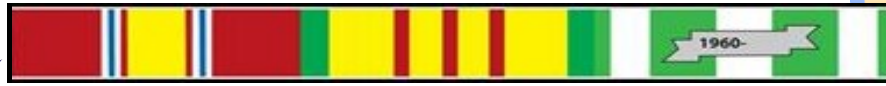




NEWS AND VIEWS

VVA REDWOOD EMPIRE CHAPTER 223



Volume 17 Issue 7

August 2015

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What I Did On My Vacation

By E. Astrid Ortega

On a recent trip to visit my family in Rhode Island I paid a visit to the Rhode Island Veterans' Memorial Cemetery. I think Rhode Island has one of the loveliest state cemeteries. There are 40 other states, including Puerto Rico, that have dedicated grounds to the burial of their own veterans. In the USA we have 131 National Cemeteries. The eligibility to be buried in one of them is very similar to the Department of Veterans Affairs' requirements. In California we have 9 state cemeteries but 4 are closed due to being full. The good news is that in July 2016 a new cemetery will be dedicated in the City of Seaside in Monterey County.

Since I grew up in Rhode Island (where most of my family still live) and went to nursing school there, I plan to have my ashes interred there. Two Army Nurse Corps buddies of mine who were also in Vietnam still live there and they want to be buried at this parklike, military cemetery also.

The Exeter Veterans Cemetery is a solemn, dignified 265-acre military cemetery in South County Rhode Island. Rhode Island is the smallest state in the Union--it is smaller than Sonoma County in size--but has a much larger population than Sonoma County. There are 31



different monuments dedicated to veterans of specific wars and conflicts. The Vietnam Memorial Honor Roll Monument has a grassy, tree-lined grove with 9 tall granite markers with the names of Rhode Island veterans who died in the Vietnam War. The many hiking trails around this cemetery make it a destination for walking and paying respects to the thousands of veterans buried there. In 2002 a large statue of a woman in military uniform standing on a world sphere with an American flag pole in her right arm was dedicated. Surrounding this statue are grounds in which military women who so desire can be buried in her shadow.

So I have chosen to make it easier on my family when I pass into a new dimension/ transition/ die, or leave this earth, by doing the paperwork for my eligibility requirements before this happens. We are not getting any younger, and as the average age of a Vietnam vet is 69, now might be a good time to address our own mortality. For eligibility requirements regarding burial in a military cemetery, you can go to www.cem.va.gov.



My vacation was full of family, seeing my nurse army

Continued on Page 8

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In our ever-growing efforts to serve local veterans, VVA Chapter 223 is always looking for new sources of funds to support the cause. We're still a very small entity trying to serve the veterans of Sonoma County.

You can help by making a tax deductible contribution directly to VVA Chapter 223. Send donations directly to the Chapter at the address on the back page.
Thanks...

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2015 Region 8/9 Conference

Reno, Nevada

By Kate O'Hare-Palmer

It was a very warm weekend in Reno for this conference. There was a street fair and car show right outside of the hotel. The line for check-in was very long, but the management wisely had wait-staff coming down the line with free drinks while you wait!! Posting of the Colors showed more flags than I have ever seen...9! Some of our very own Chapter members were recruited to help with being flag bearers.

Region 8 Director Tom Owens started our conference off after the introductions by Dick Southern. He talked about the work in Region 8 and the Oregon State legislative accomplishment of supporting bills for the Agent Orange toxic-exposure research bills that are currently in Congress. Oregon has hosted over 30 Agent Orange town hall meetings. Hmmm..what is our total for California? Their support from the community has been better than anticipated.

Ken Holybee spent over an hour and a half reviewing the Constitution Resolutions. There was quite a discussion about the difference between the Region Directors appointing an Assistant versus having that as an elected position. Traditionally, the Region Director appoints someone who is in another part of the region that can geographically access an area that may be some distance from the Director. If there were an election for the Assistant position, it would create a time and financial burden to complete the task.

Dick mentioned the need for candidates for the Commendation Medal. They can come from the State Council down to the Chapter level. It is a way for those working at all levels to be recognized. Remember to include the who, what, where, when, and why components to your write-up.

I reviewed the Women Veterans Resolutions with some good questions and comments. Dick reviewed the other resolutions and commented on the need for the delegates to go to each Committee's resolution hearing to ask any pertinent questions or give feedback prior to the vote on the floor. It was interesting to see how some of the resolutions that have come in to National vary in their format and clarity. It is up to each delegate to be

Continued on Page 8



EDITOR'S NOTES

Take a bow News and Views! For the second time our newsletter has been named Best VVA Print Newsletter. This is something our Chapter members and our veteran community can be proud of. Credit for this lofty accomplishment goes to many and I think we should take a bow and be very proud.

Two years ago I was at the VVA National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida, where the Chapter received the Award for the first time. In the September 2013 edition of the Grapevine I wrote "Let's not rest on our laurels, but rather continue to produce an award-winning publication." That applies even more this time; we must remain committed to doing so.

Printing the newsletter is costly and finding revenue to fund it can be difficult for a non-profit in a community of many other non-profits competing for limited dollars. For that reason we have been looking at ways to cut cost without cutting quality. Over the next few months we will be trying various ways to cut costs while keeping the journalistic quality of this award-winning newsletter at the same high standards you expect. Your comments and suggestions are welcome in this process. This newsletter is the product of hard work on the part of all of us, so tell me what you think, and let's keep this publication the best in the land.



New Book Explores Women's Challenges in Combat Zones

By Patricia Kime, Staff Writer - Military Times

A new book from Oxford University Press takes a fresh look at women in combat and finds that while the number serving in war zones has risen exponentially in the past 20 years, the research on issues important to female troops — health, family, career advancement and relationships — is lacking.

"Women at War," edited by retired Army Col. Elspeth Cameron Ritchie and Army National Guard Col. Anne Naclerio, doesn't question whether women should be in combat, since they have been for years.

Rather, it aggregates the scant data on the effects of war and military service on women, from the physical impact and psychological consequences to influence on relationships, financial stability, and long-term health.

Featuring 19 chapters written by 40 contributors, including 10 men, the textbook-style work is heavy on the academic research, with articles ranging from illnesses and mortality rates of women in Iraq and Afghanistan and post-traumatic stress to medical concerns, reproductive health, homecomings, motherhood in wartime and more.

Ritchie said she tackled the project largely because so little advancements have been made in accommodating women on the battlefield.

"I published a paper in 2000 about the issues facing women on deployment — things like going to the bathroom, managing recent childbirth and breastfeeding, birth control. But when my fellow editor deployed to Afghanistan, she found the same issues. Why the reason for so little change?" she said.

About 15 percent of U.S. troops today are female, with the figure expected to increase in the future and more likely to enter the combat arms as opportunities expand. But as Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho wrote in the foreword to *Women at War*, this "begs the question, what is being done to better understand and address" their needs?

"This book makes it clear that progress in understanding women's issues related to war and serving in the military has been made but much more research on these vital topics is needed," Horoho wrote.

Women at War delves into topics that even female troops are squeamish discussing — gynecological issues, birth control and reproductive concerns, sex, disease and death. Ritchie said part of the reason so few advancements have been made in accommodating women's needs on the frontlines is the reluctance to address them.

"Women don't want to admit they have different needs than men do," said Ritchie, who deployed to Iraq and served in Somalia and Cuba. "They tend to suck it up and drive on."

Roughly 770 female U.S. troops deployed to Operation Just Cause in Panama in 1989. More than 223,000 served in Iraq or Afghanistan or both from 2002 to 2011, 11 percent of the total U.S. force. Just over 2 percent of casualties in the two wars were women.

The sheer numbers and their projected growth, Ritchie said, should compel current and future leaders to educate themselves on the unique needs of women in field training or combat operations.

Those needs include how to go to the bathroom in full combat gear (many women choose to wear diapers and there's a piece of gear, called the female urinary diversion device that lets them evacuate through the fly of utility trousers); accessing birth control in remote locations, not only to avert pregnancy but to suppress menstrual cycles; and psychiatric care for issues more common to female troops, like eating disorders or post-traumatic stress related to military sexual assault.

"The military really hasn't tackled women health issues in a meaningful way. We are hoping to raise awareness of these issues so we can fix them," Ritchie said. Despite the dense research contained in the 368-page book, *Women at War* suffers from some notable gaps, according to the editors.

Ritchie said she could not find an author willing to write about what it means to be gay and female in the military, and she found a notable lack of research about consensual sex in a combat zone. The opportunities for studies on both topics are wide open, she said.

"Most of the research focuses on military sexual as-

Continued on Page 7



The Grapevine

Talk Around the Redwood Empire Chapter

By Charles Earthman

Last month I inadvertently left out a congratulatory note to Alyssa Johnson, an AVVA member of Chapter 223. Alyssa was given her school's Community Service Award for 142 hours of service, all logged while helping in various programs for our Chapter. Congratulations Alyssa, and thanks for all the work you've done serving the community on behalf of Chapter 223. Alyssa received a certificate and a pin to mark the occasion.

The Sonoma County Fair, July 24 to August 9, is happening as we go to press. This is an honest-to-goodness county fair with horse racing, carnival rides, and the 4H Club. The Fair offers several events and you can check published schedules for dates and times. Thursday is Seniors' Day: kids 60 and over (most of our members) get in free.

On August 15th the Pacific Coast Air Museum will do a Tribute to Vietnam Veterans. Join the ceremony to thank and honor Vietnam veterans for their service. Admission is free and you can climb into 10 open cockpits of Vietnam-era aircraft. Enjoy a \$5 lunch (hot dog, chips, and soda) from 11am to 1pm to be followed by a special ceremony at 1pm honoring veterans. That's Saturday, August 15th, from 10am to 4pm at the Pacific Coast Air Museum, One Air Museum Way in Santa Rosa (near the airport).

For the last two months the Chapter has had a raffle at the general meeting and for the first two drawings Bob Evans has walked away with the prize. "Lucky Bob" has some good karma working; someone should take him to the horse races at the fair. Way to go Bob--maybe we'll have you draw the winning ticket next month.

That's it for now, but let's keep the conversation going. If you would like to contribute to the Grapevine, go to www.VVA-223.org or contact me at 707.318.2837.

At Pathway Home, Combat Vets Seek to Tame Memories of War

By Martin Kuz, Stars and Stripes

Fred Gusman has been around Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) so long that he began treating the condition before it officially existed.

In 1978, as a social worker with a Veterans Affairs hospital near San Francisco, he created the nation's first residential therapy program for troops who fought in Vietnam. He listened as the men described the torment of living with a disorder that the American Psychiatric Association failed to recognize as a formal diagnosis until 1980.

More than three decades later, Gusman remains devoted to the cause, seeking to save a new generation of Veterans from the mental anguish of combat. He runs The Pathway Home, a residential treatment program for Iraq and Afghanistan war Veterans that he founded in 2008, soon after leaving his position as a senior director with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) National Center for PTSD.

His nonprofit program occupies a building on the verdant grounds of the Veterans Home of California – Yountville in Napa Valley, the heart of the state's wine region. The serene backdrop contrasts with the inner chaos of those who arrive to confront the feral memories of war.

"When I started talking with Vietnam Veterans, there was resistance to the idea that vets coming back could suffer psychological problems," said Gusman, who joined the USDVA in the late 1970s after serving six years in the military. "Now we know they do. But society still has a long way to go in understanding the complexities of what people experience when we ask them to go to war for us."

Gusman and his staff work with three classes of 15 Veterans each year. Most show up with their lives in ruin. Nearly three-fourths have attempted suicide and close to two-thirds have been homeless at least once in the previous year. Almost half are divorced.

The Veterans live for free in Pathway's relaxed, dorm-like setting during the four-month program. They gain familiarity with each other in the first few weeks as they take part in art, writing, meditation, and yoga classes intended to steady the mind. Gusman then be-

Continued on Page 8

VVA 17th National Convention, Springfield, Illinois

Dateline: Kate O'Hare-Palmer, July 25, 2015

Wow....the opening ceremonies put on by the Springfield Chapter Color Guard and the chorus of patriotic songs with the chorus dressed in Union uniforms was impressive. Then we had members of the Jefferson Starship sing the National Anthem. Took us all back to the 60's (1860's and then 1960's!)

The keynote Speaker was William A. Robinson, the longest-held enlisted POW (September 1965) who was in cap-

tivity in the Hanoi Hilton. He described his time of capture very poignantly. It was from the point of capture until he came home. Unimaginable. He was in solitary confinement for 6 months. A voice through the walls said "be prepared to die for your country--and if we survive, we must return with honor." He was put on his knees in front of an open grave, had a rifle to his head, and at that point just said it was his time to meet his maker. For whatever reason, they hauled him back to his 3x6 foot cell. Later, he was put in a cell with 8 other prisoners. Rations were meager; he ate all kinds of grass, occasionally bread, and lots of rice. He called it living in



VVA National Convention Opening Ceremony

the Briar Patch. Each morning the prisoners faced East thinking that was the closest way to the US and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. He closed with the words, "although we are far from perfect, our principles are honorable and just. I have faith that we will continue to work for peace and not let a country enslave another. Some people dream a dream or live a dream. Some people attend the dream. God bless you all."

The workings of the convention began that Wednesday afternoon, July 22nd. All of our delegates from our chapter split up the various committee hearings on resolutions so that we could bring back reports to you at the next meeting and be prepared for the final resolution voting on the floor. I went to the PTSD and substance abuse committee hearings first. There were no changes to the current resolutions. Time was then spent with discussion on the current practices for PTSD. Dr. Tom Hall also reviewed his program at his university that he calls the "At-Ease Zone". It is a way to identify those instructors that have gone through his education program of what it is like for those students who have served in the military.

I held my Women Veterans Committee resolution meeting next. We had changes to five of the resolutions! It was a very vocal group. I will talk about them when I get home. So much of our work is to get the VA to comply with improvements in women's health care and compensation equity for like-known diseases and illnesses. There was much discussion on what is happening around the country with our women veterans. We had more women delegates at this convention than ever before. The disabilities coming from service at Ft. McClellan are simply outrageous. The fight to get compensation recognized for these



Chapter 223 delegates

women (and men) who were exposed to Dioxin at this base has been a longer struggle than what has been accomplished in general for Agent Orange legislation.

I also went to the ETBO committee hearings. Keith King, President of National Veteran Business Development Council, spoke about the opportunity for small businesses by veterans. He has been doing this for fifteen years. He knows all the certification processes. He is willing to help all veterans of all eras to get off the ground. The federal government programs, he has found, do not properly prepare the veteran for all the regulations



Kate O'Hare-Palmer and Erica Jeffries

needed to be accepted by private sector. His email: kking@NVBDC.org.

In my next report I will fill you in on the Women's Breakfast. Our guest Speaker was Erica Jeffries, Director for the Illinois Dept. of Veterans Affairs. A West Point graduate and former Blackhawk pilot who also worked for the EPA, she is a very dynamic woman and I was able to get her to speak to the general session.

I am off to hear all the election results....nail-biting time for many folks.

Until next time....

See complete coverage in next month's "News and Views"



Women in the Combat Zone From Page 4

sault. But we know very clearly that sex happens. It's better to acknowledge that and address the birth control aspect of it. A study indicated that as many as 12 percent of deployed women in 2008 had an unplanned pregnancy," she said.

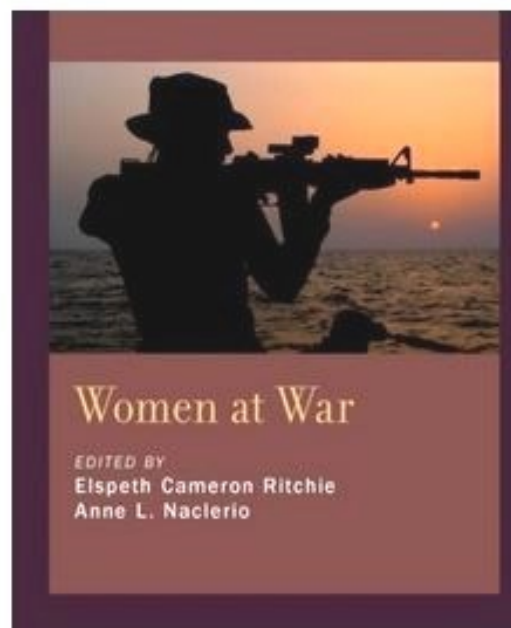
While the book is an academic tome, with the hefty price tag of a textbook — \$85 — Ritchie hopes it will be picked up by commanders and troops and be considered for integration into military leadership school training modules.

Ritchie and Naclerio have been making the rounds in Washington, D.C., speaking to the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in The Services and private bookstores and clubs, talking about the book's message.

Women at War will be the subject of an author's chat at the Politics and Prose independent book store in Washington D.C. at on Saturday, July 25, at 1 p.m. and featured in the National Museum of Health and Medicine's Science Cafe discussion series in Silver Spring, Maryland, on Tuesday, July 28.

Interested readers can pick up a copy at a 30 percent discount using the promo code AMPROMD9 at the Oxford University Press web site.

"We're hoping the conversation around this book really drives improvement in services for military women and veterans," Ritchie said.



well-versed on the issues. This helps to decrease unnecessary questions on the convention floor. These resolutions are very important to our voting body as an organization. All these are given to the Secretary of the VA for review. The comparison of what our veteran service organization feels is a priority and that of the other major service organizations help collate the main issues facing our veterans today.

John Rowan (President), Marsha Four (VP), Charlie Montgomery (candidate for VP), Bill Meeks (Secretary), and Wayne Reynolds (Treasurer) were all present for a 5-minute-each Q&A period about their candidacy in the upcoming election. This campaigning travel by them is on their own dime...it is not included in their national budget. Believe me...this budget cycle was reviewed very closely. Our Region 9 Director Dick Southern is running unopposed....so that is our voting district. The Region 8 candidates spoke also.

Once again, Dick ran a well-organized seminar. The luncheon was outstanding!! Too many choices and no time to "work off" those 4 dessert choices!! I didn't hear of any major winnings at the gambling tables or machines.

Don't forget to ask Lou Nunez how his train experience was to Reno. He has a story to tell!!

Until next time...

From Vacation, Front Page

buddies, meeting a new great nephew for the first time, and eating lobster rolls galore! As I age I find myself enjoying each day that I am given on this wonderful Earth. May we all "live long and prosper", as Mr. Spock would say!

gins a daily trauma therapy session that forces each member of the group to unearth their worst moments from a battlefield they have yet to leave behind.

"Fred is so direct that you get to the point where you're upset with him," said Zach Skiles, a former Marine who enrolled in the program in 2010. "But he does that because he knows you have to take your PTSD on or you'll never learn to deal with it."

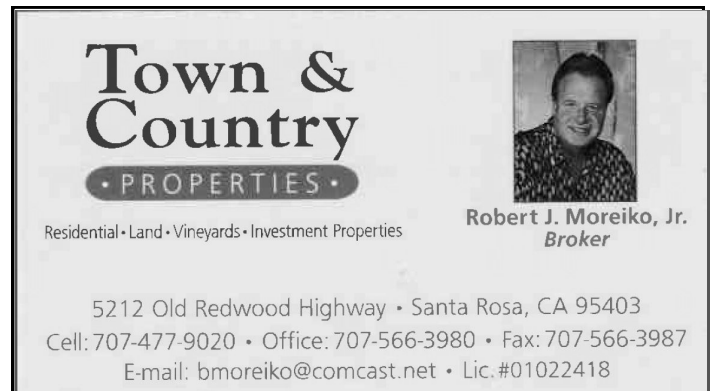
Skiles deployed to Iraq in 2003, and lost four friends in the span of two weeks. He mustered out of the Marines a year later, and beset by flashbacks of his friends dying, bouts of paranoia and insomnia, he slowly descended into the void of his mind.

By 2009, he found himself estranged from loved ones, unemployed, and homeless. As he languished on a USDVA waiting list to receive counseling, his case-worker pointed him toward Pathway.

"Going there fundamentally changed my life," said Skiles, 32, who lives in San Francisco. He recently earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and leads equine therapy and meditation classes for Veterans. "The biggest thing I took away is that you have to be an active participant in your recovery. Fred's going to say, 'You know what has to be done. Now do it.'"

Gusman's approach has yielded encouraging results. In a survey last year of 100 graduates of the program, 93 reported that the quality of their life had improved since attending The Pathway Home. Contributing factors included making stronger ties with family and friends, avoiding legal problems, and continuing to receive treatment from USDVA or private clinicians.

Gusman ascribes the success in part to an emphasis on social reintegration that counters the self-isolation associated with





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NBVRC operates Hearn House, a behavioral health treatment program that provides comprehensive treatment and housing for male veterans.

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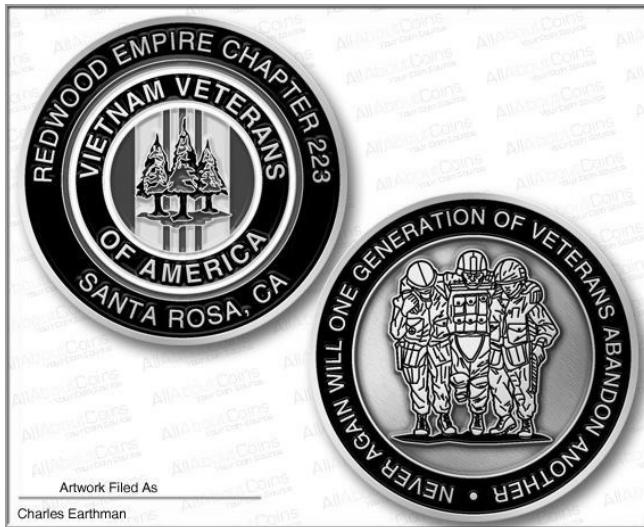


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Now!!
\$10 - Ask Earl, Ken, or Charles**

HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

Every Monday evening @ 5:30 pm.
101 6th Street, Santa Rosa.

SONOMA COUNTY VET CONNECT -

Every Tuesday morning, 9am to noon at the
VETS building. Vets helping vets solve problems.

VVA 223 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING -

Second Tuesday of the month, 1pm @ the VETS
building. Look for the guys looking for the
room...

VVA-223 GENERAL MEETING

Third Tuesday of the month. POTLUCK @ 6pm
& Meeting starts at 7pm. Next meeting , July 21

FOOD-GIVE-AWAY PROGRAM

Fourth Tuesday of the month. Volunteers will
please check in with John McGivney @ 575.5261
for time and station.

POKER SCHEDULE

Cards in the air at 6pm. Check-in and pizza 5pm
to 5:55 pm. Usually the first Saturday of the
month..

COMIC'S CORNER

What does your father do for a living? He is a
magician. He cuts people in two. Do you have any
brothers or sisters? Yes, one half-brother and one half-
sister....

* * *

A Baptist preacher and a priest sat next to each other on
a plane. When the flight attendant asked what they'd like
to drink, the priest said he'd like a glass of wine. The
preacher asked for a soft drink saying Christians should
avoid alcohol. The priest said, "Jesus drank wine." The
Baptist said, "I know and I would have thought a lot
more of Him if he hadn't."

* * *

Adam and Eve were naming animals. Adam saw a big
creature with a horn on its face and said, "What shall we
call this one?" "Why don't we call it a rhinoceros?"
"But, why?" "Because it looks more like a rhinoceros
than anything we've seen so far."

* * *



* * *

A little old man shuffled slowly into an ice cream parlor
and pulled himself slowly, painfully, up onto a stool.
After catching his breath, he ordered a banana split.
The waitress asked, "Crushed nuts?" "No, arthritis."

* * *

I changed my password everywhere to 'incorrect.' That
way when I forget it, it always reminds me, 'Your pass-
word is incorrect.'

* * *



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**NEXT CHAPTER 223
GENERAL MEETING
August 18, 2015
Raffle Prize
BE THERE EARLY!!!**



AVVA Alyssa Johnson shows her Community Service Award for 142 hours of service to the community for VVA Chapter 223