

# e · floridavets News

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS



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

April 6, 2007

**This Issue:**

■ **News of the Week**

- *Cyclist Visits State Veterans' Nursing Home* .....2
- *Medal of Honor Unveiling Ceremony* .....2
- *DOD, State Health Care Agency Agree to Share Information* .....3
- *Florida Defense Alliance Gets New Executive Director* .....3
- *South Florida VA National Cemetery to Open Section Early for Burials* .....3
- *VA Seeks Volunteers to Play 'Taps' at National Cemeteries* .....4
- *South Florida Lawmaker Hosts Veterans Town Hall Meetings* .....5
- *Wounded Warrior Assistance Act Passes House* .....5
- *Bush Vows to Ensure Troops Get Medical Care They Deserve* .....6
- *National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day, 2007* .....7
- *Congress Honors Tuskegee Airmen with Distinguished Civilian Award* .....8
- *Top Enlisted Soldier at Walter Reed Gets Back to the Basics* .....9
- *Florida Atlantic University Hosts Veterans Business Event* .....10
- *New Program Connects Iraq-Deployed Troops to U.S. Public* .....10
- *Troops Embark on 'Why We Serve' Public Outreach Mission* .....11
- **2007 Legislative Session Report** .....12
- **News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** .....12
- **2007 Veteran Organization Convention Schedule and Events** .....13
- **Florida Job Fair Information** .....14
- **Upcoming Military Air Shows in Florida** .....14
- **Supporting Veterans** .....15
- **State Veterans' Homes** .....16

- **Links and References** .....16
- **Editor's Note** .....18

## **News of the Week**

### **Cyclist Visits Veterans' Nursing Home**

By the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs with information retrieved from [www.bike4vets.com](http://www.bike4vets.com)

SPRINGFIELD, Fla. – Two weeks ago, Ed Acevedo set off on a cross-country bicycle journey from St. Augustine, Fla. to San Diego to honor America's disabled veterans and their families.

The goal for Acevedo and his organization is support and visibility, and they are hoping local and national media will show interest in the event to help highlight his cause and those of the non-profit groups he is supporting.

Since starting his journey, Acevedo has been posting an online journal and providing updates and photos along the way so that people can follow his progress as he makes the journey. His main stops are at various facilities which support disabled veterans and their families as well.

Major communities along the route include: St. Augustine; Gainesville, Fla.; Tallahassee, Fla.; Pensacola, Fla.; Mobile, Ala.; Baton Rouge, La.; Houston; Austin, Texas; San Antonio; El Paso, Texas; Las Cruces, N.M.; Silver City, N.M.; Tempe, Ariz.; Phoenix; and San Diego.

Among his many stops, Acevedo along with his friend and former West Point classmate visited the Clifford C. Sims State Veterans' Nursing Home in Springfield, Fla. on April 2.

“He and I were both highly impressed with this facility that is run by the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs,” said Acevedo in his online journal. “The veterans had a lot of good things to say about the care and facilities. It was uplifting to hear about the quality of care they were receiving and to hear some of their stories.”

To learn more about Ed Acevedo's visit at the nursing home and his journey and to see photos of his trip, log on to [www.bike4vets.org](http://www.bike4vets.org). Click on “journal” at the top of the Web page.

The Fallen Heroes' Ride Across America is dedicated to raising awareness and funds for disabled veterans and the families of military members killed in action. The intent is to pay a symbolic tribute to the stamina, endurance and courage needed by our disabled veterans and their loved ones on their road to recovery.

### **Medal of Honor Unveiling Ceremony**

From the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Fla., April 4 -- The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs is hosting a Medal of Honor Unveiling Ceremony April 18 at the Clifford Sims Veterans' Nursing Home in Springfield, Fla. The home is named for Clifford C. Sims, an Army Staff Sergeant who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions in Vietnam in 1968. The ceremony, scheduled to begin at 2:30 p.m. CDT, will be held at the home at 4419 Tram Road. The Sims Nursing Home, which accepted its first resident in October 2003, is a 120-bed facility offering skilled nursing and dementia care.

## ***DOD, State Health Care Agency Agree to Share Information***

By R. F. “Sandy” Bowron, Director of Benefits and Assistance  
Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs

MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla., April 4 – The Department of Defense and Florida Agency for Health Care Administration announced the formation of a partnership at a ceremony held April 4 at MacDill Air Force Base. The event highlighted an agreement between the DOD and AHCA to begin a pilot project to share electronic medical information.

The partnership has significant implications because it will allow the sharing and exchange of servicemembers’ electronic medical information between DOD and the state. This new relationship will allow health care providers, both civilian and military who treat current and former military personnel, electronic access and exchange personal health information. The inability to share that information in the current environment creates duplication of records, additional redundant testing and duplicate diagnostic procedures. This pilot system will create a “seamless” transition for servicemembers as they move between the military health care environment and civilian environments.

This new partnership between the State of Florida and DOD will be executed through the Tampa Bay Regional Health Information Organization, a state- and privately-funded entity. The Tampa Bay area will be the location for this new pilot project.

Dr. Stephen Jones, Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, signed the partnership document for DOD; and Dr. Andrew Agwunobi, Secretary of the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration signed for AHCA. In addition, a number of key persons attended the ceremony conducted on the Ceremonial Lawn outside of the 6<sup>th</sup> Medical Group Clinic. In attendance were W. Michael Heekin, Chairman of the Governor’s Health Information Infrastructure Advisory Board; Lisa Rawlins, AHCA Bureau Chief for Health Statistics; and Russell Thomas, President of the Tampa Bay Regional Health Information Organization.

Jim Lieupo, Chief Information Officer, and Sandy Bowron, Director of Benefits and Assistance, represented the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs at the ceremony.

## ***Florida Defense Alliance Gets New Executive Director***

From the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., April 2 -- Warren R. “Rocky” McPherson, former executive director of the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs, has been named Director of Military and Defense Programs for Enterprise Florida. In this role, he will also serve as executive director of the Florida Defense Alliance. “We recognize that this role is absolutely key to ensuring that Florida builds upon its status as a pro-military state, and those of you who know Rocky also know that his commitment to military and veterans’ issues in the State of Florida is exceptional,” said John A. Adams Jr., president and chief executive officer of Enterprise Florida, the public-private partnership responsible for leading Florida’s statewide economic development efforts.

## ***South Florida VA National Cemetery to Open Section Early for Burials***

From the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs

LAKE WORTH, Fla. – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will open its fifth national cemetery in Florida for interments on April 16. The South Florida VA National Cemetery, located in Lake Worth, Fla., is located off U.S. 441 just south of Lantana Road and north of Boynton Beach Boulevard.

For information regarding burial and eligibility, contact cemetery staff by calling (561) 649-6489.

In addition to the new national cemetery in Palm Beach County, the VA is developing two additional land sites in Florida to become national cemeteries. One is in Jacksonville and the other is in near Sarasota. More information about VA's National Cemetery Administration is available online at [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov).

### ***VA Seeks Volunteers to Play 'Taps' at National Cemeteries***

by Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON (AFRNS) – Hundreds of volunteer buglers and trumpeters are being sought to participate in Armed Forces Day observances held at veterans' cemeteries nationwide and overseas, a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs official said.

The event, called "Echo Taps Worldwide," takes place May 19 and is co-sponsored by the VA's National Cemetery Administration and "Bugles Across America," a volunteer group, said Michael Nacincik, the cemetery administration's chief of communications and outreach support.

"Echo Taps" will take place at VA-operated national cemeteries, U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service national cemeteries, and American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries located overseas, Mr. Nacincik said.

"It is an extremely important event for a number of reasons," Mr. Nacincik said. "It honors the service of veterans to our country."

The initiative also encourages musicians to perform as live buglers at veterans' funeral ceremonies year round, Mr. Nacincik said. In 2006, 688,000 veterans died in the United States, he added, with most belonging to the World War II generation.

"There is overwhelming popular support to have 'Taps' played at veterans' funerals," Mr. Nacincik said. "And, obviously, with that many burials taking place, there are not enough buglers to provide a live bugler at every burial."

Nevertheless, Bugles Across America has done "a very good job" of obtaining volunteers to play "Taps" at military funerals, Mr. Nacincik said.

"It is important that our nation preserves the tradition of a live bugler to play final military honors," Leslie Hampton, a Navy veteran and Bugles Across America volunteer, stated in a recent VA news release.

"Hopefully, 'Echo Taps' will go even further and help to identify people who know how to play 'Taps' or are willing to learn how to play 'Taps' and motivate them to want to provide the service when they're available at veterans' funerals in the future," Mr. Nacincik said.

Volunteer buglers and trumpeters must register through the VA's Web site, which is attached to the "Echo Taps" site at [www.echotaps.org](http://www.echotaps.org), Mr. Nacincik said.

The VA operates 124 veterans' cemeteries across the United States, Mr. Nacincik said. Generally, persons who have received other than dishonorable discharges after completion of military service are eligible for burial at a VA-operated national cemetery, he added.

## ***South Florida Lawmaker Hosts Veterans Town Hall Meetings***

Released from Rep. Ron Klein's Office

Congressman Ron Klein (D-Fla.) will host three town hall meetings April 9 to discuss "How we can best serve our veterans." Times and locations for these meetings are listed below:

### **9:30 – 11:30 a.m.**

(Joint Town Hall Davie/Cooper City)  
Davie Police Station  
1230 S. Nob Hill Road  
Davie, FL 33324

### **Noon – 1 p.m.**

(Joint Town Hall Plantation/Wilton Manors/Oakland Park)  
Plantation City Hall  
400 NW 73rd Ave.  
Plantation, FL 33317

### **7 – 8 p.m.**

(Joint Town Hall Coral Springs/Parkland)  
Commission Chambers  
Coral Springs City Hall  
9551 West Sample Road  
Coral Springs, FL 33065

Veterans and the general public are invited to attend. Meet Rep. Klein and others to discuss concerns as well as ideas on how to best meet the health care needs of all military veterans. To RSVP or for more information, call (954) 522-4579.

## ***Wounded Warrior Assistance Act Passes House***

*Bill ensures troops experience the seamless transition they deserve*

Released by the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

WASHINGTON, March 29 – The House passed H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act of 2007. This legislation is a cooperative effort between the House Armed Services Committee and the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to address the problems facing wounded servicemembers and to improve their transition from the military to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Our test as a Congress and as a nation is how we are going to respond to the problems we have learned about in military and veterans' health care," said Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Bob Filner (D-Calif.). "The Wounded Warriors Assistance Act is a great first step towards providing a 'seamless transition' between active duty and veterans' status: one physical evaluation for both exit (from active duty) and entrance (to VA system) and one system for electronic health care records."

The Wounded Warrior Assistance Act provides the people, training, and oversight mechanisms needed to ensure that our wounded warriors feel secure that they will always receive committed quality care and that the system will not fail them. The legislation also sets the stage for much needed reform of administrative processes that will restore member confidence in the integrity and efficiency of the disability evaluation system and begin the process of achieving a truly seamless transition of service members to the Department of Veterans Affairs programs.

“The House Armed Services Committee has worked closely with the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee to develop this legislation, and I am grateful that this cooperation allowed us to bring this bill before the House so quickly,” said Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Ike Skelton (D-Mo.).

“House approval of the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act is an important first step, but more work will need to be done. In the days ahead, both of our committees will have the opportunity to take a more comprehensive look at the challenges servicemembers and their families face during recovery.”

The text of the legislation can be found at <http://www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:h.r.01538>:

### ***Bush Vows to Ensure Troops Get Medical Care They Deserve***

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30 – Saying America's men and women in uniform deserve the best medical support system possible, President Bush assured them he's committed to making sure they get it.

Bush, speaking after touring facilities at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, said he was disturbed by the stories he heard from some of the soldiers he met. The visit was the president's first since news of the facilities' problems came to light.

None of the issues uncovered had anything to do with the medical care troops are receiving, Bush said, but rather were the result of a bureaucracy that failed them.

"It is not right to have someone volunteer to wear our uniform and not get the best possible care," he said. "I apologize for what they went through, and we're going to fix the problem. That's exactly what this government is going to do."

These fixes are already in the works, with leadership changes, the transfer of patients at Walter Reed to better living facilities and the formation of task forces to address systemic problems, he noted.

Bush cited an important first step, with Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates insisting on accountability within the military command and making leadership changes. "He made tough decisions because he, like me, demands results," the president said.

Bush welcomed Army Maj. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, Walter Reed's new commander, and Brig. Gen. Michael Tucker, its new deputy commander. He noted that Tucker isn't a doctor, but rather is "a bureaucracy-buster."

"His job is to make sure that the bureaucracy does not get in the way of making sure every soldier, Marine and their families get the best possible care," the president said.

As a positive step in that direction, Bush noted that Building 18, Walter Reed's most notorious facility, has been closed for much-needed repairs, including a new roof. The patients who were living there have been transferred to Abrams Hall, where they report high-quality conditions, he said.

In addition, three working groups have been formed to help address problems that may exist and may arise:

-- An independent review group formed by Gates is examining conditions at Walter Reed and the

National Naval Center in Bethesda, Md., and will recommend ways to improve the medical care they provide. This group will consider, among other issues, what new equipment is needed. "We want to be on the leading edge of technology, not the trailing edge," Bush said.

-- An interagency task force, led by Veterans Affairs Secretary James Nicholson, will identify potential gaps in the services wounded troops receive as they return from the battlefield. "In other words, we want all hands on deck here at the federal level to make sure that health care is as good as it possibly can be," Bush said. "I'm not talking about the health care in the operating room, I'm talking about the bureaucracies that may prevent good health care from being delivered."

-- A bipartisan presidential commission, co-chaired by former Sen. Bob Dole and former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, is conducting a comprehensive review of the entire system for providing physical and emotional care to troops injured in this war. "They will make sure that that person gets high-quality care from the time they suffer their wounds, through their return to civilian life," Bush said. This will help smooth a wounded warrior's transfer from the DOD to the VA system and help prevent bureaucratic delays or other obstacles.

Bush thanked the people working to improve the military medical system and said he looks forward to hearing the task forces' recommendations so he can act on them.

"I want to make sure our military families can be assured that their loved ones will get the very best," he said.

The president acknowledged that the military health-care system is large and complex.

"Yet, there's nothing complex about what we owe our troops," he said. "We owe them the best."

### ***National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day, 2007***

A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America  
April 5, 2007

The men and women of the United States Armed Forces have made great sacrifices to defend our Nation. They have triumphed over brutal enemies, liberated continents, and answered the prayers of millions around the globe. On National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day, we honor the brave individuals who put service above self and were taken captive while protecting America and advancing the cause of freedom.

Throughout our Nation's conflicts, American prisoners of war have defied ruthless enemies and endured tremendous hardships as they braved captivity. Their strength showed the power and resilience of the American spirit and the indomitable character of our men and women in uniform. Their sacrifices are a great example of courage, devotion, and love of country.

Our Nation's former prisoners of war have helped secure the priceless gift of freedom for all our citizens, and we will always be grateful to them and their families. On National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day and throughout the year, we honor the American heroes who have been taken as prisoners of war and remember their legacy of bravery and selflessness.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 9, 2007, as National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day. I call upon the people of the United States to

join me in honoring the service and sacrifices of all American prisoners of war. I call upon Federal, State, and local government officials and private organizations to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fifth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-first.

GEORGE W. BUSH

### ***Congress Honors Tuskegee Airmen with Distinguished Civilian Award***

By John J. Kruzel

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 29 – Before a U.S. aircraft broke the sound barrier, the Tuskegee Airmen overcame a daunting social hurdle: breaking the Air Force's color barrier.

In the Capitol Rotunda, President Bush and Congress awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to the Tuskegee Airmen, more than 60 years after the 332nd Fighter Group's World War II achievements that were made bittersweet by the racial discrimination they endured after returning home.

"I thank you for the honor you have brought to our country, and the medal you are about to receive means that our country honors you," Bush said to the roughly 300-member audience of surviving airmen, Tuskegee Airmen widows and other relatives, before presenting the congressional award.

Bush said he has a strong interest in World War II airmen because one raised him.

"(My father) flew with a group of brave young men who endured difficult times in the defense of our country. Yet for all they sacrificed and all they lost, in a way they were very fortunate," he said. "They never had the burden of having their every mission, their every success, their every failure viewed through the color of their skin; ... nobody refused their salutes."

The Tuskegee Airmen fought two wars -- one in the European theater and another in the hearts and minds of the nation's citizens, he said.

Saying he wanted to "offer a gesture to help atone for all the unreturned salutes and unforgivable indignities," Bush held his straightened right hand to his brow and saluted the airmen. After returning his salute, the airmen remained standing and applauded.

Speaking on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, Dr. Roscoe Brown, a former commander of the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, thanked Bush and the House and Senate for "voting unanimously to award this medal collectively to the pilots, bombardiers, the navigators, the mechanics, the ground officers, the enlisted men and women who served with the Tuskegee Airmen."

"Over 60 years ago we were flying in the skies over Europe defending our country, and at the same time fighting the battle against racial segregation," he said. "Because of our great record and our persistence, we inspired revolutionary reform which led to integration in the armed forces in 1948. As the president said, (this) provided a symbol for America that all people can contribute to this country and be treated fairly."

Brown, a Distinguished Flying Cross recipient and the first U.S. pilot to down a German Messerschmitt jet, said that the Tuskegee Airmen are very pleased to have been in the forefront of the struggle for freedom and justice in this country.

To read the rest of the article, click on <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=32634>.

### ***Top Enlisted Soldier at Walter Reed Gets Back to Basics***

By Fred W. Baker III

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 2 – During the past three weeks, Army Command Sgt. Maj. Althea Green Dixon has done a lot of walking and talking.

She's also done a lot of listening. As well as much inspecting, checking, moving and shaking.

Sitting in her new office in the command section of the red-bricked Building 1 on the Walter Reed Army Medical Center campus, Dixon is surrounded by blank walls and bare cabinets. Her office is adorned with only the American and Army flags. All of her "stuff" is still in her old office on Fort Detrick, Md., she said.

But that's OK, because the new top NCO over the North Atlantic Regional Medical Command hasn't spent a lot of time in her office since being handpicked for the job at Walter Reed.

"I believe in management by walking around. Just stop in on people and say, 'Hi.' See how they are doing. Check on things," Dixon said.

"I can get a lot done in this office sitting behind that computer, but I can get a lot more done by walking around and interacting with people and really seeing how things are going out there and hearing from folks directly," she said.

Army Maj. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, the new commander of Walter Reed and the North Atlantic Regional Medical Command, chose the 29-year career medical soldier to lead the changes in wounded soldier care at the center and within the command. The center and its previous leadership have been under fire for the past month since media reports of poor outpatient soldier care caught national attention.

Dixon served as Schoomaker's "right hand" on Fort Detrick and Fort Gordon, Ga. She found out March 2 that Schoomaker wanted her to move to Walter Reed with him. The next day, when she was supposed to be packing her bags for a vacation in California, she was instead at the center helping coordinate the packing and moving of soldiers and their belongings out of Building 18. The building was spotlighted in the media for poor living conditions, including moldy walls, faulty plumbing and backed-up maintenance work orders.

"I needed to be here," Dixon said. "Our first priority that weekend was to move our soldiers out of Building 18 and into suitable quarters. And we got that done."

Dixon has taken only one day off since.

A native of Trinidad, Dixon speaks with a pleasant Caribbean accent, soft and sure about the basics of soldier care. Her passion for taking care of troops showed during an interview with American Forces Press Service.

"I hate to talk about the past. I probably shouldn't. But part of the reason that we have this situation that we're in right now is because noncommissioned officers failed to do their jobs," Dixon said.

"They're supposed to check on their soldiers," she added. "They are supposed to know how they are living, what problems they have.

"I'm sorry. I get a little emotional when I talk about that because that's basic stuff and they didn't do it," she said.

For the past three weeks, Dixon has spent countless hours making her rounds across the sprawling 113-acre campus reacquainting the center's NCOs with the basics of soldier care as she sees them.

"I'm about three things: basics, standards and accountability," she said. "Basic things like taking care of soldiers, basic things like checking soldiers' living quarters, basic things like keeping up with your soldiers' whereabouts. If you stick to the basics, you generally end up OK."

Probably the biggest effort she's taken on so far has been making sure all wounded warriors at Walter Reed are housed in "accommodations that are suitable for an American soldier," she said.

To read this entire article, click on <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=32674>.

### ***Florida Atlantic University Hosts Veterans Business Event***

From Florida Atlantic University's Small Business Development Center

BOCA RATON, Fla. -- Florida Atlantic University's Small Business Development Center is sponsoring a networking expo April 18 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on FAU's Jupiter campus.

The goal of this free expo is to assist South Florida businesses in networking with area veteran-owned and run companies, supporting the potential of contracting, sub-contracting, and general business enhancement. Continental breakfast and lunch are included. The morning session will encompass a keynote speaker, several informative presentations and a panel discussion. After lunch, there will be an expo where sponsoring agencies and companies will present their material and hold individual discussions with attendees. Florida Atlantic University and local business leaders will be supporting the event. Numerous large and small businesses from the South Florida service area will participate.

Registration, directions and additional details are available on the center's Web site at <http://www.fausbdc.com/index.php?src=events&submenu=Training&srctype=profile&refno=2753>.

### ***New Program Connects Iraq-Deployed Troops to U.S. Public***

By Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 4 – American military members serving in Iraq have an additional opportunity to share their experiences with the U.S. public, thanks to a new public outreach initiative, a senior U.S. military officer said in Baghdad.

"The 'Share the Story' initiative is a new program that's designed to connect U.S. military personnel with organizations and groups like yours," Navy Rear Adm. Mark I. Fox, Multinational Force Iraq spokesman, told stateside-based representatives of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Reserve Officers' Association and others during a telephone conference call.

Military members of all ranks and service branches serving in Iraq who are slated to return stateside for leave or duty rotation "will have an excellent opportunity to share their story with the folks who want to hear it," Fox said.

The Multinational Force Iraq Web site, [www.mnf-iraq.com](http://www.mnf-iraq.com), provides a "Share the Story" link where interested Iraq-deployed servicemembers register to participate in the program, Fox said. Servicemembers can choose to discuss their Iraq experiences with interested groups while on leave in their hometowns, he said, or with organizations situated near upcoming stateside assignments.

The complete story is online at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=32689>.

### ***Troops Embark on 'Why We Serve' Public Outreach Mission***

By Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 2 – Eight servicemembers with duty experience in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Horn of Africa, who have been selected to tell the military's story to the American public, met with Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England March 30.

"It's important and it's vital, particularly now," England told the group of their mission to relate their experiences to the American public. "This is the time to be out with the message of the importance of what you do every day, and all those who serve."

The eight enlisted and commissioned Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps members are participating in the Defense Department's "Why We Serve" public outreach program.

The United States has always relied on the courage and selflessness of military members who have fought to preserve America's security, freedoms and way of life since the nation was established, England pointed out.

"What you're doing is hugely important," the deputy defense secretary told the servicemembers as he shook their hands and passed out his personal coins. "And, while you're out there, deliver a great message for America."

The "Why We Serve" program began last fall and was initially the idea of Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The program is conducted in quarterly segments and eight military members, two from each service, are selected to participate, said Air Force Maj. Ann N. Biggers, the program's director.

"We're sending the best of the best from each of the services," Biggers said.

Participants are attached to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs for periods of about 90 days. They travel to communities across the nation to tell their personal stories of military service. Speaking engagements range from veterans organizations to grade schools to business groups.

This is the third "Why We Serve" group since the program began, Biggers said. The group members are:

- Air Force Capt. Michael J. Frasco, 35, Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.;
- Air Force Tech. Sgt. Robert P. Jubie, 35, Hill Air Force Base, Utah;
- Army Capt. Jessica L. Murphy, 28, Fort Drum, N.Y.;

- Army Staff Sgt. Matt Olson, 25, Fort Jackson, S.C.;
- Marine 1st Lt. Matthew H. Hilton, 28, Camp Pendleton, Calif.;
- Marine Sgt. Paula Payne, 23, Camp Pendleton;
- Navy Lt. Junior Grade Katie Hagen, 24, Norfolk, Va.; and
- Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Virginia Marie Mayo, (a New Port Richey native) 29, Camp Pendleton.

The servicemembers have unique experiences they'd like to share with the American public. Read the entire article and each group member's story online at <http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2007/WhyWeServe/index.html>.

For general questions about the "Why We Serve" program, call Maj. Ann Biggers at (703) 695-3845.

## **2007 Legislative Session Report**

The Florida Senate did not convene this week due to the Passover and Easter holidays, and the House of Representatives met for only a few council meetings. Session will resume in full April 9.

### **Key Legislative Dates:**

- April 19 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. Florida House of Representatives' Military Appreciation Day, House Chamber at the Capitol. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.
- May 4 Final Day of Regular Session

## **News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

### ***VA Searching for Last Doughboys of World War I***

*Only Four Believed Still Alive*

WASHINGTON, April 4 -- With the number of known living American veterans of World War I now standing at four, the Department of Veterans Affairs is seeking public assistance in determining whether others are still alive.

"These veterans have earned the gratitude and respect of the nation," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "We are coming to the end of a generation that helped bring the United States to the center of the international arena."

Nicholson noted that VA usually knows about the identity and location of veterans only after they come to the Department for benefits. None of the four known surviving World War I veterans has been on the VA benefits rolls.

The Secretary asks members of the general public who know of a surviving World War I veteran to contact VA. To qualify as a World War I veteran, someone must have been on active duty between April 6, 1917 and Nov. 11, 1918. VA is also looking for surviving Americans who served in the armed forces of allied nations.

Information about survivors can be e-mailed to [ww1@va.gov](mailto:ww1@va.gov); faxed to (202) 273-6702, or mailed to the Office of Public Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs (80), 810 Vermont Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20420.

About 4.7 million men and women served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I. About 53,000 died in combat, with another 204,000 wounded.

The four known surviving World War I veterans are John Babcock, 102, from Puget Sound, Wash.; Frank Buckles, 106, Charles Town, W.Va.; Russell Coffey, 108, North Baltimore, Ohio; and Harry Landis, 107, Sun City Center, Fla.

Babcock is an American who served in the Canadian Army. The other three survivors were in the U.S. Army.

## **2007 Veteran Organization Convention Schedule and Events**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Blinded Veterans of America - Florida Regional Group	First district meeting	April 7 11:30 a.m.	Mesquite Charlie's Steak House 5901 North W. St. Pensacola	Darryl Goldsmith (850) 554-7819 <a href="mailto:dandv5@cox.net">dandv5@cox.net</a> <a href="http://www.bvafrg.org">www.bvafrg.org</a>
Florida Council, Fleet Reserve Association - First Coast Branch 91 and Unit 91	Florida Meeting	April 13-15	5391 Collins Rd. Jacksonville	Jim Robbins (904) 269-2136
Lakeland Area Multiple Sclerosis Support Group	Support group meeting for vets, family and friends of people with MS	April 14 1 p.m.	DAV Chapter 28 303 Veterans Ave. S. Lakeland	Lisa Garcia (863) 644-0239 <a href="http://home.earthlink.net/~tbl5142">http://home.earthlink.net/~tbl5142</a>
Patrick Air Force Base Retiree Activities Office	Patrick AFB Military Retiree Day	April 21 9 a.m.- 1:30 p.m.	Patrick AFB	PAFB Retiree Activities Office (321) 494-5463
Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard	20 <sup>th</sup> Annual VVB Reunion	April 26-29	Wickham Park, Melbourne	Greg Welsh <a href="mailto:vets2gether@cfl.rr.com">vets2gether@cfl.rr.com</a>
Italian-American War Veterans of the U.S.	National Ladies Auxiliary Testimonial	April 27-29	Hawthorn Suites, 7450 Augusta National Dr. Orlando	Vito M. Rao <a href="mailto:vroao@broward.org">vroao@broward.org</a>
Korean War Veterans Association, Department of Florida	2007 Annual State Convention	May 11-13	Kenilworth Lodge Sebring	Joan Arcand <a href="mailto:Richard.arcand@verizon.net">Richard.arcand@verizon.net</a>
Vietnam Veterans of America	Florida State Council Meeting	June 8-10	Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Universal 5905 Kirkman Road Orlando	Jerry Klein <a href="mailto:jaklein9@adelphia.net">jaklein9@adelphia.net</a> Florida State Council (561)797-9475

Editor's Note: Veteran Service Organizations in Florida provided the information in the table above. If you would like to submit event information to include in the *e-floridavetsNews*, please e-mail the editor, Courtney Heidelberg, at [heidelbergc@fdva.state.fl.us](mailto:heidelbergc@fdva.state.fl.us).

## **Florida Job Fair Information**

### ***Career Fair Heads to Tampa***

From RecruitMilitary.com

TAMPA, Fla. -- RecruitMilitary.com is hosting a Career Fair in Tampa. Veterans, servicemembers separating from the military, National Guard and Reservists, and spouses are all welcome to attend. The Career Fair will be held April 12 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Museum of Science and Industry, 4801 East Fowler Ave. If you plan to attend, be sure to bring multiple copies of your resume and dress professionally.

### ***Job Fair Coming to Jacksonville***

*Separating servicemembers, veterans and military family members welcome*

From the Fleet and Family Support Center

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers from three naval installations are hosting a Navy Tri-Base Job Fair. The event will take place April 17 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Jacksonville at the Morocco Shrine Center, 3800 St. Johns Bluff Rd. S.

*For more information and a list of employers, contact:*

- Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga., Fleet and Family Support Center at (912) 573-4513
- Naval Station Mayport, Fla., Fleet and Family Support Center at (904) 270-6600 ext.120
- Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., Fleet and Family Support Center at (904) 542-2766 ext. 130

National and local companies will be hiring, so bring copies of your resume and come dressed for success!

\*Additional job fair information from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation is available online at: [http://www.floridajobs.org/onestop/os\\_job\\_fairs.html](http://www.floridajobs.org/onestop/os_job_fairs.html).

## **Upcoming Military Air Shows in Florida**

### **Thunderbirds – U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron**

April 14-15: Eglin AFB

May 5-6: Fort Lauderdale

### **Golden Knights – U.S. Army Parachute Team**

April 14-15: Eglin AFB (Air Show)

May 5-6: Fort Lauderdale (Air and Sea Show)

### ***2007 Eglin Air Show***

*Heritage to Horizons ... Celebrating 60 years of Airpower*

Retrieved from Eglin Air Force Base Web site

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- Eglin Air Force Base welcomes the Air Force Thunderbirds, Army Golden Knights and the Air Force Reserve Bi-plane demonstration teams to its 2007 Open House and Air Show at 9 a.m. April 14 and 15. Key events also include the Doolittle Raiders Dedication with B-25s.

All visitors are subject to security checks. Admission and parking are free. Learn more about Eglin's Open House and Air Show by logging onto <http://www.eglin.af.mil/airshow/index.asp>.

## **Supporting Veterans**

### ***License Plates Support Florida Veterans' Homes***

Your purchase of the "**Florida Salutes Veterans**" or one of the **approved Army, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard Military Service license plates** helps people who need it most, when they need it most. The entire \$15 surcharge goes into a Trust Fund for the operation and maintenance of critically needed Veterans' Homes in Florida. A portion of the Marine Corps License Plate also supports the State Veterans' Homes Program.

### ***Headstones and Markers***

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs furnishes upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For all deaths occurring before Sept. 11, 2001, the VA may provide a headstone or marker only for graves that are not marked with a private headstone.

Spouses and dependents buried in a private cemetery are not eligible for a government-provided headstone or marker.

Flat markers in granite, marble, and bronze and upright headstones in granite and marble are available. The style chosen must be consistent with existing monuments at the place of burial. Niche markers are also available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

When burial or memorialization is in a national cemetery, a headstone or marker will be ordered by the cemetery officials based on inscription information provided by the next of kin. When burial is in a private cemetery, [VA Form 40-1330, Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker](#) (PDF), must be submitted by the next of kin or a representative, such as funeral director, cemetery official or veterans counselor, along with [veterans military discharge documents](#), to request a Government-provided headstone or marker. Do not send original documents, as they will not be returned.

To learn more information regarding headstones and markers including eligibility criteria, placing orders, inscriptions, replacements and more, click on [http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm\\_hm.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm_hm.asp).

### ***Do Your Homework before Donating Money***

From the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs

The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs receives calls from Floridians who have been contacted by various organizations requesting that they donate money or other assets to their causes. Requesting organizations frequently have 'veteran' or other military and patriotic-related words in their titles, which can be misleading. Although many of these groups are doing great things with donated funds, some prey on innocent people to fatten their pocketbooks. Never give your social security number, date of birth, credit card number, or other personal and financial information to someone who you do not know. Although the department cannot tell you what organization to give your money to, we can make some recommendations to help you make an informed decision.

The Florida Department of State's Division of Corporations posts information on registered corporations online, including non-profit organizations, at [www.sunbiz.org/](http://www.sunbiz.org/). To see if a particular organization is registered with the Division of Corporations, from sunbiz.org, click *Online Searches and Document Images*; select *Corporations, Trademarks, Limited Partnerships, & Limited Liability Companies*; then choose *Name List*. Here you will enter the name of the organization you are researching in the text box and click on *Submit*. If the organization you are looking for is registered with the Division of Corporations, then you will be able to access information such as its address, officers, and certain reports and documents. As you will notice while navigating through the Web site, there are many other options for finding information that you may want to explore.

Another good resource for gathering information on charitable organizations is the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' *Gift Givers' Guide*, which can be accessed at <http://app1.800helpfla.com/giftgiversguide/>. Just input the name of the organization you are researching and click on *Search*. The guide will provide you with revenue information, as well as costs, surplus and more.

You can also find information on large charitable organizations by logging onto <http://www.charitynavigator.org/>. This site only includes charities that take in at least \$500,000 per year and have existed for a minimum of five years; thus, some of the new and small charities, although legit, may not be included in this Web site. Charity Navigator also includes helpful tips like *Top 10 Best Practices of Savvy Donors*, *Six Questions to Ask Charities before Donating*, and much more.

If you want to donate money to help out fellow veterans or current servicemembers, a good rule of thumb to go by is to donate to organizations that you know are legitimate and well-established. Your local veterans service organizations are a good place to start. The VA has published a *Directory of Veterans Service Organizations*, which you can access by logging onto <http://www1.va.gov/vso/>.

### **Vietnam Memorial Traveling Wall 2007 Schedule**

Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard (VVB) is hosting a Vietnam Traveling Wall. The wall is a 3/5 scale replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., and is based in Brevard County, Fla. VVB is currently developing this year's schedule, which is slated to visit two cities in Florida to date. The current schedule is listed below. For more information on the Traveling Memorial Wall, visit the Traveling Wall Web site at [www.TravelingWall.us](http://www.TravelingWall.us)

Florida Showings:

April 6-8        Ocala  
April 22-29     Melbourne

### **State of Florida Veterans' Homes**

Take a [virtual tour](#) of a State Veterans' Nursing or Domiciliary Home. The tour includes ten 360-degree fully interactive pictures. No additional software is required to view these images. Simply click on the desired picture and the tour begins.

### **Links and References for Veterans**

[Click here](#) for a copy of **Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide**.

**[Ask Benefits Questions Via E-MAIL:](#)** For specific Compensation and Pension benefits questions and local regional office issues, the contact list is by state and geographical area of jurisdiction.

**[Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents](#)** (Current Edition) - The current edition of this booklet lists the variety of federal benefits available to veterans and their dependents. Selecting the link above will allow you to download the booklet as a **[PDF](#)** file in English or Spanish.

La versión en Español de el folleto "Beneficios Federales para los Veteranos y sus Dependientes", el cual explica la variedad de beneficios disponibles para los veteranos y sus dependientes, se encuentra disponible en versión PDF al presionar **[aquí](#)**.

**[VA State Summary for Florida](#)** – As of December 2006.

**[Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center](#)** - The Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center uses a state of the art 40-foot van equipped with two exam rooms, as well as facilities for dental care, to travel the state performing intervention with homeless veterans who live in rural encampments. This mobile unit offers a unique opportunity to provide homeless veterans immediate assistance of food and clothing, health screening and assessment, VA benefit determination and counseling, as well as assessment of housing, mental health, substance abuse, employment, educational and vocational needs.

The Mobile Service Center will host the following events in Florida soon:

April 26-29	Melbourne Vietnam Veterans Reunion
May 26-27	Panama City Stand Down
June 29-30	Miami Stand Down

**[Florida Government](#)**

**[Federal Government](#)**

**[NEW! Florida State University's Institute on World War II and the Human Experience](#)**

**[Library of Congress, Veterans History Project](#)**

**[Issues and Action: Federal Veterans Issues](#)**

**[Find your member of Congress](#)**

**[United States Senate](#)**

**[U.S. House of Representatives](#)**

**[Combat Veterans Information](#)**

**[Transition Assistance Program](#)**

**[Survivors Benefits](#)**

**[Women Veterans Information](#)**

(Some links require [Adobe Acrobat Reader, which can be downloaded here](#).)

### **Florida Relay Service**

If you or someone you know is hearing or speech impaired, you should know about the resources available from the Florida Relay Service. The Florida Relay Service is the communications link for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind, or speech-impaired. Through the Florida Relay Service, people who use specialized telephone equipment can communicate with people who use standard telephone equipment. To call Florida Relay, dial 7-1-1, or use the appropriate toll free numbers:

- 1-800-955-8771 (TTY)
- 1-800-955-8770 (Voice)
- 1-877-955-8773 (Spanish)
- 1-877-955-8707 (French Creole)

More information is available from the Florida Relay Service Web site at <http://www.ftri.org/>. Also, you may write to the Florida Relay Service at 1820 East Park Ave., Suite 101, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

**Please encourage others to sign up for *e-floridavetsNews*.** Sign up, unsubscribe or change your e-mail address at <http://www.floridavets.org/news/newsletter.asp>.

### **Editor's Note**

The material presented herein does not have the effect of laws or regulations.

Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Public Relations Manager, ATTN: *e-floridavetsNews*, 4040 Esplanade Way, Suite 152, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0950 or e-mail [HeidelbergC@fdva.state.fl.us](mailto:HeidelbergC@fdva.state.fl.us).

Changes to the e-mailing list may be accomplished by accessing FDVA's Web site at <http://www.FloridaVets.org>.

The newsletter archive is available online at <http://www.floridavets.org/news/archive.asp>.