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View from the Bridge

The passage of the PACT Act last year was a major win and provided the largest expansion of benefits Veterans since the GI Bill in 1944. MVA was instrumental in drafting the legislation and working with legislators to get the bill passed. The PACT Act provides VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances.

In addition to Vietnam, the legislation added Agent Orange exposure presumptions for Guam, Thailand, Cambodia, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll. This year we will focus on recognition of Agent Orange exposure for those who were in Panama and Okinawa, as well as implementing an earlier effective date for exposure in Guam to Aug. 15, 1958. We will also make the case for extending the Blue Water benefits line to the original Vietnam Service Medal line.

In addition to Agent Orange exposure expansion, our top issues to tackle for this year include:

- Disability appeals reform
- Timelines for Veterans Affairs response to rulemaking requests
- Presumptive benefits for Fort McClellan
- Include benefits for dependents exposed to toxic exposures.

Membership update

Our end of year push to expand life memberships was successful and we added 72 new life members. We are still falling short of the 2,000 members needed to apply for Veterans Service Organization status with the VA. Unfortunately, this limits the kinds of services we can offer for Veterans, including assistance in filing initial claims. Although we are no longer offering the discounted life memberships, we encourage people to join at the rate of \$35 per year or a life membership. Memberships provide the financial resources we need to meet with legislative teams and fight for your benefits.

Sponsorships

This year we are adding personal and business sponsorships as a way to support MVA. Please see our article on page 2 of the newsletter to learn more.

Thank you all for your past support and I look forward to another successful year.

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



Agent Orange Survivors of Guam update

*By George Coolbaugh
Commander (U.S. Navy, Retired)
Director & Section Leader
Agent Orange Survivors of Guam™*

With the passage and signing into law of the **Honoring our PACT Act** last summer, AOSOG's focus shifted from supporting legislative work to one of providing continuing education, assistance and VA-related knowledge to our members. Thanks to everyone who's contributing so much knowledge to that effort.

I want to specifically recognize the work done by the "AOSOG Communications Team" in the last Congress. This group of 30+ volunteer members reached out on a continual basis with emails, telephone calls, and (yes) even written letters to make the case for the support of the **PACT Act**. These folks kept the bill in front of Congress every single week with many thousand individual contacts.

MANY THANKS, Comms Team. We're forever grateful for your hard work. All of the AOSOG members who reached out to representatives in Congress, deserve our respect and thanks. "Bravo Zulu" and "Well done".

Brian Moyer, AOSOG's founder, leader and driving force since the beginning, is now

Legislative Director for Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. I've been named to succeed Brian as Section Chief as we shift our focus from the legislative process to one of education, identifying more vets who were exposed to toxic herbicides, and providing the information we all need to meet ongoing challenges in getting VA recognition and compensation. I'll need your help if we want to continue to be successful.

In 2023, AOSOG hopes to replicate its earlier success by setting up Comms Teams on behalf of MVA's **Okinawa and Panama Canal Zone** sections. We are working on legislation supporting your benefits and will ask you to reach out to Congressional staff to get it across the finish line. All it takes to join in the fun is a computer and email/spreadsheet/word processing programs (there are free open-source versions of each program available from online sources, MS Office or other suites of programs). This is your fight, so please don't sit on the sidelines!



MVA Offers Individual and Corporate Sponsorships

Military-Veterans Advocacy is offering individual and corporate sponsorship options. There are four sponsorship levels ranging from the \$1,000 Platinum level or the \$250 Bronze level. All sponsors will receive recognition on the VMA website and Facebook, as well as recognition and tickets for the "Breakfast of the Best" on Armed Forces Day. Depending on the level they may also receive Rifle Raffle tickets, Saints home game raffle tickets, and challenge coins. Click [here](#) for more information.

MVA Officials Greet New Congressional Members

By Donna C. Stratford (MSgt. USAFR Retired)
MVA Marketing and Communication Director

[Military-Veterans Advocacy](#) officials and staff made their first Congressional visit of the year to Washington, D.C., focused on informing and educating new U.S. House of Representatives and Senate members about expanding Veterans benefits.

Many new members of Congress have limited knowledge of military benefits in general or the effects of toxic exposure from Agent Orange, burn pits, and other substances that are common among Veterans. The MVA delegation met with 60 new members or their staff during the Jan. 23 to Feb. 3 meetings.

“These trips are extremely important as we work to inform the new members of Congress about the health effects of toxic exposure and resulting health care or disability needs of Veterans,” remarked Commander John Wells, (USN Retired) Chairman, Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. “Our focus for the first trip is to introduce new members to Veteran issues and gather their support for future legislation.”

MVA’s legislative agenda for the 118th Congress is to focus on the following concerns:

- Agent Orange exposure benefits for Panama Canal and Okinawa Veterans
- Change the benefit date for Guam Agent Orange exposure to Aug. 15, 1958 (Currently Jan. 9, 1962)
- Extend the Blue Water disability benefits area to match the Vietnam Service Medal boundaries
- Disability appeals reform to reduce wait times
- Timelines for Veterans Affairs response to rulemaking requests
- Presumptive benefits for Fort McClellan
- Benefits for dependents exposed to toxic exposures.



Rep. Al Green of Texas, left, meets with Brian Moyer during MVA Congressional meetings in Washington D.C..

“We found that many new members and their staff were not familiar with Agent Orange, Blue Water Navy issues, or how exposed Veterans have been impacted,” according to Brian Moyer, MVA Legislative Director. “That reinforces the importance of getting to new House and Senate members early and building that relationship with MVA.” Moyer served in the U.S. Marine Corps and was the section leader and founder for MVA’s Agent Orange Survivors of Guam section.

Unlike many large Veteran service organizations, MVA’s board members and non-administrative staff are all volunteers. “Many members and their staffs were impressed that our delegation members were volunteering their time because of the commitment to improving Veteran benefits.

“These visits are already paying dividends,” Wells said, “Since the trip we have received calls from several Congressional offices for additional information or to ask about legislation we are drafting.”

The next MVA Congressional trip will take place in March to discuss proposed Veteran legislation and gather sponsors. MVA delegation trips to Washington, D.C. are funded by MVA [memberships](#) and tax deductible [donations](#).

Veterans Affairs benefit updates and news

VA reaches 1M PACT Act military exposure screenings

The Department of Veterans Affairs has screened more than 1 million Veterans for military exposures as part of the [PACT Act](#) signed into law Aug. 10. The screenings are a key component of the law — which empowers VA to deliver care and benefits to millions of toxic exposed Veterans and their survivors. Veterans enrolled in VA health care will be offered an initial toxic exposure screening then follow-up screenings at least once every five years.

VA launches new life insurance program for Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs has opened enrollment for Veterans Affairs Life Insurance — the first new VA life insurance program for Veterans in more than 50 years — extending VALife access to millions of Veterans. VALife will provide up to \$40,000 of whole life insurance for all Veterans, age 80 or under, with service-connected disabilities rated from 0-100%. Acceptance in the program is guaranteed, and no medical underwriting is required. Veterans can complete their application online, receive instant decisions, and perform self-service functions — including electronic payments and beneficiary updates. To learn more, visit [VALife](#).

Free lifetime pass to National Parks for Gold Star Families and Veterans



The National Park Service is offering a free lifetime Military Pass to Gold Star Families and U.S. military veterans. A free annual Military Pass is also available for current US military members and their dependents. The passes provide free access to more than 2,000 federal recreation areas, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests. You can apply at any national park location or by applying online [here](#). There is a \$10 processing fee for online enrollment. Proof of Veteran status (Veteran Health Identification Card, Veteran designation on state-issued U.S. driver's license, DOD ID card, or DD-214) is required.

Veterans in suicidal crisis can go to any health care facility for free emergency health care

Veterans in acute suicidal crisis will be able to go to any VA or non-VA health care facility for emergency health care at no cost – including inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in the VA system to use this benefit.

This expansion of care will help prevent Veteran suicide by guaranteeing no cost, world-class care to Veterans in times of crisis. It will also increase access to acute suicide care for up to 9 million Veterans who are not currently enrolled in VA.