

# Jacksonville

## Chapter #1 INC

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### Disabled American Veterans, Southside Chapter #1, INC.

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### Officers:

<u>DAV</u>			<u>DAVA</u>	
John E. Markiewicz	743-2924	Commander	Jean Christian	646-1372
Guy Diffenbaugh	223-3041	Sr. Vice Cmdr	Flossie Shaw	399-4040
Dick Aquino	465-1791	Adjutant	Marjorie Paine	714-6677
Thurman Dubberly	751-4325	Chaplain	Annie Shortridge	641-2748

Chapter Service Officers: Al Braun, John Markiewicz, Guy Diffenbaugh, Kermit Griffin and Dick Aquino.

Service office is open Monday-Thursday, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Fridays by appointment only.

**Please call before coming to chapter house**

Membership meetings are held on the fourth Saturday of each month at 1:00 p.m.

Executive Committee meets at 12:00 p.m., on the same Saturday.

### COMMANDER'S REPORT

As most of you know by now I spent the last week of February in Washington DC at the Disabled American Veterans Mid-Year Conference.

Our opening session, on Sunday, featured a briefing by the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs on matters of concern to the Veterans Administration, the 600,000 claims backlog, the affects of the budget delays and the plans for dealing with the shortfalls. This was followed by the Legislative Workshop which provided information on the first session of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress and issues affecting veterans' programs as well as briefings on issues to be presented during our visits and the Commander's testimony.

On Monday, we had our training workshops and seminars. The Service Workshop I attended covered the missions and agendas of the Veteran's Disability Benefits Commission and The Commission on the Future of America's Veterans. The VAVS Workshop discussed the DAV Volunteer initiatives and changes in the volunteer programs offered under the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service. The Membership workshop mostly dealt with the changes to the DAV website and the new Chapter and Department free websites that will be available through the national website. I assigned myself as our Chapter 1 Webmaster and completed the initial survey for our Chapter required to set-up our Chapter Website when they become available this summer. The Adjutants Workshop was conducted by the Inspector General, Robert L. Gushee, and dealt mostly with Chapter and Officer Liability Insurance and some recent case history involving litigation against Department and Chapter Officers that highlighted the need for such insurance.

On Tuesday I attended the joint session of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committee Meeting where our National Commander, Bradley Barton, testified before that Committee (I have previously emailed a copy of his remarks to you all). I also visited and met with the staff members (the Congressmen themselves, as usual, were all either unavailable or out of town) for Adam Putnam, Vern Buchanan, Alcee Hastings and Ander Crenshaw in the Congressmen's offices both before and after the Committee Session.

There was also some time for social interaction as we had a Florida Delegation Dinner at the Old Ebbitt Restaurant near the White House in downtown Washington on Sunday evening and also the National Commander's Reception at the Marriott Crystal Gateway in Arlington VA on Wednesday evening.

There were several issues that we emphasized to our Congressmen in our visits.

The situation at Walter Reed Army Medical Center was foremost on everyone's mind during our visits due to recent publicity and a two-part series published in the Washington Post. We asked that the Congressmen ensure that the Army takes corrective action to investigate and restore Walter Reed to its previous position as the Army's showplace Medical Center; to eliminate the current practice of "Warehousing" our wounded veterans in dilapidated off-base housing; to Invest the necessary resources to ensure that caring for our wounded and fallen veterans be viewed as a part of the cost of war and that a commensurate level of resources be made available for that care; and to eliminate the backlogs in processing the Medical Evaluation and Physical Evaluation Boards needed to transition these wounded veterans out of the military and into the Veterans Administration care near their homes and families.

Veterans continue to endure long waits for benefits to which they are entitled. **BENEFITS DELAYED ARE BENEFITS DENIED**. It is paramount that measures be taken immediately to fix the over 600,000 backlog in claims processing before the system collapses under its own weight. Our veterans need to know that when they come home from the war they will receive the best medical care, vocational rehabilitation, and compensation through a claims system that will deliver the benefits in a minimum time. To accomplish this it is necessary that the VA have adequate staffing levels and resources, comprehensive training programs to enable claims processing personnel to make accurate decisions the first time and a system of accountability for the accuracy of claims processing. It is also important that the VA Claims system remain an advocacy system not an adversarial system. The law passed in the last session allowing attorneys access to the system will further bog the system down, increase the backlogs and take the money needed by the veteran for his future survival in attorney fees. Lawyers and agents must not be allowed under any circumstances to charge fees for assisting veterans with VA disability claims. The provision in S.3421, Public Law 109-461 that allows lawyers to charge such fees must be repealed.

Assured funding for Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care is still lacking. The VA is the largest direct provider of health care services in the United States and is the primary back-up provider to the Department of Defense in time of war and national emergency. While Congress has authorized significant increases in the VA Health Care Funding, the funding still fails to come through in time each year causing the VA to operate without a budget on a continuing resolution until the funding finally is provided. This requires the VA to ration health care, delay hiring needed medical and claims processing staff, and put construction, improvement and maintenance of facilities on hold which again increases waiting times and decreases the quality of health care. In addition to not receiving the funding in a timely manner for the past eleven years, even with the record increases of the past couple of years the funding proves to be inadequate to meet the current level of health care and has required supplemental funding resolutions to be passed later in the year to make up the short-falls. We must, once and for all time, provide sufficient funding to enable the VA to meet the health care needs of all veterans and to do so in a timely manner. We believe that removing the VA from the discretionary funding process and placing it in the mandatory funding process will go a long way towards meeting these needs.

Finally, we are very concerned that military retirees continue to have to fight to end the unfair law that requires forfeiture of career retirement pay in order to receive VA Disability Compensation. While provisions have been passed that allow those 50% or more disabled to concurrently receive both their pension and VA compensation under a 10 year phase in process, we believe that the law should be repealed and that there should be no eligibility criteria based on the level of disability allowed. If it is unfair for those 50% or more to have to forfeit a portion of their career retirement in order to receive VA compensation, it is unfair for any veteran with any level of disability to have to forfeit. We are asking that our Congressmen support H.R. 303 and S. 439 to fully repeal the prohibition of concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability compensation for **ALL** disabled career military retirees.

## **Chapter 1 Nominations of Officers**

In accordance with our By-laws and SOPs nominations for Officers was opened at today's meeting with the following results:

Commander: Guy Diffenbaugh

Sr Vice Commander: Ray Paine

1st Junior Vice Commander: Kermit Griffin

2nd Junior Vice Commander: No nominations received

3rd Junior Vice Commander: No nominations received

4th Junior Vice Commander: No nominations received

Treasurer: John Markiewicz

Sergeant of Guard/MAA: No nominations received

Appointed Positions to be filled by newly elected Commander:

Adjutant

Chaplain

Legislative/Judge Advocate

Everyone is reminded that noon on April 14th is the District 3 meeting in St Augustine. The next Chapter 1 meeting is on Saturday the 28th of April. Nominations will be re-opened at that meeting and election held.

John Markiewicz

Commander DAV

## **CHAPLAIN'S REPORT**

To God is the glory. We are so blessed to live in the USA, although many of our rights have been taken away, lets all unite ourselves in Love & Compassion, it is the only way we can survive. Lets pray for our troops overseas, they need us. Remember God loves you and

Thurman Dubberly  
Chaplain DAV

## **SERVICE OFFICE – REPORT**

In our last bulletin, I reported on the US Court of Appeals decision that naval personnel who had been awarded the Vietnam Service Medal are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange, and may be qualified for service connection for certain diseases. We now have been informed that the VA has appealed that decision, and all claims based on that decision (Haas vs. Nicolson) are being held in abeyance.

Military retirees if you haven't received your 1099R, don't wait until April to request a replacement. Call DFAS at 1-800-321-1080, or go online to my Pay (<http://myPay.dfas.mil>) where you can access your account and print your 1099R. Those in receipt of CRSC or CRDP are being reviewed to determine if any back pay is owed. Accounts found in need of retroactive pay will be corrected in a single lump sum payment. You will be notified when payments are made to explain why you're receiving the additional money.

Tricare: Does not cover long-term care – beneficiaries will be responsible for all such expenses.

Drugs available through TRICARE – for info on formulary drugs go to:

<http://www.tricareformularysearch.org/dod/medicationcenter/default.aspx>. For drugs in the Antilipidemic Agent category, go to: <http://www.expressscripts.com/TRICARE>, or call 1-866-363-8667.

If you have questions on wearing military medals on civilian clothing, we have current info at the Service Office.

In 2006, VA received 806,382 claims and rendered decisions of 774,378 of them. Processing time rose to 177 days...so if you have a claim pending, don't try to determine status too early.

Al Braun  
Senior Service Officer

## **AUXILIARY REPORT**

The month of April promises to be the busiest month of the year. We will be burning the mid-night oil while working on Unit reports, District reports, State and National reports. All reports are due before May 1<sup>st</sup>. Past Unit Commanders Phyllis Underwood and Lola Dealy will be lending a hand and guiding myself and Adjutant Marjorie Paine as we tackle this annual project.

At the March 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, Unit members discussed plans for the Christmas gifts and parties for the disabled veterans in the Lake City VA Hospital, and veterans in the local nursing homes. We started working on these projects early, and hope to find some of the articles we need "on sale." we try to keep expenses as low as possible. Flossie Shaw is already crocheting hats and serving bibs for the patients in the nursing homes and the VA nursing home. By Christmas time, she will have quite an assortment of these items.

Unit members also agreed to hold two fundraisers in the near future. You should have already received a letter concerning the "no bake sale," and I hope you will be generous when you write a check for your donation. Remember there are so many elderly disabled veterans in nursing homes and VA hospital who have no family members available or able to visit or attend to them. Your support of the Unit fundraisers helps to provide comfort items, games, puzzles, lap robes and many other articles the veterans need; but would not have if an organization such as ours did not provide them.

The Unit will be having another Quilt Raffle on a beautiful hand made quilt. Tickets will be mailed out to auxiliary members sometime in the next couple of months.

The District III meeting and luncheon will be held on Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup> and hosted by Chapter and Unit 6. Location of the meeting place is the First United Methodist Church on King Street in St Augustine. Bring a covered dish and join us for lunch at 12:00 noon. You will see many old friends and meet new ones. District officers will be elected at this meeting for 2007-2008.

Unit I will hold an election for officers for the 2007-2008 year, at our next meeting on April 28<sup>th</sup>. I encourage you to attend the meeting so you will have in-put in the election of officers who represent you.

There will be a "Veterans Stand down" day held at the Veterans Coliseum some time in August. Unit I will be providing Ditty Bags filled with personal articles, such as hand towels, wash cloths, soap, shampoo, safety razor, shaving cream, deodorant, body powder, comb, small packages of non-perishable food. If you can help by donating some of these items, please drop them off at the Chapter House, Monday-Thursday between the hours of 10:00am-2:00pm, or bring them when you attend our meeting on the Fourth Saturday of each month at 1:00pm.

I will be looking for you and hope to see you there.

Jean Christian  
Commander DAVA

## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

We want to thank all of our donors who have contributed this fiscal year. Their generosity helps us to continue our services to our members and to all of our Veterans. Those Contributing since July 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 are listed below:

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