

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



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Director's Message

Dear Friends -

In our last newsletter we announced several appointments to the V.A. by the Obama Administration. Another recent appointment is that of Emily Smith (of Des Moines) as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Intergovernmental Affairs for the V. A. We welcome her and look forward to the opportunity of working with her.

Several weeks ago I had the opportunity to meet with the President and Executive Vice-President of Historic Ships Memorial at Pacific Square while they were here in Des Moines. We visited with Sen. Jack Kibbie and Sen. Daryl Beall about the future plans for the U.S.S. Iowa. We discussed the timeline the Dept. of the Navy has tentatively set to ensure the ship is made into a historical museum. We are concerned that the more time that passes before restoration begins, the more it will cost as the exterior continues to deteriorate.



(L-R) William Stephens - Executive Vice President & Director of Historic Ships Memorial at Pacific Square; Sen. Daryl Beall - Chair, Senate Veterans Committee; Merylin Wong - President and Founding Director of Historic Ships; Sen. Jack Kibbie - President of Iowa Senate; and Patrick Palmersheim - Executive Director of IDVA

The legislature has just completed their 2009 session and, as always, we are thankful for all the assistance they provide us to better serve our veterans - especially given the current economic situation.

We continue to receive information on the new G.I. Bill; hopefully everything will be finalized by the time enrollment begins so there will not be a long back log of claimants awaiting payments.

Now that spring has arrived, we are hopeful that the weather will cooperate and give us some time to enjoy the outdoors before we see the annual return of hot, dry summer.

Sincerely,
Patrick J. Palmersheim, Executive Director
Iowa Department of Veterans

Iowa Vietnam Veterans Memorial Event

Iowa Vietnam Veterans will be honored at a special ceremony to be held May 7th, 2009. The event will begin at 10:00 am at the Vietnam Memorial located on the south side of the Capitol in Des Moines. Special guest speakers include Vietnam Veteran Larry Spencer, former POW.



This event was requested by the Iowa Legislature to honor veterans who served during the Vietnam War. A resolution was passed during the 2008 Legislative Session establishing the date and providing for the ceremony during 2009. ~

Iowa Veterans Cemetery

The cemetery's major improvement project this spring revolves around erosion control. During construction and following the dedication, the grounds staff has struggled with heavy rains and the erosion issues that it caused. The scenic beauty of the property, with its rolling hillsides, also contributes to the challenge.

However, progress is being made.

The biggest challenge has been around our burial sections. Federal protocol dictates that burials begin in the lowest point of a section, resulting in rain water rushing to those areas from higher elevations. Had weather conditions during construction allowed for growth of seed plantings, a majority of the erosion problems might have been mitigated. Staff often engages in repairing erosion after heavy rains only to be back at it again following another downpour.

The department is in the process of obtaining bids from seed vendors and plans to seed the affected areas. Both Dallas County and the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa Roadway Trust Fund) have stepped up to assist staff. They have donated money, time, and product to combat erosion.



Erosion control methods surrounding newly placed headstones



Additional attempts to control erosion near the administration building

Another affected area has been along the sidewalk that runs from the administration building south to the Committal Service Shelter. Seeding and matting has been applied along these troubled areas.



Seeding along the walkway toward the Committal Service Shelter

Planning is in progress to add another monument along the Memorial Walk. Last Veteran's Day, The Military Order of the Purple Heart (Iowa Chapter) dedicated its monument. The Iowa Vietnam Veterans of America service organization plans to have its monument dedicated this November 11th. Two other organizations have also approached the cemetery about possible monuments.

Cemetery Cont'd

Cemetery staff will occasionally address questions related to the placement of headstones in different sections around the cemetery. Stated simply, the type of burial will dictate the location. A casketed burial of a veteran and spouse is in a different location than the burial of a single veteran. Cremated remains are interred in different sections, as are the "In Memory Of" headstones of veterans whose remains have been scattered or are missing (e.g., lost at sea during WWII). Additionally, to give the cemetery some look of development burials are being split between sections. This also allows the ground to repair itself following a burial (complicated by erosion issues mentioned above). As of April 24th, the cemetery has coordinated the interment of 241 veterans and family members.



From time to time county commission members and directors visit the cemetery when they are in the area. IVC gladly welcomes each visit and, if time permits, tours of the property are arranged. Staff welcomes everyone to our state's special place of honor—the Iowa Veterans Cemetery. ~



Honor Flight Winnebago

On April 18, 2009, over 100 World War II veterans and 60 guardians boarded a chartered jet to travel to Washington, DC. The day trip began at 5:30 am when the travelers arrived at the Mason City Airport. A member of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs' staff was honored to be one of the guardians to make the trip with these veterans.

The plane arrived at Dulles International Airport and as the veterans deplaned, they were greeted by twenty Honor Flight volunteers from Washington, DC.



Volunteers hugged and thanked Iowa World War II veterans as they arrived in Washington, DC

Immediately upon arriving, the veterans were bused to the WWII Memorial on the Capitol Mall.



Iowa Veterans at THEIR Memorial!



Complete strangers on several occasions approached the Iowa veterans and thanked them for their service. This was one of the most emotional parts of the trip.



Former Senators Bob Dole (R-Kansas) and Elizabeth Dole (R-North Carolina) were at the WWII Memorial to greet veterans

Following lunch, the group visited the Lincoln Memorial end of the Mall and was able to visit the Korean and Vietnam Memorials while in the shadow of the 16th President.



Lincoln Memorial

Next there was a bus tour of the capitol city that took the three buses by the Department of Agriculture, several Smithsonian Museums, the Capitol building, and the White House. Following this, the tour continued to Arlington National Cemetery for the changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and a visit to the Iwo Jima Memorial. The group then departed and returned to Mason City for a hero's welcome. ~



Changing of the Guard



The group saluting at the Iwo Jima Monument



Welcome Home!

Legislative Update

The 2009 Iowa Legislative Session is over after 105 days of debate that concluded with two marathon weekend sessions. The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs was very busy this session, monitoring over 50 bills that could affect veterans. In total, twelve policy bills have passed the Legislature and were sent to the governor for signature. These bills include:

Interstate Compact for Military Children (HF 214); Definition of a Veteran Change (HF 503); County Office Cleanup Language (HF 283); Military Casualty Flag Presentation (SF 112); Mortgage Foreclosure Protection for Activated Military (HF 706); Federal Department of Veterans Affairs Name Change in Iowa Code (SF 241); VA Prescription Drugs in Long Term Care Facilities (SF 440); Report on County Veterans Offices Activities (SF 254); Veterans Preference for Non-Iowa Resident (SF186); Unemployment Insurance Changes for Temporary Workers Replacing Activated Military Personnel (SF 197, Section 4); Reporting of Veterans Living in an Assisted Living Facility (SF 203); and In-State Tuition for Non-Resident Veterans Domiciled in Iowa(SF 451).

In addition to these policy bills, the legislature has taken action on the department's budget which included funding a \$10,000 allocation for each county and an additional \$1.6 million for the Military Homeownership Program.



Photo by Lisa Purvis

Once the Governor finalizes his actions on all veterans legislation, a *2009 Session Review* will be created and sent out to everyone. This should occur in mid-May. ~

Dan Steen

The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs wishes Iowa Veterans Home Commandant Dan Steen the best of luck in his future. Dan will be leaving as head of the Veterans Home on April 30th. In his four years as Commandant, Dan has been a tremendous supporter of veterans and the state of the art Iowa Veterans Home. His passion shows in the beginning phases of the "Master Plan" construction of the 120 bed and 60 bed pavilions. Thanks Dan for your service!



Commandant Dan Steen

IDVA Staff Spotlight



John Halstead-Veterans Benefits Specialist

John has over 37 years of federal service. He spent 4 years in the military and 33 with the U.S. Veterans Administration. Thirteen of those years were in administration at the Des Moines VA Medical Center and 20 years as a Veterans Service Representative at the VA Regional Office in Des Moines. While with the VARO, John was involved in processing and authorizing VA compensation, pension, education, and other claims. This is John's third year as a State of Iowa Veterans Benefits Specialist assisting VA beneficiaries with their Federal claims. ~

Missing in America Project

April 24th marked the interment of seven veterans identified by the Iowa Missing in America Project (MIAP). The Missing in America Project works tirelessly to locate the unclaimed remains of deceased veterans across the nation. The remains of these Iowa veterans were located in storage in funeral homes throughout the state; and the veterans do not have identifiable family members.

The remains of these honored veterans traveled from Knoxville, IA by motorcycle. A procession of hundreds of motorcycles escorted the "Iron Hearse" to Van Meter, IA. It was estimated that a procession of 500 bikes stretched over five miles.

Full military honors were provided to the servicemen and hundreds carried flags while lining the cemetery's walkways.

The veterans interred on April 24th were:

- Airman Bennie L. Hall - U.S. Air Force - Vietnam Veteran
- PVT. Batestta Lipuma - U.S. Army - WWII Veteran
- PVT. Michael Alan Pfeifer - U.S. Army - Vietnam Veteran
- Seaman Albert Lee Ramey - U.S. Navy - Korean Veteran
- Petty Officer Leroy Thomas Stephens - U.S. Navy - Korean Veteran
- CPL. Ward Dewey Stockstill - U.S. Marine Corps - Korean Veteran
- PFC. Kenneth D. Gonsalves - U.S. Marine Corps - Vietnam Veteran

A huge thank you to Bill Lauchlan and the MIAP, Iowa Army National Guard Honor Detail, Patti Meyer (Buchanan County), Mackenzie Highlanders Pipes & Drums of Des Moines, Iowa Patriot Guard, and Legion Riders for making this event so memorable. ~



The "Iron Hearse" that transported the cremated remains from Knoxville, IA



Honor guard carrying the veterans to the Committal Service Shelter



Hundreds of motorcycles at the funeral of seven Iowa



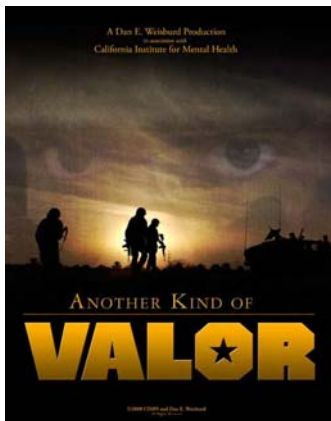
Hundreds of flags were carried by those in attendance

Another Kind of Valor

Created in collaboration with the California Institute for Mental Health, *Another Kind of Valor* is a powerful new DVD/CD Learning System designed to address the emotional needs of veterans returning to civilian life. Through nine docudramas, it explores the behavioral manifestations of veterans with deep emotional wounds as they battle "their invisible enemy within."

The première Iowa presentation of this series will occur on Saturday, July 25th at the Iowa National Guard Joint Forces Headquarters in the Enhanced Classroom. Registration begins at 8:30 and the program will run from 9 am to 4:30 pm. Each segment will be shown followed by a Town Hall style meeting to discuss the particular episode.

This is an event focused on training family members and professionals to address the mental health needs of veterans.



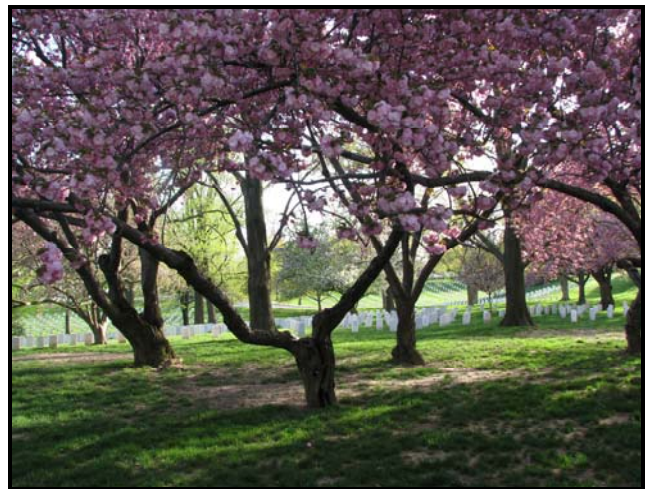
This event is sponsored by the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Iowa Veterans Home, University of Iowa Hospital, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Veterans Council, and NAMI Greater Des Moines. For more information on this event, please contact Jill Joseph at the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs at 515-242-0033. ~



Memorial Day 2009

Memorial Day is Monday, May 25th and there are many events that are scheduled. Local Des Moines events include:

- Camp Dodge Freedom Center - Serving Breakfast - 6:00 am
- Iowa Veterans Cemetery - 8:00 am
- WWI Gold Star Monument - 9:00 am
- Vietnam - Korean Monument - 10:00 am
- Veterans Auditorium - 11:00 am
- WWII Memorial - 2:00 pm



Blossoming trees shade the graves of American patriots at Arlington National Cemetery

Federal VA Information

New Website -

Recently, the VA launched a "Returning Veterans" Website - www.oefoif.va.gov. This new site is intended to welcome home veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with a social site that addresses their needs and questions. It contains videos, a blog, and a restructured effort at listing veterans benefits.

Federal Stimulus Check for Veterans -

As part of the Federal Stimulus Package, veterans or their beneficiaries who received compensation, pension, dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), or spina bifida benefits at any time between November 2008 and January 2009 will be eligible for a \$250 payment. The VA will provide this amount through the normal means that the veteran receives their benefits. These payments will be issued as early as June 2009. ~

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