ability for many Veterans to better understand and manage chronic diseases. This partnership with their care team helps delay the need for institutionalization and enables them to maintain independence for an extended period of time, thus improving their overall quality of life.

Detroit To Host Small Business Conf.

WASHINGTON – The National Veterans Small Business Conference, the government’s premier event for Veteran-owned small businesses, is coming to Detroit’s Cobo Center June 26-29.

VA also announced that a “VA for Vets” Hiring Fair will be held June 26-28 during the conference for Veterans looking for careers in the public and private sectors. The conference is expected to attract thousands of Veterans, business owners and federal employees, and bring an estimated \$3 million in direct spending to the city.

“VA is committed to bringing more Veteran-owned businesses into the public-private partnership,” said VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich. “In addition to the National Veterans Small Business Conference, our Detroit Hiring Fair will provide Veterans with on-the-spot job opportunities and interviews, while also offering career search classes and one-on-one counseling.”

Last year’s National Veterans Small Business Conference and Expo in New Orleans drew almost 5,000 attendees, and more than 6,000 participants are expected this year.

The Detroit Hiring Fair builds upon VA’s success Jan. 18 in Washington at which a partnership of federal agencies and private industry attracted over 4,100 Veterans and resulted in over 2,600 on-the-spot interviews and more than 500 tentative job offers.

VA’s Facebook Passes 200K ‘Fans’

WASHINGTON – The primary Facebook page for the Department of Veterans Affairs has amassed more than 200,000 “fans,” increasing the department’s ability to communicate directly with Veterans across the nation.

The milestone was achieved less than three years after the creation of VA’s office of online communications, which oversees all social media programs. The office has been led by Brandon Friedman since its inception in August 2009, and was launched as part of the administration’s “Open Government” plan.

“This is a notable milestone for VA,” said Mike Galloucis, VA’s

“These events are part of Secretary Shinseki’s ongoing efforts to help Veterans find employment in both the public and private sectors,” said Gingrich. “As the President said in yesterday’s State of the Union address, Veterans are crucial to our economy, and we need to find them jobs.”

This year’s conference will include an open house June 26-28 that gives Veterans the chance to learn the wide range of resources available to help them with their own businesses. Also available will be the VetGovPartner online platform, which enables networking, viewing the business profiles of all participants, and identifying business opportunities with more than 400 government procurement decision makers in attendance.

Known historically as the world’s capital for the transportation industry, the Detroit metro area is reinventing itself with six booming industries: medical research, defense, entertainment, green tech, urban farming, and aeronautics. About 330,000 Veterans are served by the city’s VA medical center, and more than 704,000 Veterans live in Michigan.

VA invites all interested persons and businesses to attend. More information about the small business conference is available at www.national-veteransconference.com. Information and registration for the hiring fair is available at www.VAforVets.VA.Gov/Detroit.

executive director of public and intergovernmental affairs. “It shows we are using all available means to reach Veterans.”

VA has over 150 Facebook pages, most of which belong to individual VA medical centers, with more than 440,000 combined fans. In addition to Facebook, VA maintains an extensive social media presence with 70 Twitter feeds, the Vantage Point blog, a YouTube channel with over 400 videos, and a Flickr page containing over 12,000 photos.

To access and connect to VA’s social media sites, visit VA’s social media directory at www.va.gov/opa/socialmedia.asp.

VA, American Heart Association 'Go Red For Women'

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Heart Association have entered into a formal agreement to raise awareness of heart disease and strokes among women Veterans and Servicemembers, and wives of Veterans and military members.

"This exciting collaboration bolsters VA's ongoing efforts to prevent cardiovascular disease," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "This is an important issue for women Veterans, and we need to do everything we can to address it."

In support of the First Lady's "Joining Forces" initiative, VA and the American Heart Association's "Go Red For Women" are partnering to raise awareness among America's female Veterans of heart disease – the number one killer of women.

"Currently, some eight million women in the U.S. are living with heart disease, yet only one in six American women believes that heart disease is her greatest health threat," said Dr. Susan Bennett, cardiologist, MedStar Washington Hospital Center and national "Go Red For Women" spokesperson. "Go Red For Women is excited about our newest strategic alliance with VA because it will provide additional opportunities to increase awareness of women's number one killer and encourage military women – active, veterans and military wives – to actively prevent heart attacks and stroke."

The two organizations share a common priority to reach women with important information about heart disease. By combining efforts, they can maximize their resources and improve communication of the "Go Red For Women" messages to women Veterans and military audiences.

VA will focus on educating women Veterans about their risks for cardiovascular disease through the use of "Go Red For Women" online resources. These include "Go Red BetterU," a free online nutrition and fitness program and "Go



Red Heart Match," a database that allows women to connect with others who share similar experiences. VA and "Go Red For Women" hope to increase consumers' sensitivity to issues that military women face, especially as it pertains to putting their health first.

"VA continues to focus on women's cardiovascular disease prevention and outreach, and has improved gaps in heart disease prevention measures between men and women," said Dr. Robert Jesse, VA's principal deputy under secretary for health, and a cardiologist. "This collaboration will strengthen our efforts and further the conversation about women's risks for heart disease."

Women serve in every branch of the military, representing 15 percent of today's active duty military and nearly 18 percent of National Guard and reserve forces. Women are now the fastest growing cohort within the Veteran community. In 2011, about 1.8 million or 8 percent of the 22.2 million Veterans were women. The male Veteran population is projected to decrease from 20.2 million men in 2010 to 16.7 million by 2020. In contrast, the number of women Veterans will increase from 1.8 million in 2011 to 2 million in 2020, at which time women will make up 10.7 percent of the total Veteran population.

For more information, call the VA at 1-800-827-1000 or visit: www.womenshealth.va.gov, or call 1-888-MY-HEART (1-888-694-3278) or visit www.goredforwomen.org.

VA Continues Long-Term Study On Gulf War Era Veterans

WASHINGTON – For the third time since the 1990-1991 Gulf War, VA researchers will contact Gulf War-era Veterans as a part of a long-term study of their health.

"Our message to our Gulf War Veterans is clear: We are not forgetting you, we are listening to you, and we are acting," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "This Gulf War follow-up study provides an important long-term look at how Gulf War Veterans are faring, and will provide essential data to guide the care of these Veterans."

For the "Follow-up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans," researchers want to learn about how the health of these Veterans has changed over time, and about the natural history of long-term conditions like unexplained multi-symptom illnesses. Researchers will begin contacting participants at the end of May 2012. Veterans were previously contacted for a baseline survey in 1995 and a follow-up survey in 2005.

This continuing VA effort studies a group of approximately 15,000 Gulf War Veterans and 15,000 Veterans who served elsewhere during the Gulf War. The study group includes all branches of service, representing active, Reserve, and National Guard members. Women are being oversampled to make sure they are represented, making up 20 percent of the study sample. Veterans will respond via a paper or online survey, and researchers will also review medical records from a sample of study participants.

Veterans will be asked about health issues that affect them, including chronic medical conditions such as cancer, neurological, respiratory and immunological conditions, as well as general health perceptions, functional status, chronic fatigue syndrome-like illness, unexplained multi-symptom illness and women's health. Veterans will be queried about their physical activity and their use of alcohol and tobacco. They also will be asked about



their use of VA health care and satisfaction with their care.

More than a dozen scientific articles have been published from the two earlier surveys in the study. This work has investigated multi-symptom illnesses, chronic diseases, and environmental exposures associated with military deployment.

A recent scientific article showed that Gulf War Veterans' health has worsened over time compared to the health of Gulf War Era Veterans who served elsewhere. Gulf War Veterans reported higher rates of ongoing unexplained multi-symptom illness, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic fatigue syndrome-like illness, along with higher health care utilization, including frequent clinic visits and recurrent hospitalization. These findings, other ongoing studies, and future research efforts will help VA to better understand the health consequences of deployment and guide care delivery.

VA is funding the new study by a team from the Post-Deployment Health Epidemiology Program, Office of Public Health. VA is working towards improving care, services, and benefits for Veterans of all eras. More information can be found at www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/gulf-war-follow-up.asp.

VISN 6 Sites of Care

Albemarle POC
1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC
252-331-2191

Asheville VAMC
1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911, 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov/

Beckley VAMC
200 Veterans Avenue
Beckley, WV 25801
304-255-2121, 877-902-5142
www.beckley.va.gov/

Beckley Vet Center
1000 Johnstown Road
Beckley, WV 25801
304-252-8220

Brunswick Outreach Clinic
20 Medical Campus Drive
Supply, NC 28462
910-754-8574

Charlotte Vet Center
2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Charlotte CBOC
8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213

Charlottesville CBOC
650 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Danville CBOC
705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Durham VAMC
508 Fulton St.
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411, 888-878-6890
www.durham.va.gov/

Emporia CBOC
1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville VAMC
2300 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120, 800-771-6106
www.fayettevillenc.va.gov

Fayetteville Vet Center
4140 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28311
910-488-6252

Franklin CBOC
647 Wayah St.
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredricksburg CBOC
1965 Jefferson Davis Highway
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Greensboro Vet Center
2009 S. Elm-Eugene St.
Greensboro, NC 27406
336-333-5366

Greenbrier County CBOC
804 Industrial Park Rd.
Maxwelton, WV 24957
304-497-3900

Greenville CBOC
800 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27858
252-830-2149

Greenville Vet Center
1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Hamlet CBOC
100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hampton VAMC
100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961, 866-544-9961
www.hampton.va.gov/

Hickory CBOC
2440 Century Place, SE
Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex
1824 Hillandale Road
Durham, North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC
241 Freedom Way
Midway Park, NC 28544
910-353-6406, 910-353-6406

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center
110-A Branchwood Driv
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Lynchburg CBOC
1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC
5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Norfolk Vet Center
1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Princeton Vet Center
905 Mercer Street
Princeton, WV 24740
304-425-5653

Raleigh CBOC
3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex
3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Raleigh Vet Center
1649 Old Louisburg Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-856-4616

Richmond VAMC
1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000, 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov/

Roanoke Vet Center
350 Albemarle Ave., SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Robeson County CBOC
139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-521-8452

Rutherford County CBOC
374 Charlotte Rd.
Rutherfordton, NC 28139
828-288-2780

Salem VAMC
1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463, 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov/

Salisbury VAMC
1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000, 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov/

Staunton CBOC
102 Business Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC
123 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-2526

Virginia Beach CBOC
244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961, ext. 1900

Virginia Beach Vet Center
324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA, 23452
757-248-3665

Wilmington CBOC
736 Medical Center Drive
Wilmington, NC 28401
910-763-5979

Winston-Salem CBOC
190 Kimel Park Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27103
336-768-3296

Winston-Salem Annex
2101 Peters Creek Parkway
Winston-Salem, NC 27127
336-761-5300

Wytheville CBOC
165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400