



## **Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®**

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### **VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE**

Chairman's Remarks

May brought a return to Washington and the Halls of Congress. We had 26 appointments in four days with very successful meetings, including five Members of Congress. Discussions included MVA's™ legislative agenda for this and the next Congress.

We returned to Slidell just in time for our second annual Breakfast with the Best.

A good time was had by all. MVA™ members and local community leaders joined Chief of Staff Mike Kvintus, Colonel Rob Maness, yours truly, and our staff to celebrate Armed Forces Day. Rifle-Raffle (Rif-Raf) winners were drawn and winners were notified. We set a record this year, selling 382 Rif-Raf tickets compared to 310 in 2021. We are preparing for next years raffle as we speak. Speaking of raffles, I was able to purchase 2 season tickets for the New Orleans Saints. These terrace level seats in the end zone have been donated to MVA™.

We will be raffling off each game for \$25.00 for the two seats. We will only authorize 100 raffle tickets per game to increase the chances of winning. So, if you live on the Gulf Coast or you are coming to New Orleans, watch for the announcements on our website and FB pages. Great time to visit us, especially if your favorite team is visiting the Saints.

Of course our Fall Foliage trip raffle is almost ready to launch. The 6 prizes will allow the winners and a guest to join the tour for a late October (Oct 23-27) tour of Southern New England. This will include two nights in Newport RI, the site of many America's Cup races, the Naval War College museum, beautiful Ocean Drive, and shopping on the Newport waterfront. Dinner at the LA Forge Restaurant adjacent to the Tennis Hall of Fame is included. Traveling north, the tour will pass the site of the Revolutionary War Battle of Rhode Island, Battleship Cove in Fall River Mass, and a two night stay in Boston. The tour will include Boston's Freedom Trail and the battlefields at Lexington and Concord. Airfare not included. MVA™'s own Princess Susie Belanger, her Prince Ernie and yours truly will accompany the tour to handle any problems and entertain the winners with sea stories. Tickets are \$100.00 each, but a chance at this tour is worth the chance. Come join us!

Membership is increasing but slowly. We still have a number of non-renewals. But our life memberships are growing. Remember if cost is an issue we can provide a donated gift membership. You do not have to choose between MVA™ and your gas tank. Contact Robin.Barr@madvocacy.org. Also, if you are a widow or widower of someone who died from a service-connected illness or disability, you are eligible for a free life membership.

I will be returning to Washington DC the week of 19 June for more time on the Hill. Due to the cost of hotel rooms in Washington, this visit will be limited to myself and Vice-Chair Sgt. Major Jim Kuiken. We just cannot afford to take a full delegation right now.

The Panama Canal Society will be holding their convention in Orlando July 6-9. Donna Tornadoe, Mike Kvintus, and I will be manning an exhibit to educate attendees on our legislative agenda for veterans who served in Panama.

Every few days I read a Facebook post from a Blue Water Navy veteran who has recently received his or her benefits. Soon we will be seeing these types of posts from Guam, American Samoa, Johnston Island, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Sometimes we are thanked. Occasionally we receive a donation. Folks, please remember who worked on the Hill and in court to get you these benefits. Please consider making a donation at [https://www.flipcause.com/secure/cause\\_pdetails/MTQ1MjEx](https://www.flipcause.com/secure/cause_pdetails/MTQ1MjEx)

No word yet on the promised appointment with the VA Secretary. Still waiting.

Please check out the MVA Marketplace on our website. <https://military-veterans-advocacy.square.site/>

So, until next month, stay steady on course.

John B. Wells  
CDR USN (ret)  
Chairman



## **BILL OF THE WEEK**

Please support the MVA™ bill of the week. It takes a minute to register and seconds to send the pre-written email to your Member of Congress and Senators. This allows you to provide your input to Congress, support MVA™, and support your fellow veterans. Please scroll through and support all or some of our bills of the week.

<https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/bill-of-the-week.html>

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Your MVA Board has put in over 4500 hours so far in 2022

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**PACT ACT UPDATE**

It looks like the Senate will quickly pass the PACT Act upon their return from recess. The bill must then return to the House to reconcile some changes made by the Senate but should quickly pass the House again and be sent to President Biden for his signature.

The PACT Act will provide for herbicide (Agent Orange) benefits for veterans serving on Guam, American Samoa, Johnston Island, and in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The bill will add hypertension to the list of herbicide presumptives.

It will also provide coverage for radiation cleanup veterans at Eniwetok and Palomares. Finally, it will provide coverage for veterans deployed to the K-2 base in Uzbekistan and burn pit victims throughout Southwest Asia.

This bill is not all encompassing but it is a good start. It should provide toxic exposure benefits to about 3.4 million veterans.

If you have not filed a claim, file it now or at least submit an intent to file. The claim submission will mark the effective date of your benefits. Unlike the case with the Blue Water Navy, benefits will not be retroactive to previous submissions. There was a consent agreement that allowed us to make Blue Water retroactive. That is not the case with the other areas. Reserve your place in line now - file that claim.

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### **MVA's Legislative Priorities for the 118th Congress**

Assuming the PACT Act passes, many of this year's legislative priorities will have been enacted. This is not the end however. It is one battle, a big battle, but we still have the war to win!

Our legislative priorities for the next Congress include adjusting the start date for Guam coverage back to August of 1958 when the first use of herbicide was documented. Extension of the herbicide exposure to Panama and Okinawa are also at the top of our list. Fort McClellan and other CONUS sites are other areas of concern that must be addressed. We hope to address the problems with the VA appellate backlog and the claims process at the Regional Office. Critical to our litigation strategy is to impose a statutory time line on the VA to answer our rulemaking requests. We have a number of requests that have been approved, but the VA never seems to get around to issuing the rules.

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### **Litigation**



Our two suits at the Federal Circuit are still pending. These suits will require the VA to issue regulations extending herbicide benefits to Thailand, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Island. It will also encompass the airspace over the Republic of Vietnam and extend the Blue Water Navy line throughout the Vietnam Service Medal area. The PACT Act, assuming it is passed, will moot one suit and part of another. But the airspace and Blue Water portions remain. We expected a decision by now, so it could come at any time. Assuming PACT is passed, we will update the court on its impact.

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### **MVA™ AT THE SUPREME COURT**

What happens when a veteran suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress or Traumatic Brain Injury fails to file a claim within one year or misses an appeal date? Can this be excused? The VA says no, but if the mental illness interfered with the veteran's ability to file or pursue his claim, should he or she be denied

the earlier effective date? A court case supported by Military-Veterans Advocacy® is now pending at the Supreme Court of the United States to resolve the matter. MVA™ has filed an amicus curiae brief in *Arrellano v. McDonough*, which argues that these deadlines are susceptible to equitable tolling. In other words, an event that was not the veteran's fault, but that prevented him from meeting these deadlines, could stop the deadline.

This case, if decided favorably, may have wide ranging ramifications. Say you wanted to file a claim for herbicide under the Blue Water Navy Act prior to the Procopio decision. A VSO refuses to accept it because of the "boots on the ground" policy. A couple of years later you convince another VSO to file the claim. If we are successful in *Arrellano*, we may be able to argue that the retroactive date is should be the date you first tried to file the claim, not when it was eventually filed.

Oral argument was held in this case in April. We should see a decision this month.

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### **Operation Mission Daybreak (from MOAA newsletter)**

The VA is launching a contest that will dole out \$20 million in prizes to entrants with the best ideas for reducing the thousands of veteran suicides that occur in the U.S. each year.

The competition, called Mission Daybreak, seeks to bring in "fresh thinking, outside perspectives and innovative concepts" that the department could use to help save veterans. Top winners will take away prizes of \$3 million and \$1 million, while others will get \$250,000 and \$100,000 for chosen proposals, according to a website for the VA contest.

For more information go to: <https://www.missiondaybreak.net/>

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*From FRA "Newsbytes"*

### **Cause of Gulf War Illness Discovered**

After the Gulf War, nearly one-third of all who deployed reported unexplained chronic symptoms such as rashes, fatigue, gastrointestinal and digestive issues, brain "fog," neuropathy, and muscle and joint pain. Federal agencies generally rejected the idea that troops may have been suffering from exposure to chemical agents, with many veterans experiencing symptoms sent to mental health providers.

A study published in the journal of Environmental Health Perspectives used genetic research and survey data to determine that service members exposed to sarin were more likely to develop Gulf War Illness, and those who were exposed and had a weaker variant of a gene that helps digest pesticides were nine times more likely to have symptoms.

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In January 2023, the VA will launch a new program offering, Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife), which provides guaranteed acceptance whole-life insurance coverage to Veterans ages 80 and under with any level of service-connected disability. Although, some Veterans aged 81 and older may also be eligible.

Learn more about VALife and whether it's the right choice for you and your family. <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/103790/valife-insurance-program-coming-january-2023-veterans-with-service-connection/>

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## **BLUE WATER NAVY ASSOCIATION™**

Here it is another month and yet we have not reached our goal of over 2000 Members. We need to reach this number so we can become a registered Veterans Service Organization. Please help by reaching out to your Veteran friend and asking them to join.

An update on the Deck Log Project. If you have a Deck Log that you feel we do not have, please email them to me at <mailto:mike.yates@madvocacy.org> so we can add them to our collection to help other Blue Water Navy Veterans. We have over 6000 Deck Log entries that show ships that were within the Territorial Sea. Some of the Deck Logs we have are for other ships, and these can be used for claims as long as it shows your ship's name and that the location is within the Territorial Seas. As I can, I am looking for the exact Deck Log for the ships and replacing them.

If you follow our Facebook page you will see some Members letting you know that you can do your own research for Deck Logs by going to the National Archives. The location is

[https://www.archives.gov/research/military/logbooks/navy-online?fbclid=IwAR1usvmENWaur7E25gFzM1Jjfo9WLOmV8gtRBD3J\\_aXHFVs10DOUalpxk#i](https://www.archives.gov/research/military/logbooks/navy-online?fbclid=IwAR1usvmENWaur7E25gFzM1Jjfo9WLOmV8gtRBD3J_aXHFVs10DOUalpxk#i)

This location is where you will be able to find most of the Deck Logs. You need to check the three locations entered for the time period of 0800, 1200, 2000. Next you need to know the location of the Territorial Sea Line. You can find that in the HR 299 bill. Note, you need to read and understand the wording of the HR 299 Bill definition of the Territorial Sea, this is very important.

Where the main problem comes in is if the 0800, 1200, or 2000 location only shows that the ship was close to the Territorial Sea Line and you need to do Dead Reckoning to see if the ship entered the Territorial Sea Line. It would take too long to try to explain how to do Dead Reckoning. You need to start with a good location and check each and every course change and speed change and how long the ship was on that course and speed.

Mike Yates  
Director, Blue Water Navy™  
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®

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## **VETERANS OF PANAMA CANAL ZONE™**

**Panama Canal Society Meeting**

2022 is the 90th year of the Panama Canal Society and Military-Veterans Advocacy® will be there to connect. It will be held in Orlando, Florida. They have some excellent speakers lined up, including Dr. Heckadon-Moreno, Smithsonian Research Institute, and Ilya Espino De Marotta, Deputy Administrator and Vice President for Operations of the Panama Canal. What impressive resumes! I hope to meet them both!

I have made signs for our table, hoping to attract interest and increase our membership. Thank you to all who have donated to my birthday fundraiser. It is going to cost a pretty penny to get me from California to Florida. If I didn't think this of the utmost importance, I would not go. We have come this far, together we can make this happen. Please continue to tell your fellow veterans, families and friends to join and support our Panama section. And if you will be there, please stop by. We will be setting up near the PanCanal Museum area.

### **H.R. 5026**

Although Panama is not included in the PACT Act which is close to becoming law, Panama is front and center and making progress. We will need to reintroduce the Panama bill after the new congress gets seated. But remember, we do have a grant from the VA Secretary for Panama. Commander Wells and others have been to DC several times to ask for assistance in getting the Secretary to write Panama into the CFR.

DC needs to hear from all of us. Continue to engage in our Bill of the Week program which can be found here: [Bill of the Week](#)

Do it every week! Do it every day! Do it multiple times! This program we provide for your use makes it simple to contact your representatives and only takes a couple seconds of your time. Every bill we put up in our Bill of the Week program is important to a veteran. They need our help, and we need theirs! Let us be proactive!

I know that it is a bummer when we get the blah, blah, blah responses and our representatives never answering our question about Panama, that just means we need to pester them until they do! Call, email, fax, go to their offices! Ask them to support H.R. 5026, direct them back to our evidence here: [Vets of Panama \(militaryveteransadvocacy.org\)](#) and the fact that the Secretary has granted for Panama, what are they waiting for, please support H.R. 5026. If we get their support on this Panama bill, if any of them are left after the election, they can help us again to get it going. Remember, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease!"

Individuals can and have won, so keep up the battle and never give up! Appeal, appeal, appeal! And if you need assistance, let us know.

### **What can you do to help advance our cause?**

Maybe you belong to an organization where you meet with many people or just have a heck of a lot of friends. We could use your help spreading the word about SMILEAmazon. Millions shop on Amazon, and it doesn't cost them one red cent to help our cause. Please ask them, in fact sit down with them and make sure they get it done, hook them up to us on SMILEAmazon. This is just a simple way that money can come in to help us get this done. Just go to our FlipCause page from our website here: [MVA Donations - Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. \(flipcause.com\)](#) and hit SMILE Amazon and follow the prompts. But remember, very important for all, my regular amazon and my smile amazon can see each other and anything I put in the cart in either place shows, but when I go to purchase, I have to make sure I am on SMILEAmazon account not just the regular to get those pennies to go to Military-Veterans Advocacy®. So make sure to convey to people you may help to help us to go through SMILE.

Maybe you belong to your local veterans group. Commander Wells and others would be happy to come to give a talk to your group. If that is you, reach out to us and let us know when and where.

### **Possible testing sites posted**

If you are a member of Military-Veterans Advocacy® and part of my Panama section, you are already aware of the 17 video series on possible places to test in the old Canal Zone. This information was from a Tropical Test Center map which turned up. I think it is very interesting, especially for those who may have an interest in possibly testing, if needed. I especially like Fort Davis, as that is where my husband and I lived 1974-1977. Well, actually we lived the first year in Colon waiting for quarters. The Fort Davis video shows the old PX and parade field and talks about the enlisted quarters across the street from the barracks

and there being five pinpoints within throwing distance of our old quarters. I worked next door to the PX and would walk across the parade field during the dry season to work each day. It sure seemed silly to drive the car around the block, but with the rains coming right at quitting time most days, you got soaked running to your car!

### **We are planning to grow**

We are looking to grow and planning new sections as we find leaders. God Bless Commander John Wells for bringing all of our groups under one organization. It is a huge task, and we can help each other. As you ask fellow veterans, families, friends, people on the street to join MVA™, remember we have many sections.

Donna Tornoe  
Director, Veterans of Panama Canal Zone™  
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®

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### **Are you eligible for VA disability Benefits?**

You should be eligible for disability benefits if you have an illness or other condition believed to be caused by your contact with an environmental hazard while serving in the military. This may include contact with:

- Particulate matter or large burn pits in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa
- A large sulfur fire Mosul, Iraq
- Hexavalent chromium at the water treatment plant in Basra, Iraq
- Pollutants from a waste incinerator near the Naval Air Facility at Atsugi, Japan

In-addition the VA has coverage for illness associated with:

- Agent Orange
- Asbestos
- Birth defects like spina bifida
- Contact with mustard gas or lewisite
- Contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune
- Gulf War Illness
- Gulf War Illness in Afghanistan
- Project 112/ SHAD
- Radiation exposure
- Specific environment hazards

Action steps for all military veterans:

1. Enroll in the VA medical system today (sometimes illnesses are delayed)
2. File a claim for existing condition(s)
3. Join the registry for the condition

Contact your local Veteran Service Officer to get started today.

If you need help let me know.

Richard Elliott  
Director of Research  
Richard.Elliott@MVAdvocacy.org  
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®

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If you have questions about membership, contact Robin Barr at [Robin.Barr@madvocacy.org](mailto:Robin.Barr@madvocacy.org)

Be sure to visit our online marketplace. We offer a variety of products from all of our sections and are continuing to add new products. <https://military->

