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View from the Bridge

Hello Everyone,

What a dynamic three months we've had! We've transitioned from the sweltering heat of summer to the coolness of autumn. Across the nation, leaves have blanketed the ground, and even here in the South, we've felt a hint of frost.

As 2023 winds down, so does one of the least productive Congresses in American history. Beginning with high hopes, the 118th Congress quickly succumbed to partisan gridlock. Out of the 15,000 bills introduced, only 150 passed – and many of those were obligatory funding measures or straightforward acts like renaming post offices.

Despite the challenges, we've achieved a few significant victories. One notable success was passing a bill to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Commander Everett Alvarez, USN (Ret.), the first POW of the Vietnam War. "Ev" as he's fondly known, remains active and sharp in his 80s and is a proud life member of the MVA. We're also advocating for HR 3649, the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy bill, and working to include a study on herbicides in Panama in the National Defense Authorization Act.

Looking ahead to the 119th Congress we're optimistic. The only way is up! Our legislative committee will reconvene in January, equipped with new software to streamline our efforts in supporting or opposing bills. With an ambitious but achievable agenda, we're committed to ensuring Veterans receive the benefits they've earned.

On the litigation front, we've seen mixed results. In April 2024, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a Veteran in a GI Bill benefits dispute – a win. However, Justice Kavanaugh, joined by Justice Barrett, questioned the pro-Veterans canon of statutory construction, which typically favors Veterans in statutory interpretation. Justices Alito and Thomas echoed similar concerns. In *Bufkin v. McDonough*, the Supreme Court considered whether the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims must apply the "benefit of the doubt" rule consistently. Our amicus brief reinforced the canon's history and alignment with Congressional intent. Oral arguments offered no direct challenges to the canon, leaving us hopeful for a favorable decision.

On the administrative side, President-elect Trump has nominated former Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia as the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Having worked with him previously, we know him to be personable and receptive. I plan to meet with him early in 2025. Outgoing Secretary McDonough, despite frequent promises of meetings, never followed through – a pattern we hope will change.

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After the success of our rain soaked *Veterans Get Outside Day* in Newport, RI, we're thrilled to announce that Niagara Falls will host the third annual event on Flag Day, June 14, 2025. The city has warmly welcomed us, offering waived fees and in-kind contributions. We anticipate strong support from sponsors and donors, paving the way for an even more memorable event.

Effective January 1, 2025, I will step down as Chairman of the Board, passing the baton to Brian Lewis. I'll transition to the role of Executive Director, akin to a Chief Operating Officer, overseeing staff and operations in Slidell. Robin Barr will move to my law office, while Donna Ross and Chasity Arrington will assume her duties. Both are highly capable and ready to assist. This change won't affect our external operations, and I'll continue writing this column through 2025.

Financial challenges persist. Last year, we faced a \$48,000 deficit, and this year we predict a \$40,000 shortfall. While our reserves can sustain us through 2025, 2026 remains uncertain. You can help bridge the gap. During our end-of-the year fundraiser, a \$10 contribution from each member would reduce our deficit by \$16,000. A \$25 contribution would eliminate it entirely. Remember, donations are tax-deductible – please consider supporting us. You can donate online at by clicking [here](#) or mail a check to Military Veterans Advocacy, P.O. Box 5235, Slidell, LA 70469-5235.

God Bless,

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



Legislative update

The Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc Legislative Committee approved the following items to the MVA™ legislative agenda for the 119th Congress:

1. **HR 1191** - Legislative Committee discussed support for earlier effective date for Guam (Aug 15, 1958).
2. **HR 2447** - Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act of 2023
3. **HR 3967** - Herbicide benefits for Okinawa.
4. **HR 2693** - Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act.
5. Require a timeline for VA response to rulemaking requests.
6. VA benefits and Appellate reform including legislatively overruling *George v. McDonogh*.
7. Return the Blue Water line to the theater of combat as existed prior to 2002.
8. Cover military dependents exposed to Toxic Exposures.
9. **HR 105 & HR 3649** - Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment for Traumatic Brain Injury.
10. **HR 3023** - Stellate Ganglion Treatment for PTSD at VA.
11. Presumptive benefits for Fort McClellan. Defer until study ordered by PACT Act completed.
12. **S. 740** - GUARD VA Benefits Act of 2023 - Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding VA Benefits Act of 2023 or the GUARD VA Benefits Act of 2023.



Honor a beloved veteran with a special tribute of 'Taps' at the National WWI Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Those beautiful, slow, peaceful bugle notes. Every American knows them as the military's special musical way of saying, "Now it is time to rest." And every member of the U.S. Armed Forces knows that heavenly melody by its proper name: "Taps."

Now all American families are being offered the opportunity to have their own cherished veteran's memory honored, nationwide, in a unique, meaningful way.

Every day, rain or shine, precisely at 5 p.m. Eastern, a bugler sounds "Taps" at the [National WWI Memorial](#) in Washington, D.C. It is a tribute to every individual who has ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces—especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and democracy. The ceremony is presented by the Doughboy Foundation that works to ensure these Veterans are not forgotten.

The Daily Taps Program invites you to dedicate "Taps" at the National WWI Memorial in honor of your Veteran, in their name, and on a selected day of your choosing.

Your presence in Washington, D.C. is not required to bestow this honor. The ceremony is streamed live on YouTube, allowing the whole family, no matter where in the world they are, to partake in this moving commemorative experience, with your Veteran's service info scrolling across the bottom of the screen.

This special moment can be experienced live on the day of tribute and remains accessible on YouTube indefinitely.

To request a Daily TAPS dedication, go to this [link](#) to select a date for the dedication, and information about your honoree.

VA makes tele-emergency care available nationwide, offering Veterans more virtual care options

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that tele-emergency care (tele-EC) is now available nationwide, a step that increases timely access to virtual emergency care options for Veterans enrolled in VA health care. This expansion of care — piloted in recent months — has already shown promise for Veterans, helping more than 61,182 callers with a 59.4% case resolution rate (meaning Veterans' needs were resolved without having to travel from their homes to urgent care or an emergency department).

Tele-emergency care is a part of [VA Health Connect](#), a phone service that Veterans can call nationwide. Veterans who contact VA Health Connect will speak to a clinical triage nurse, who will connect them to tele-emergency care when clinically appropriate. Tele-EC providers will then evaluate the Veteran over the phone or on video and recommend treatment or follow-up, including if in-person care is needed. In life-threatening emergencies, the clinical triage nurse will call 911 and stay on the line until help arrives. Veterans experiencing a life-threatening emergency should immediately contact 911, versus seeking support via tele-EC.

This expansion is a part of VA efforts to expand access to timely, world-class care for Veterans. Veterans enrolled in VA health care can now access tele-EC nationwide by calling [VA Health Connect](#), and through the [VA Health Chat](#) app. Veterans can find their local VA Health Connect number by [searching for their facility](#).

Through VA's tele-emergency care, Veterans now have increased and quicker access to timely emergency care from VA clinicians, helping them get the right care, at the right time, from the right place. While tele-EC does not replace the need for in-person emergency evaluation, for Veterans in rural areas or those with mobility and transportation challenges, in-person immediate care can be difficult to access. VA's tele-EC helps bridge this gap through quick, virtual triage assessments.

VA continues to increase Veterans' access to VA health care through initiatives like tele-EC, [access sprints](#), and by designing and implementing [more virtual care options](#). Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law, VA is delivering more care to more Veterans than ever before. Nearly [740,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care](#) in the past two years.

For more information about VA care, visit [VA's health care website](#). For more information about Veteran trust in VA, visit the [VA trust website](#). To enroll in VA care, visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>.

Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

There is a growing concern over the health impacts of long-term exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Most of the Earth is now contaminated with some level of PFAS. Researchers have found traces of these chemicals in every living creature on land and sea. Recent studies have raised potential links between this exposure to increased incidences of cancer and other health conditions.

The science on PFAS contamination and human health effects continues to evolve. Pushed by Congress, DoD now includes PFAS blood testing during annual occupational exams to active duty, reserve component, and civilian employee firefighters. The Department says it is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to determine whether other military occupational specialties (MOS) should be similarly screened.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will conduct a scientific assessment into whether there is a relationship between PFAS exposure during military service and kidney cancer. If a link is found, the VA could create a new service presumption for this toxic exposure, making it easier for impacted Veterans to qualify for care and benefits.

MVA Trademark

One of the things MVA leadership takes very seriously is our Trademarks. We want to make sure that our name(s) are not used incorrectly or used in a way to promote information that is not correct.

There are legal requirements that we need to follow to keep our Trademarks in effect. While we are surfing the web, we are on the lookout to see if anyone is using our Trademarks, you will see that if there are T-Shirts ads, we do two things. First, we remove the ad and second, we send a copy of it to our Attorney to get a Cease-and-Desist Letter to them. We will usually block the person who posted the ad.

If you see any Facebook Page or Website that has the words Military Veterans Advocacy® or Blue Water Navy Association™, please contact us. You can reach me at mike.yates@mvadvocacy.org.

Survivor Benefits and Reporting a Veteran Death



Losing a loved one is a challenging time — Veterans Affairs has benefit specialists available to help. As the survivor of a Veteran or Service member, check to see if you qualify for survivor benefits, including help with [burial costs and survivor compensation](#).

Please contact VA to report the Veteran's death and avoid an overpayment of the Veteran's benefits. You can report the death in person at a [VA Regional Office](#), by mail, or by call 800-827-1000. When contacted, VA

will stop any benefit payments the Veteran received as required by law. Reporting the death timely will help ensure survivors or executors of the Veteran's estate do not experience additional financial stress.

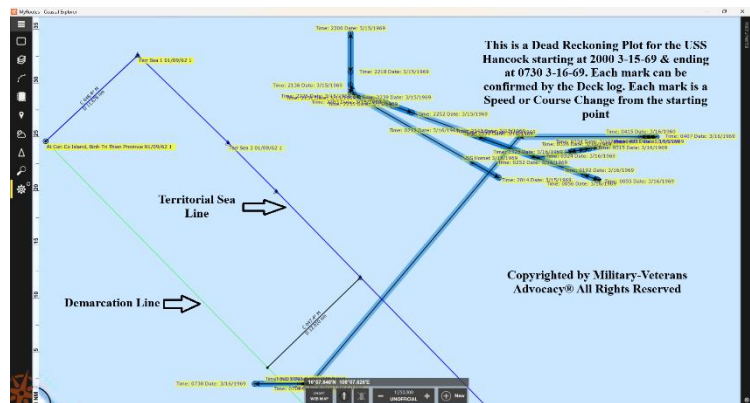
VA can also assist with [burial and memorial benefits](#). Veterans who plan to be buried in a VA cemetery can also be approved for burial prior to need which will reduce stress on the spouse at the time of death. For more information on pre-need eligibility for burial click [here](#).

MVA Provides Deck Logs and Dead Reckoning Plots

If you are looking for a copy of a Deck Log that shows that the ship you were on was within the Territorial Sea for your claim, you can either get it from the National Archive or make a Deck Log request from Military Veterans Advocacy. For our members, we will do the search and provide you with a copy of the page from the Deck Log that shows the ship was within the Territorial Sea, a plot from a Professional Navigational Program, and a letter of Certification that the ship was within the Territorial Sea at no charge. In most cases this will work as the locations (0800,1200,2000) that is usually listed at the top of the Deck Log Page maybe in an area within the Territorial Sea of Vietnam, Guam or American Samoa, or stopped in Thailand or Johnston Atoll.

Dead Reckoning

However, there are times when one of the three locations (0800,1200,2000) are not within the Territorial Sea but are close. This is when you may need a Dead Reckoning (DR) plot. A DR plot (see example right) is when we start at a known good location, usually 0800, 1200, or 2000 and start there and plot each speed change, course change, and amount of time during each segment. This is very time consuming and very detailed. It takes reading the narrative of the Deck Log page and looking for the time and the speed or course change and looking for any other thing that may help you. This is done until a plot shows that the ship was clearly within the Territorial Sea. There could be only a few segments, since they may not have made many turns or in the case of something overnight from 2000 until 0800 the next morning, there could be many segments.



We stand behind each Deck Log request we do. To make a Deck Log Request, please go to https://www.bwnvva.org/decklog_req.html

