



View from the Bridge

We have been very busy in 2023 as MVA continues to work with Congress to expand the Blue Water Navy presumptive disability line, designate June 10th as Veterans Get Outside Day (Story on page 3), and other Veterans benefits actions.

Our major accomplishment last year was helping to draft portions of the PACT Act which greatly expanded presumptive benefits to Veterans who were exposed to toxic substances in the environment. This included those who visited Guam which greatly expanded benefits for sailors who were not covered under the Blue Water Navy Act. We will not give up the fight to expand these boundaries and are working on additional legislation. That's why your support and our meetings with Congressional staff in Washington, D.C. are so important. Your donations and MVA membership make this possible.

This expansion of presumptive benefits has made an incredible difference for hundreds of thousands of Veterans exposed to toxic materials during their time in service. We hear almost every day from a Veteran who was previously denied that has just received their benefits for Agent Orange exposure because their ship stopped in Guam. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to know we have helped another Veteran.

From January to mid-May, VA completed nearly 300,000 Veteran and family member PACT Act claims with a 79% approval rate. VA has received 30% more claims than they did at the same time last year and are struggling to keep up.

The VA continues to hire more employees, train them, and impose mandatory overtime to process claims faster, but still face a growing backlog which exceeded 900,000 on May 20.

The VA officials stated that they intend to publish a list of about 300 potential service presumptions related to toxic exposures in the next few months. Because of the requirements of the PACT Act, the new presumptions will be published and available for public comment.

MVA is working closely with VA officials and Congressional staff to ensure these new presumptions meet the needs of Veterans. We will keep you posted.

Commander John B. Wells (U.S. Navy, Retired)
Chairman, Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc.

In this issue

View from the Bridge	Page 1
Section Update	Page 2
Get Outside Day	Page 3
Legislative Update	Page 4
MVA Upcoming Events	Page 4
VA benefit updates	Page 5



MVA Section Update

Blue Water Navy Section update

By Mike Yates



The Blue Water Navy section continues to be very busy as we work to ensure our sailors receive the benefits they have earned. I check the Facebook pages, my email addresses, and my phone messages

daily to provide assistance. Please understand there are a lot of people asking for help or guidance and it may take a while for me to get back to you, but I want to remind you that we still do deck log research and plots for MVA members. I want to thank Brad Davidson for all the help he provides when I can't find a Deck Log.

One thing I need to make very clear to all Blue Water Navy Veterans is that we NEED to help Veterans in other sections fight for their benefits. The Blue Water Navy Section is the only one that has a relationship to all other sections. Your ship may have stopped for a visit in one of them (Okinawa, Guam, Panama). We need to support them as much as we can, it may help get benefits to another Blue Water Navy Veteran. So, when we send out information on a related Bill of the Week, please provide any help you can to get a bill passed to help other Veterans.

Veterans of Okinawa

By Jerry Balmes



We were unable to get Okinawa exposure to Agent Orange in the PACT Act, but that doesn't mean we stopped the fight. I've spent several weeks in DC this year with other members of the MVA team

educating congressional staffs on the issues Okinawa Veterans face related to herbicide exposure. We are pushing for separate legislation or an amendment to current law to ensure those who were exposed to Agent Orange in Okinawa receive the same recognition and

benefits as other Veterans. This legislation doesn't just happen, it takes hundreds of hours of research and education to get a bill sponsored and introduced. The MVA has been very successful in getting exposure legislation passed for other locations and we continue to push to have you included.

When we do get legislation introduced, you will be notified through our Bill of the Week email. It is extremely important that you contact your legislators and let them know how important their support is. When important Veteran legislation is introduced, reach out to your representatives and encourage your family and friends to do the same. **You make all the difference.**

Agent Orange Survivors of Guam

By George Coolbaugh

With implementation of the PACT Act now fully



underway and more central Pacific members seeing their claims **processed and approved**, the AOSOG section has focused on migrating more of the 1,900+ folks from our open Facebook page to the Members

Only Facebook group.

The moderator of the Members group reached out to every member of the original group who is listed as a MVA supporter but has not yet formally joined the Members group. Early responses have been encouraging, and the Members Only group has grown in size by just over 15%.

Remember, the Members Only group is where our subject matter experts answer VA-related questions, where we post filing/claims information from the Veterans Administration, and where you can interact with others who have "been there, done that" as you work with VSOs and others to further your own claim.

Don't forget to renew your MVA membership as soon as possible – MVA needs our financial support to work with Congress on our behalf. **Make it count!**

Senate signs resolution designating Veterans Get Outside Day June 10

By MSgt. Donna C. Stratford (USAFR, Retired)

MVA Marketing and Communication Director

Several months ago, MVA joined forces with the Benjamin Ware Legacy Fund - o2 Project, a Canadian initiative to designate the second Saturday in June as Veteran Get Outside Day. MVA representatives drafted a resolution and worked with Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D. and Representative Garrett Graves to make this a reality. On May 31, the U.S. Senate approved the [resolution](#) designating June 10, 2023 as “Veterans Get Outside Day”. The resolution encourages a targeted outreach program to urge Veterans to participate in outdoor activities on that date.

The resolution is the part of an effort by [Military-Veterans Advocacy](#) (MVA) and the Canadian [o2 Project](#) to encourage those living with post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression, and anxiety to participate in outside events and activities to improve mental health outcomes.

“This is a great opportunity for veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury to go outside and benefit from the calming effects of nature.” said Commander John Wells (US Navy retired), Chairman of MVA. “I know when I was in the Navy it was always nice to go topside, breathe some salt air and watch a sunset. This program will give folks an opportunity to enjoy some fresh air and appreciate the world around us.”

“We owe it to the men and women who traveled oceans to protect us to address the veteran suicide crisis,” said Dr. Cassidy. “Vets Get Outside Day is a positive step towards ensuring veterans know they have the help they need available to them.”

“Veterans Get Outside Day encourages Veterans to experience the outdoors and engage in recreational activities such as hiking, biking, fishing, and hunting, and ultimately promote a passion for the outdoors. Studies show that nature-based therapy can work,” said Representative Graves.

Rachel Ware, Executive Director of Legacy Fund noted: “The o2 Project - Get Outside Day initiative encourages people worldwide to go outside and benefit from nature. Getting outside and reconnecting with nature has been proven to reduce blood pressure, stress, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and improve our overall well-being. We are happy to work with MVA to promote wilderness therapy and mental health among Veterans.”

“Our hope that if Veterans spend one day outdoors doing activities that help them relax and connect with nature, that they will want to make it part of their regular routine,” Wells said. “With this in mind, we encourage everyone to “Take 10” minutes daily to get outside and do something to provide a break from daily stress.”

The Veterans Get Outside Day Joint Resolution encourages the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Forest Service, and the Department of the Interior to coordinate and cooperate in promoting “Veterans Get Outside Day”. This designation coincides with U.S. Forest Service National Get Outdoors Day.

Public events are planned June 10 at the [USS Kidd Veterans Museum](#), 305 S. River Road, Baton Rouge Louisiana, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and [Fitzgerald Freedom Ranch](#), Columbia, Tennessee from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.



MVA Legislative Update

By **Brian Moyer**
MVA Legislative Director

The Guam, American Samoa, Johnston Atoll, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand veterans now have the same benefits as a "Boots on the Ground Vietnam veteran" also there are still some Blue Water Navy veterans that are still being denied benefits because of the way Congress ignored the Court of Appeals decision on the Procopio v Wilkie. Congress decided to draw its own base line for the Blue Water Navy in the Blue Water Navy Act.

If that sailor or marine knows his ship pulled into Guam coming or going into the original area of combat operations in an ancillary support position and was awarded the Vietnam Service Medal. But unfortunately, is still being denied benefits that veteran can still file a claim under PACT Act for exposure on Guam as long as the veterans ship shows it docked at Guam coming from or going from Southeast Asia. That would also include those Marine battalions that were always out on a float from Okinawa and pulled into Guam periodically on return to Okinawa.

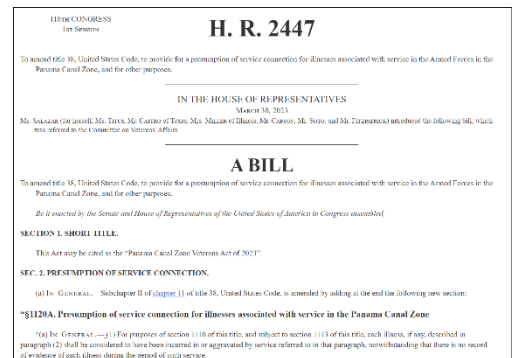
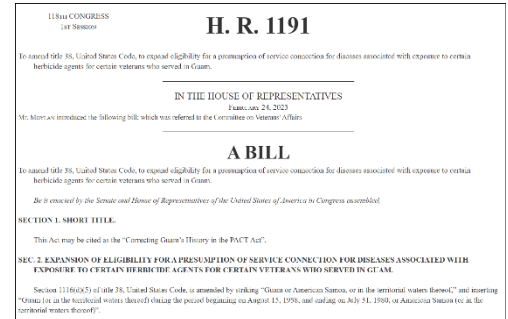
The same applies to that Air Force Veteran that rotated between Okinawa and Guam or went to Thailand. Hopefully those documents exist in that Veterans records.

We are working very hard to add more co-sponsors for [HR 1191 "Correcting Guam's History in the PACT Act"](#) and also, [HR 2447 "Agent Orange Veterans of Panama"](#). Both of these acts are being very well received by the Representatives staff and hope the House Veterans Affairs Committee will act on both bills soon. We are also working very hard on trying to find a sponsor for the Agent Orange Veterans of Okinawa to get those veterans and dependents their toxic exposure benefits.

MVA Upcoming Events

MVA leadership volunteers are participating in the following conferences and events to help forward the Veterans benefits agenda. In addition there are monthly visits to U.S. House and Senate offices in Washington, D.C.

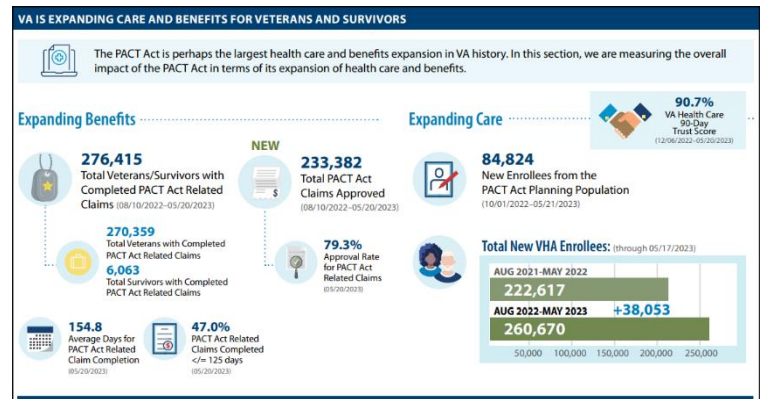
- June 4-8: County Veterans Service Officers Madison, WI
- June 10: Veterans Get Outside Day
 - [USS Kidd Veterans Museum](#), 305 S. River Road, Baton Rouge Louisiana, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
 - [Fitzgerald Freedom Ranch](#), Columbia, Tennessee, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- June 15 - 18: Florida American Legion Conference, Orlando, FL
- July 25-27: Veterans Affairs Vet Resources Conference, Nashville, Tennessee
- Aug 14 - 19: Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention, Baton Rouge, LA
- Aug 13 – 16: National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, Buffalo, NY
- Aug 27 – Sep 2: United States Submarine Veterans Conference, Tucson, AZ



Veterans Affairs benefit updates and news

PACT Act Performance Dashboard provides implementation statistics

VA publishes the [PACT Act Performance Dashboard](#) every other Friday to measure the implementation of this legislation and showcase its impact on Veterans and survivors. The dashboard provides a variety of information including the number of claims filed, processed and information on claim approval rates.



VA relaxes masking at health care facilities

The Department of Veterans Affairs [announced](#) that as of May 30, it has relaxed the masking requirement at VA medical facilities. VA facilities will no longer universally require masks in most clinical areas.

Masks will continue to be required for staff, Veterans, and visitors while in the high-risk areas, including waiting areas of:

- Transplant units
- Dialysis
- Chemotherapy units
- Emergency department and urgent care
- Open bay medical intensive care units
- Spinal cord injury and community living centers (staff and visitors only, with the exception that visitors to CLCs and SCI may unmask when visiting with a patient within that patient's room or outside.)

Masking is required for those with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection or other viral respiratory infection; VHA healthcare personnel upon request of a Veteran patient, caregiver, or family member; or where local leadership determines that continued masking is required.

Studies show VA health care is better or equal to non-VA health care

The [Journal of General Internal Medicine](#) and the [Journal of the American College of Surgeons](#) published articles based on a [systematic review of studies](#) about VA health care, concluding VA health care is consistently as good as — or better than — non-VA health care.

The findings come from a national review of peer-reviewed studies that evaluated VA on quality, safety, access, patient experience, and comparative cost/efficiency. Of the 26 studies that looked at non-surgical care, 15 reported VA care was better than non-VA care and seven reported equal or mixed clinical quality outcomes. Of the 13 studies that looked at quality and safety in surgical care, 11 reported VA surgical care is comparable or better than non-VA care.