

THE ALABAMA VETERAN

Kay Ivey
Governor

Fall 2017

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner



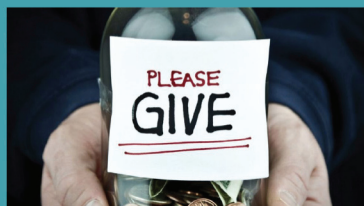
DATES TO REMEMBER

- * Columbus Day
October 9, 2017
- * Halloween
October 31, 2017
- * Veteran's Day
November 11, 2017
- * Thanksgiving
November 23, 2017
- * Christmas
December 25, 2017

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2017 State Combined Campaign



Commissioner's Corner



ADVA's Annual Report is now complete. The report shows the progress made in caring for our veterans and highlights activities that the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) is doing to ensure that we are bringing our veterans "all the way home."

The report emphasizes the accomplishments and improvements made in calendar year 2016 to address the needs of Alabama's veterans and their families.

Significant increases in federal veterans benefits were

collected on behalf of Alabama's veterans and their families.

One number I want to pass along is that the VA compensation and pension number for Alabama continues to increase. The FY2016 figure hit \$2,062,094 million, which is an almost 10 percent increase in compensation and pension payments to Alabama veterans. Amazing work by the VA, veterans organizations, our department and many others in serving Alabama veterans. While this is a great number, there are still thousands of veterans that don't know that they may be eligible for benefits, so we ask everyone to assist in finding those veterans and getting them connected.

You may be able to connect those veterans to benefits at local VA outreach or Veteran's Day events. Please support these events and take the time to acknowledge the great service and sacrifice of our veterans past and present. From my own military experience, I've seen countless displays of bravery from the men and women I was privileged to serve with. I've seen the quiet courage and iron will of brave young Americans. I was humbled to be in their presence. My fellow veterans, we are with you, and we are for you.

Finally, the State Combined Campaign kicked off on August 30. The campaign allows state employees to donate to qualified human health, welfare and human care service charities. All state employees are eligible to contribute through payroll deduction, which allows employees to give a little every month. It's a gift you'll never miss, that someone else will never forget.

Hopefully everyone had a great and safe summer. Thanks to everyone who has served our great country and those that support them. Today, our state's obligation remains the same—to provide our veterans the benefits and services they have earned. We honor our veterans not by what we say about them, but by how we treat them.

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State Cemetery Benefits Veterans

Death is nothing new; the clock starts ticking as soon as we are born.

In the old days when someone passed away, the family would go to the local funeral home and have a service, buy a plot and rest there forever. Now, the only question about being ushered into the next life deals with convenience and cost. Alabama can help with part of that question for veterans.

Many of the more than 370,000 Alabama veterans are unaware that they can be buried at the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort. The cemetery at Spanish Fort stands as a solemn tribute and final resting place for men and women who have honorably served their country.

"This cemetery is a wonderful benefit for Alabama veterans," Tony Ross, cemetery director, said. The cemetery was dedicated in December 2012 and began interments in April 2013. Since then, there have been 1,266 interments. The first phase of the cemetery had 2,776 burial sites (2,392 in-ground, columbarium niches and a scatter garden). Last year, the expansion of the columbarium from 128 to 768 vaults was completed. The expansion of the in-ground cremations section and the memorial wall section is due to be completed in 2018.

In general, veterans discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible. A veteran's spouse, minor dependent children and, under certain conditions, unmarried adult children with



disabilities also may be eligible for burial. Veterans must be legal residents of Alabama at the time of death; legal residents of Alabama when he or she entered the service; or legal resident of Alabama for 10 or more cumulative years.

While many expenses are paid by the veteran's family or estate, the burial plot or columbarium niche as well as an inscribed gravestone and a committal service are offered at no charge to veterans. A small fee is charged for spouses or dependent children.

Preregistration is available and allows a veteran and their spouse to establish, in advance, their eligibility. Preregistration simplifies and assists the veteran's next-of-kin at the time of death. All that is needed to preregister are a copy of the veteran's discharge certificate (DD Form 214) and, for married veterans, a copy of the marriage certificate.

Interested individuals should submit a preregistration application (available at <http://www.va.alabama.gov/pdf/forms/adva-21.pdf>) and supporting documentation to the cemetery by: fax at 251-626-9204; email to cemetery@va.alabama.gov; or mail to Alabama State Veterans Cemetery at Spanish Fort, 34904 State Highway 225, Spanish Fort, Alabama 36527. For more information, please call the cemetery office at 251-625-1338.

Meet your VSO



Marengo County VSO Sandra Wright files a form for Army veteran Donald Craig.

Sandra Wright, the Marengo County veterans service officer (VSO), loves helping veterans. “My job is mostly advocating for veterans and educating the veterans about the process, not just by filing claims but being with them from start to finish,” she said. “I have to know a little about everything.”

Wright retired from the Navy in July 2005. Although she was a chief electrician, she also served as a drug and alcohol counseling and sexual assault victim advocate. “I took these collateral duties very seriously,” she said. “I went back to school and studied psychology which helped me to compartmentalize some of the stuff that went on.”

Those additional duty positions led Wright to the VSO job, where she has been for 12 years. In addition to Marengo County, she helps veterans from Wilcox County as well. She averages about 18 veterans a day, around 250–300 a month.

“My favorite part of being a VSO is serving,” she said. “I pray each day to God to order my steps and do something to help each veteran that I meet. If a vet is hurting, I hurt.”

Wright goes beyond the basics to help her fellow veterans. She develops relationships with them; her motto—“Enter as Strangers, Leave as Friends.” “You have to be able to sit down and listen to the veteran to understand what they need,” she said. “Ideally, I try to get most vets at least 10 percent. I don’t give up unless the vet gives up. Even then, I try to drag them across the finish line.”

Alfred Mack, an Army veteran with the 25th Infantry, said that Wright is the best he has ever dealt with. “She does everything possible to enable vets to get benefits. I got denied and we filed appeal and got approved,” he said. “I went from 0 to 100 percent disability.”

Sometimes the assistance provided is life altering. “There have been times when people are on their last legs,” Wright said. “They have drained their finances and it’s a choice between medicine or food. Her persistence in working VA claims helps connect veterans to their rightful benefits.”

Emma Davis, the widow of an Army Vietnam veteran, is one who is extremely grateful for Wright’s help.

Her husband died from pancreatic cancer after Agent Orange exposure. “I came in for an ID card. She asked questions and then got interested in my case.” Wright filed a Dependency and Indemnity Compensation claim and reviewed records related to the Vietnam service. She discovered that Davis’s husband had benefits that he never received, so she filed an appeal. Davis received a substantial amount in accrued benefits and now receives a monthly VA benefit.

MSgt. Jay Wright, a former Air Force tactical air specialist, filed a claim when he retired in 2000. “I didn’t hear anything about the claim for 15 years. I figured I had been turned down,” he said. He later learned that the claim was mistakenly marked cancelled.

“After the claim was reinstated, I was bombarded with VA-this and VA-that. I came down and met Sandra and she has been my point of contact for three years. She has helped me with everything,” he said. “She does not do just what she has to do, she does extra. I’ve had to refile stuff, five or six times. I’m computer savvy but why waste the experience. Sandra knows the system and instead of having to figure it out myself, I let her do it. She also has kept transmission documents so we can prove that forms have been submitted.”

Daniel Craig, Army signal corps veteran, met Wright when she worked in Selma. “I started with her and I have followed her around. I drove from Prattville to see her,” he said. “She knows my situation and I didn’t want to have my paperwork spread around.”

“Sandra is unique; she is always nice and courteous. I can always count on her to give 100 percent,” he said. “She makes every effort to get results. She filed and got me aid and attendance help after my stroke. It really helped me.”

You Are Not Forgotten



You Are Not Forgotten—that's the words behind POW/MIA Recognition Day, a day that Americans pause to remember the sacrifices and service of those who were prisoners of war (POW), as well as those who are still missing in action (MIA), and their families.

POW/MIA Recognition Day

ensures that American remembers to stand behind those who serve and to make sure we do everything we can to account for those who have never returned.

According to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), 82,524 Americans are still considered missing, including 73,046 from World War II; 7,740 from the Korean War; 1,606 from Vietnam; 126 from the Cold War; and six from the Gulf Wars and other conflicts.

Efforts to find those men and women, identify them and bring them home are constant. For example, the

DPAA said that in the past year it has accounted for 95 men missing during World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

The American Legion of Alabama, Rolling Thunder of Alabama, and various veterans service organizations held their annual POW/MIA recognition on the south lawn of the state capitol on September 16th. The day's events began at 10:30 a.m. with a motorcycle POW/MIA Honor Ride from Cramton Bowl to the State Capitol.

The observance honored and remembered US military service members still classified as either POWs or MIAs from all wars—both those returned as well as those still unaccounted for. Besides bestowing honor and remembrance, the ceremony also aimed to raise public awareness of the POW/MIA issue.

The keynote speaker was Michael J. Durant, an American pilot and author who was held prisoner for 11 days in 1993 after a raid in Mogadishu, Somalia. He was a member of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). He retired from the Army as a Chief Warrant Officer 4 Blackhawk helicopter master aviator in the 160th SOAR after participating in combat operations Prime Chance, Just Cause, Desert Storm and Gothic Serpent.



Longtime board member William Wyatt officially stepped down during the July 7th board meeting. Clyde Marsh, ADVA commissioner, honored Mr. Wyatt with a military statue, thanking him for his hard work over the years. Mr. Wyatt's wife Pat accompanied him to the board meetings over the years.

Honor Those Who Served



An armistice was declared on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 between the Allied nations and Germany in the First World War. To commemorate the the end of hostilities, Pres.

Woodrow Wilson proclaimed Armistice Day on November 11, 1919. The holiday started as a day to reflect upon the heroism of those who died in our country's service.

In 1953 Alfred King, a shoe store owner in Kansas, began a campaign to celebrate veterans of all wars, not just those who served in World War I. A bill to replace "Armistice Day" with "Veterans Day" was pushed through Congress and Pres. Dwight Eisenhower signed it into law on May 26, 1954. November 11 has been known as Veterans Day ever since.

But, just who is a vet? There are approximately 25 million living veterans. Except for parades or other special events, most of these men and women who

have kept America safe do not wear distinctive badges or emblems. Some veterans bear visible signs of their service—a missing limb or a jagged scar, but in most cases, you can't tell a veteran just by looking.

She is the high school math teacher who spent a year in Iraq, sweating gallons a day ensuring that the tanks and armored personnel carriers didn't run out of gas. He is the old guy bagging groceries at the store who helped liberate a Nazi death camp. He or she is your next door neighbor who proudly flies the American flag for all to see on patriotic holidays. The American veteran is an ordinary, yet an extraordinary, human being. The veteran is a person who gave some of their life's most vital years in the service to their country. They sacrificed their ambitions and sometimes even gave their life, so others would not have to sacrifice theirs.

Veterans Day is a time for Americans to pay respect to all those—living and dead—who have served honorably in the military, during war or peacetime. It is a day to remember that their contributions to our nation are appreciated and to emphasize that all people who serve, not only those who have died, have sacrificed for our freedom.

This Veterans Day, take a moment to reflect on the day's significance and what veterans have done for us and our country. Have a great veterans day.



Georgia Knowles, Belk store manager, presents a flag to the Patriot Guard Riders on September 7. Ms. Knowles donated 20 new American made US flags for use at the committal shelter at the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery. The Patriot Guard will stand a flag line at a funeral service and/or escort a deceased veteran to a Cemetery for Interment.

Fun at the Homes

The Veterans at Col. Robert L. Howard got an afternoon visit from Steel City Puppies on September 5th. Steel City Puppies is a local breeder of Goldendoodle (a golden retriever/poodle mix) puppies. They offer puppy training programs for therapy dogs.

Part of this training includes socialization with multiple people and situations. The veterans had a fun afternoon visiting with the two 11-week-old puppies, Luke and Taft. These puppies will graduate their training soon and be off to live with their adoptive families.



Mr. Leonard Corley getting cozy with one of the puppies! Look at that smile!

Mr. Art Cranston is picture perfect with the puppy!



Mad Hatter Tea Party. Mr. Arthur Harper poses with Col. Howard's Director of Activities Ali Conn at the Mad Hatter Tea Party. The veterans wore their favorite hat and watched the new Alice in Wonderland movie.



Members of the Rolling Thunder veterans support group pose with World War II veterans at a special screening of the movie "Dunkirk" in Huntsville, on August 2, 2017. (Photo by Lee Roop/lroop@al.com)



Camille Waldon helps World War II veteran Lenton Bryant with physical therapy at Bill Nichols State Veterans Home.



Mildred Daye, a Vietnam veteran, performs physical therapy on an arm cycle at Bill Nichols.



The William F. Green staff posed for a group photo after receiving a zero deficiency annual survey from the Alabama Department of Public Health.

President, VA Secretary Announce Veteran Telehealth Initiatives

President Trump and VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin recently announced three initiatives that will expand access to health care for veterans across the country. Using telehealth technology and mobile applications, VA will connect with more veterans to provide services where they live.

“This will significantly expand access to care for our veterans, especially for those who need help in the area of mental health . . . and also in suicide prevention,” Trump said. “It will make a tremendous difference for the veterans in rural locations.”

Many of the veterans using telehealth live in rural areas or far away from their closest VA medical facility. The announcement will expand VA’s Telehealth capability in three specific areas.

Shulkin announced he will be issuing a regulation that explicitly authorizes VA providers, using telehealth technologies, to serve veterans no matter where the provider or the veteran is located in the country. The “Anywhere to Anywhere VA Health Care” initiative will empower VA to hire providers in major metropolitan areas, where there is an abundance of clinical services and connect them to better serve veterans in rural communities that lack sufficient medical services.

VA plans to expand its telehealth services to support convenient, high-quality care for all veterans. To do

so, Shulkin announced VA is initiating the nationwide rollout of a new application called VA Video Connect. VA Video Connect provides a secure and web-enabled video service that makes it easy for veterans to connect with their VA providers by video on their own mobile phones or personal computers. VA Video Connect is currently being used by more than 300 VA providers at 67 hospitals and their associated clinics. It will be rolled out to VA providers and veterans across the country over the next year.

Shulkin also announced the nationwide roll-out of an application to make it easier to schedule or change appointments with VA. The Veteran Appointment Request (VAR) app is an application that makes it possible for veterans to use their smartphone, tablet or computer to schedule or modify appointments at VA facilities. VA will continue to roll out the application nationwide – bringing the capability to all VA facilities and clinics.

“What we’re really doing is, we’re removing regulations that have prevented us from doing this. We’re removing geography as a barrier so that we can speed up access to veterans and really honor our commitment to them,” Shulkin said.

To find out more about VA’s telehealth program, visit <https://www.telehealth.va.gov/>

What is Aid and Attendance for Veterans?

The Veterans Administration offers Aid and Attendance as part of an “Improved Pension” benefit that is largely unknown. This Improved Pension allows veterans and spouses of veterans who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in bathing, eating, dressing, undressing, medication dosing, or using the restroom to receive additional monetary benefits. It also includes those who are blind or a patient in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity. Assisted living facility care also qualifies.

This most important benefit is overlooked by many families with veterans or surviving spouses who need additional monies to help care for ailing parents or loved ones. This is a “pension benefit” and IS NOT dependent upon service-related injuries for compensation. Aid and Attendance can help pay for care in the home, nursing home or assisted living facility. A veteran is eligible for up to \$1,794 per month, while a surviving spouse is eligible for up to \$1,153 per month. A veteran with

a spouse is eligible for up to \$2,127 per month and a veteran with a sick spouse is eligible for up to \$1,410 per month.

Many families overlook the A&A benefit as it pertains to veterans who are still independent, but have an ill spouse. But in this situation, if the spouse’s medical expenses completely depletes their combined monthly income, the veteran can file as a veteran with a sick spouse.

The Aid and Attendance benefit is considered to be the third tier of the VA’s Improved Pension. The other two tiers are known as “Basic” and “Housebound”. Each tier has its own level of benefits and qualifications. The Improved Pension is not a new benefit, and has in fact been an entitlement for 61 years sitting idle while millions have and still are missing out on.

More information is available at <https://www.veteranaid.org/>.