

InService



HELPING VETERANS, COMMUNITIES, AND THOSE SERVING IN HARM'S WAY

SPOTLIGHT: WOMEN'S RIGHTS

One of VVA's most important outreach committees is the **Women Veterans Committee**. Women veterans have been involved with the association since its launch in 1978, and the committee formed in 1983, when pressure from VVA resulted in a GAO report on health care for women veterans. Lynda Van Danner, a vocal advocate for veterans suffering from exposure to Agent Orange, served as the committee's first chair. "The Women Veterans Committee has been a truly proactive group in forging ahead on women veterans' issues," says current chair Kate O'Hare-Palmer. "Angst alone wasn't getting anything done legislatively when we first came home."

In addition to health care, the Women Veterans Committee concentrates on issues such as homelessness, sexual harassment and sexual trauma, and transitioning from military to civilian jobs. Many women serving in the military hold supervisory roles, and experience difficulty getting the same levels of respect and pay in the private sector.

The program works with other service organizations to promote legislation favorable to women veterans. The committee has established a relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and

frequently offers testimony on women's health care, education and employment to U.S. House and Senate committees. "We are a clearinghouse of information from the national level down to local areas for women veterans service access," O'Hare-Palmer says.

Among the committee's long-term goals include creating a VVA Leadership Conference seminar, monitoring and coordinating the delivery of benefits and services to women veterans with the

VA, working on issues related to military sexual trauma, and promoting the recognition of women veterans' military service and contributions.

Of VVA's more than 80,000 members, only about 1,200 are women, even though more than 250,000 women served in the military during Vietnam. That means that it's a challenge to keep women's — and all veterans' — issues in the spotlight. "When I was in the military, 10 percent of the population was in the military," O'Hare-Palmer says. "That percentage in now 1 percent, so the needs of veterans are being pushed further back on the burner in the public's eye. It is our job to keep them visible."

For more information visit vva.org/what-we-do/outreach-programs/women-veterans. ■



Chapter news inside >>



The Women Veterans Committee has been championing its causes for 35 years. Photos: VVA

VVA CHAPTERS ACROSS AMERICA

NEW YORK

REMEMBERING MCCAIN. Members of **Chapter 20** in Rochester remembered John McCain in the aftermath of his death on Aug. 25, 2018. McCain was held prisoner for five years in Vietnam after his plane was shot down, and served in Congress for more than 30 years.

McCain visited Rochester during one of his presidential bids, holding a rally at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Highland Park before the New York primary in 2000. Chapter members said they appreciate his service and his work on behalf of veterans.

“He did something that was not demanded of [many],” chapter member Joe Peck told the *Spectrum News*. “He did it to serve his country. And for that, he is a true American hero who went above and beyond. And I’m sure he’ll never be forgotten.” ■



Sen. John McCain: Aug. 29, 1936 – Aug. 25, 2018



PENNSYLVANIA



SOLEMN RIDE. About 1,700 motorcyclists took part in the 25th Annual Ride for Freedom in Berks County in August. The event ensures that all veterans who were POWs and listed as MIA are not forgotten.

The ride concluded in Reading with a moving ceremony dedicated to all POW/MIAs—a total of 82,334 missing and unaccounted nationally since World War II. The names of 91 Vietnam POW/MIAs from Pennsylvania were read aloud, before Taps and time for reflection and prayer.

“If I do anything in my life, it will be not to forget these people, and especially what they have done for us,” Bernie Bingham, president of **VVA Chapter 131**, executive director of POW/MIA Forget-Me-Nots, and vice president of the Reading Motorcycle Club, told the *Reading Eagle*. “And I will be back here next year as long as my lungs are working.”

The rally attracted hundreds of onlookers along its 14-mile route. “When we first started this ride, we had 70 riders from the Reading Motorcycle Club and another 80 or so Harley riders,” Bingham said. “Now we have about 1,700 bikes and roughly 2,500 people here, including passengers and others.” ■

TEXAS

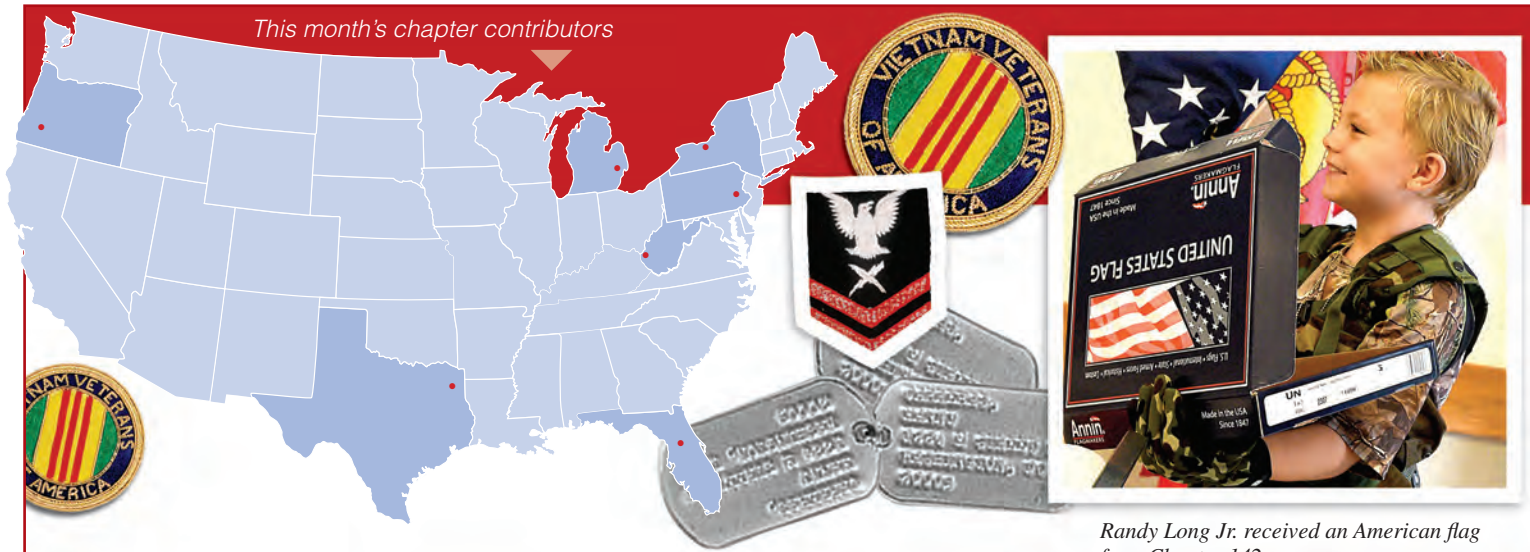
CITIZEN VETERAN. Frank Hajart, a member of **VVA Chapter 987** in Longview, finally became a U.S. citizen in August. Hajart was 12 when his family moved from war-torn Yugoslavia to Denver in 1956, and he joined the Marines after a recruiter said it would help him achieve citizenship.

After an application to renew his driver’s license was denied due to his lack of citizenship, Hajart was shocked. He told Lori Thomas, a friend and veteran peer network coordinator at an Overton healthcare facility, who helped relaunch the naturalization effort.

“He is a great man and has done so much for our country and our community, and he needed to have a country,” Thomas told the *Longview News-Journal*. “He will be an American citizen, and I am proud to know him and have even a little part in this.”

Fellow Vietnam veteran David Applewhite helped out by spreading the word about the 74-year-old Hajart’s plight. “I’ve known Frank for eight or 10 years, and we just kind of bonded,” he said. Hajart and Applewhite wore their service uniforms — which still fit — to the ceremony, which was attended more than a dozen of Hajart’s relatives and friends. ■





Randy Long Jr. received an American flag from Chapter 142.

OREGON

STANDING DOWN FOR THE HOMELESS.

About 200 veterans visited the Veterans Stand Down for Douglas County at the Roseburg Veterans Medical Center in September. The annual event targets homeless and at-risk veterans for help in accessing VA benefits and housing.

This year, veterans also took advantage of free or reduced-price haircuts, flu shots, dental checkups and veterinary services. A range of supplies including granola bars and DOD surplus gear such as boots, parkas and backpacks was also offered.

Ken Steller, a Gulf War veteran who operates For the Love of Paws, a low-income veterinary clinic, told the *Roseburg News-Review* that the Stand Down offers the area's many homeless veterans a great service. "It's good they're getting some help," he said.

Frank and Diahn Escalante of **VVA Chapter 805** in Umpqua brought the traveling Vietnam War Wall to the event. The Escalantes' mission is to help veterans who don't know they're eligible for benefits figure out how to sign up for them. "That helps me with my PTSD," Frank said, "because they're all my brothers." ■

MICHIGAN

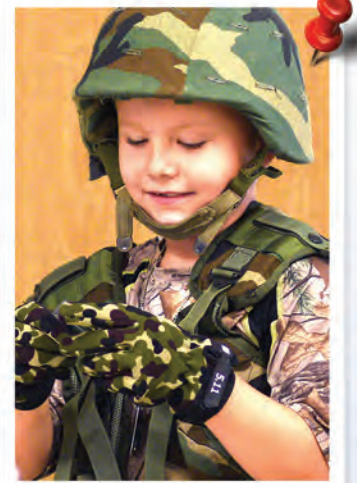
SPIT 'N' POLISH. VVA Chapter 142 in Monroe recently presented seven-year-old Randy Long Jr. with a plaque and an American flag to show appreciation for his volunteer service. The boy has washed and polished the memorial stones of more than 90 veterans throughout Michigan since last year.

Long started with a stone bearing the name of his great uncle, Richard Carlton, last year. "I decided, out of respect, I wanted to clean the other names too, because they deserved it," he told the *Monroe News*. "These men deserve respect."

"You just don't see enough good stuff by young men nowadays," Dr. Dennis Warner, chapter president, said at a ceremony attended by several members of the Long family. "When we saw what this young man was doing, we knew we needed to show our appreciation."

The veterans also made Long an honorary member of the chapter, and Michigan State Council president John Riling II gave him a State Challenge coin. "I think he deserves special recognition not only from the chapter, but also from the state," Riling said.

"That flag's ginormous," said Long, who plans to serve in the military once he's old enough to do so. "I think I'm going to hang it up on my wall." ■



Long Jr. says he'll join the military once he's old enough. Photos courtesy of Monroe News/Tom Hawley





WEST VIRGINIA

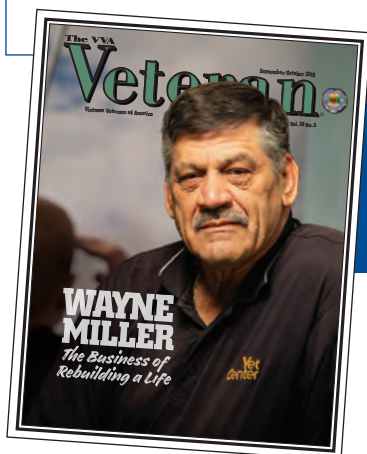
SPEAKING OUT. Ron Wroblewski, president of VVA's Tri-State Chapter 949 in Prichard, W.Va., spoke at a National POW and MIA Recognition Day ceremony in Gallipolis, Ohio, last month. National POW and MIA Recognition Day is observed annually on the third Friday of September to honor POW/MIA service members.

Wroblewski is a Vietnam combat veteran who served as a field radio operator in the Marine Corps from 1963–1966. Among his most significant accomplishments on behalf of veterans is having a U.S. Navy ship named for WWII veteran Hershel “Woody” Williams, West Virginia’s only living Medal of Honor recipient.

Wroblewski has also served as commander of VFW Post 1064, general chairman of the Huntington, W.Va., Veterans Committee for Civic Improvement, and commandant of the Marine Corps League’s Huntington Detachment. In addition to his chapter presidency, Wroblewski is also president of the West Virginia Marine Corps Coordinating Council. ■



Wroblewski speaks at a recent event. Photo: Chapter 949



Reconnect and get the latest news in *The VVA Veteran*.



Chapter 1036's John Thomstatter and Johnny Byard show off a photo of Bobby Joe Quinn, the 50,000th photo found for the Wall of Faces. Photo: John Thomstatter



Thomas “T.J.” Burton’s photo was the last needed to complete Florida’s contribution to the Wall of Faces project. Photo: VVMF

FLORIDA

THE FINAL FACE. VVA Chapter 1036 in The Villages, Fla., announced that it has finally located photos for every one of Florida’s 778 fallen heroes. The photos can be viewed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) website, www.vvmf.org/wall-of-faces. The last photo found was of Thomas John “T.J.” Burton, who served in the U.S. Army and was killed in action in Binh Duong in 1968.

Chapter 1036’s photo search team included retired Army, Navy and Marine officers, as well as a private investigator. The team spent hundreds of hours investigating leads, poring over yearbooks and library files, contacting friends and family members of the deceased, and requesting information from the St. Louis Military Records Office. The search was supported by the Florida State Council, state VVA chapters, local TV stations and newspapers, and county libraries, genealogy databases and historic societies.

“I’m just thrilled that we’ve finally got it done,” chapter member John Thomstatter, who spearheaded the effort, told the *Pensacola News-Journal*. “We did an average of 10 hours of research per soldier, and some took hundreds of hours.”

Chapter 1036’s team will now help other states find photos to complete the Wall of Faces Project, which needs only about 2,000 more photos to put a face and story to every one of the 58,195 names on the black granite of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. An interactive Vietnam Education Center on the National Mall will display the photos once built. To learn more, visit www.buildthecenter.org. ■

Let us know what your chapter has been doing to help our veterans, your community, and those serving in harm’s way.

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