



# THE ALABAMA VETERAN

WINTER 2021 ISSUE



**ADVA**

**NEWSLETTER**

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**ADVA**

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving  
America's Finest"*

# COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



## COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

What are you thankful for? It's a question we ask ourselves every year around Thanksgiving as we find ways to take that gratitude and use it as an opportunity to show others our thankfulness. It's important that we stop and reflect on who or what makes our lives meaningful, as well as acknowledging ways we can do the same for others.

ADVA's Veterans Well-Being Program Manager Sissy Louise Moore has coined the phrase "The Power of One," which can reference one person, one phone call, one compliment – whatever simple, small act it is that can make a lifetime of difference for a Veteran. While we continue showing gratitude as we transition into the winter holidays, we still must face life's tragic realities, such as 152 Alabama Veterans dying by suicide last year. That's a number that we all know is far too high.

Lowering Alabama's Veteran suicide rate is a tall task that's going to take everyone's effort. The good news is Alabama is up for the challenge.

I experienced one effort fighting Veteran suicide on Thanksgiving Day, as my family and I marched seven miles with the student Veterans from the University of Alabama and Auburn University for Operation Iron Ruck. It might be hard to believe, but just days before the Iron Bowl each year, UA's Campus Veterans Association and the Auburn Student Veterans Association come together and march 151 miles to raise awareness of Veteran suicide.

ADVA partnered with Operation Iron Ruck to help promote the march and support to the effort. It's the least we can do when you consider these student Veterans are sacrificing their Thanksgiving holiday for a larger cause. Operation Iron Ruck was also supported by Governor Kay Ivey, who released a PSA and issued a proclamation declaring November 23 as Operation Iron Ruck Day.

Veteran suicide prevention is a priority of ADVA. I cannot stress enough that everyone has a role. However, even with a group effort, ask yourself how you can be that "Power of One." How can you make a difference that will lead to someone showing their thankfulness? Is it calling your buddy from when you served together just to check in? Is it volunteering at the local soup kitchen to make sure homeless Veterans have a meal this Christmas? Or, is it simply telling another Veteran thank you?

That's what I would like to say: Thank you. Thank you for serving this country. Thank you to the student Veterans who lead Operation Iron Ruck. Thank you to those who offer resources for Veterans. And, of course, thank you to all the Veterans who give the ADVA the privilege of proudly serving America's finest.



Commissioner Kent Davis presents UA's Slade Salmon and AU's Clayton Buchanan with a proclamation from Governor Kay Ivey.

## **ADVA**

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Wendi Findley—Executive Assistant

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Jeff Newton

### **ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT**

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### **DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL**

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### **VETERANS HOMES PROGRAMS**

Kim Justice—Executive Director

### **ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

Kayla Kyle—Program Manager

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## **ADVA ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ADDED TO WALL OF ACHIEVERS AT ENLISTED HERITAGE HALL**

We want to congratulate ADVA Assistant Commissioner Jeff Newton for being added to the Wall of Achievers at the Enlisted Heritage Hall at Maxwell Air Force Base Gunter Annex. The announcement was a planned surprise by several members of the ADVA.

Assistant Commissioner Newton began his journey as a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force in August of 1989. That is not, however, where his Air Force journey began. He enlisted in the Air Force in February 1980 and served nine years before receiving his commission. Airman Newton served as an Inventory Management and Supply Specialist in the 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing supporting RF-4C aircraft. After receiving his commission from the Academy of Military Science, his first assignment as a 2nd Lieutenant was as an Operations Support Officer for the 117th Resource Management Squadron. He went on to serve in a number of Logistics Management and Readiness related Officer Career fields, as both a full-time Air Reserve Technician and an Active Duty Guard Reservist. General Newton deployed multiple times in support of his unit's KC-135R Air Refueling mission to include: Operation Allied Force, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. On December 1, 2017, General Newton was authorized to assume the rank of Brigadier General and serve as the Assistant Adjutant General, Joint Force Headquarters-Air Component. After 41 years of faithful service to the Air Force, Brigadier General Newton retired February 28, 2021 while serving as the Director, Joint Staff, Alabama Joint Force Headquarters right here in Montgomery. He continues providing service to others as he joined the ADVA as Assistant Commissioner of Operations.

By earning the rank of Brigadier General after previously serving as an enlisted Airman, General Newton earned himself a place on the Air Force Enlisted Heritage Hall's famed Wall of Achievers. The exhibit was started in the 1980s as a way to honor prior enlisted general officers. It has since evolved to include prior enlisted Airmen who have obtained other forms of success and notoriety such as celebrities, politicians, and public figures.



# WELCOME HOME!

SBVA HOLDS FIRST MEETING IN RENOVATED CONFERENCE ROOM



It had been more than a year and a half since the ADVA gave its conference room a makeover, but October 1 marked the first time the State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA) met in the renovated space.

The renovation followed the SBVA meeting in January 2020, but meetings moved virtual for more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It wasn't until July 2021 that the Board met in person again. However, with the agenda including naming the fifth state Veterans home, the meeting was held in Enterprise, where the home will be located.

The October 1 meeting was highlighted by SBVA passing a resolution urging Alabama Legislators to support establishing presumptive service connections for Fort McClellan Veterans (page 5), but it was also the first meeting for new board members Mr. Tony Berenotto and Ms. Earnestine Doubek, both of whom are representatives of the American Legion.

The October 1 meeting also included a change in leadership. Mr. Scott Gedling was elected as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Chad Richmond was voted to serve as Deputy Vice-Chairman.



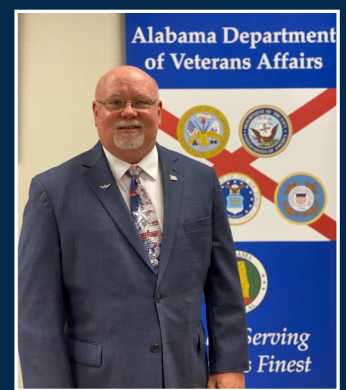
Mr. Scott Gedling



Mr. Chad Richmond



Ms. Earnestine Doubek



Mr. Tony Berenotto

## SBVA RESOLUTION URGES ALABAMA'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO SUPPORT ESTABLISHING HEALTH REGISTRY AND PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE CONNECTION FOR FORT MCCLELLAN VETERANS

### SBVA Resolution Urging Alabama Legislators to Support Establishing Presumptive Service Connection for Fort McClellan Veterans

WHEREAS, Fort McClellan, located in Anniston, Alabama, became an Army installation in 1917. After World War II and until the base closed in 1999, it was home to the Chemical Corps and Chemical Weapons School for the United States Army. In 1953, Fort McClellan conducted "Operation Top Hat," which used military personnel to test exposure and decontamination methods that included sulfur mustard and nerve agents and in 1962, Fort McClellan added the Biological Radiological Agency; and

WHEREAS, in a 1998 report of a US Army Environmental Center study, the US Army noted the presence of dangerous contaminants requiring investigation and cleanup prior to transferring Fort McClellan's property to the public domain; and

WHEREAS, the Monsanto Chemical Plant in Anniston, Alabama was instrumental in the development and testing of herbicides used during Vietnam and settled a \$700,000,000 class action suit with the citizens of Anniston which explicitly excluded those exposed due to military service on Fort McClellan; and

WHEREAS, in 2005 the National Academy of Medicine, formerly the Institute of Medicine, recognized that both the groundwater and soil were contaminated. Finding that there were 67 different disposal sites on Fort McClellan containing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) trichloroethylene (TCEs), PCBs, semi-volatile organic compound (SVOCs), pesticides, explosives, heavy metals (Pb), unexploded ordnance (UXO), radioactive sources, and non-stockpile chemical materials; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans Health Administration (VA) has noted the existence of the toxic chemicals used at Fort McClellan and that potential exposures could have included, but are not limited to, the following: Radioactive compounds (cesium-137 and cobalt-60) used in decontamination training activities; chemical warfare agents (mustard gas and nerve agents) used in decontamination testing; and airborne PCBs from the Monsanto plant in Anniston; and

WHEREAS, the VA does not recognize any adverse health conditions associated with military service at Fort McClellan despite evidence that exposure to high levels of the above compounds has been shown to cause a variety of adverse health effect; and

WHEREAS, legislation relating to toxic exposure at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, passed with bipartisan support from the North Carolina delegation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the State Board of Veterans Affairs urges Alabama's congressional delegation to seek and support legislation to study the effects of service at Fort McClellan to include the establishment and maintenance of a health registry; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the State Board of Veterans Affairs urges Alabama's congressional delegation to seek and support legislation to establish presumptive service connection for the veterans who were exposed while serving on Fort McClellan.



The SBVA took a formal stance on a controversial topic during its October 1 meeting by passing a resolution urging the Alabama Congressional Delegation to support establishing a health registry and presumptive service connection for Fort McClellan Veterans. The resolution led to media attention nationwide and received support from Veterans across America.

In early November, SBVA Vice-Chairman Scott Gedling released a 2-minute message to Veterans explaining that the resolution has only two goals: Establishing a health registry through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and, based on the findings, establishing presumptive service connection by passing legislation. He added that Veterans can best support the resolution by calling their U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives to seek legislation to enact the resolution. Once a health registry is established, Mr. Gedling urges Veterans to enter their health information into the registry and encourage fellow Veterans to do the same.

## AROUND THE STATE

### 'TUT' FANN STATE VETERANS HOME FORMS PARTNERSHIP TO HELP WITH HEALTHCARE SHORTAGE



Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home has partnered with Drake State Community & Technical College to create a career pathway for certified nursing assistants and students.

Executive Director Kim Justice and Director Charlotte Robinson joined leaders from Drake State and the Honor Health Careers Program in October to sign off on a memorandum of understanding and agreement that will allow students to look for more jobs and opportunities that could lead to a licensed practical nurse career and also address the nursing shortage for long-term care.

### CONGRATULATIONS! DEKALB CO. VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER RETIRES AFTER 19 YEARS

DeKalb County Veterans Service Officer Jim McIntire (left) was recognized for his 19 years of service to Alabama Veterans as District I Manager Tim Edgil presented him with a retirement plaque on December 1. Mr. McIntire also served as itinerant VSO to the Blount, Etowah, Jackson, and Cherokee offices. Notably, he was also awarded the American Legion Department of Alabama VSO of the Year award for the Northern District in June 2021.



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY: WORLD WAR II VETERAN CELEBRATES 99TH BIRTHDAY IN MONTGOMERY

World War II Veteran Dr. Woodward Durham Lamar celebrated his 99th birthday on October 31 in Montgomery and was honored with a commendation from Governor Kay Ivey and a proclamation from Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed.

Dr. Lamar joined the United States Navy in June 1942 during World War II, received a commission, and graduated from flight school at the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Fla., where he earned his pilot's wings at the rank of lieutenant.

Dr. Lamar was trained to fly the Boeing-Stearman PT-17, SNJ trainer, TBF Avenger torpedo bomber, and C-47 Skytrain. After the Japanese surrendered on August 15, 1945, Dr. Lamar was discharged from active military service in 1946 at San Francisco.

Using his G.I. Bill, Dr. Lamar graduated from the University of Alabama with a degree in pre-medicine, and later graduated from the UAB School of Dentistry in 1952.

Dr. Lamar and his wife, May, were married for 48 years and have four children, nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.



## VETERANS CRISIS LINE RECEIVES SURGE IN CALLS AFTER TALIBAN TAKEOVER

The Veterans Crisis Line saw a sharp uptick in calls as the Taliban took control of Kabul in mid-August, a sign that Veterans experienced significant stress as the war in Afghanistan came to a close.

VA officials say the increase also means former service members are seeking help -- an encouraging trend that may be the result of a concerted effort to eliminate any stigma associated with mental health treatment.

"Our [Veterans Crisis Line] number is being marketed everywhere right now, which I'm thankful for," said psychologist and Crisis Line Director Lisa Kearney during a call with reporters. "The more we can do to normalize discussions about crisis, about suicide and it's OK to reach out for help ... I'm thankful for it."

ADVA has promoted the Veterans Crisis Line on TV and radio, with the PSAs receiving nearly 120 million impressions in less than a year.

Texts to the hotline jumped 98% between Aug. 14 and Aug. 29, while chat messages and calls rose by 40% and 7% when compared with the same time frame last year, according to the VA.

The Veterans Crisis Line can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1, or by texting 838-255 or engaging via the Crisis Line's website — [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net).



## VA EXTENDS PRESUMPTIVE PERIOD FOR PERSIAN GULF WAR VETERANS

VA has extended the presumptive period to December 31, 2026 for qualifying chronic disabilities rated 10% or more resulting from undiagnosed illnesses in Persian Gulf War Veterans to ensure benefits established by Congress are fairly administered.

If an extension of the current presumptive period was not implemented, service members whose conditions arise after December 31, 2021 would be substantially disadvantaged compared to those whose conditions manifested at an earlier date.

Limiting entitlement to benefits due to the expiration of the presumptive period would be premature given that current studies remain inconclusive as to the cause and time of onset of illnesses suffered by Persian Gulf War Veterans.

VA presumes certain medically unexplained illnesses are related to Persian Gulf War service without regard to cause, including, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and functional gastrointestinal disorders. Also included are undiagnosed illnesses with symptoms that may include but are not limited to abnormal weight loss, cardiovascular disease, muscle and joint pain, headache, menstrual disorders, neurological and psychological problems, skin conditions, respiratory disorders and sleep disturbances.

Persian Gulf War Veterans experiencing any of these symptoms and other unexplained medical issues are encouraged to file a claim.

# A LOOK BACK ...

## NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY



A ceremony to commemorate National POW/MIA Recognition Day was held at the Alabama State Capitol to honor and remember the brave men and women who endured the hardships as Prisoners of War and those still Missing in Action and to give special recognition to their families who bore the cost of war.

## VETERANS DAY



Events celebrating Veterans around Alabama included Mobile continuing its tradition of hosting its annual Veterans Day parade. ADVA participated in the parade and other patriotic activities planned throughout the day. ADVA was joined in the parade by Boy Scout Troop 87 and Cub Scout Pack 87 of Daphne.

## MISSING IN AMERICA PROJECT SERVICE



The Alabama Missing in America Project (MIAP) honored seven previously unclaimed cremated remains in mid-October in Montevallo. MIAP locates, identifies, and inters the unclaimed cremated remains of Veterans through the joint efforts of private, state, and federal organizations to provide honor and respect to those who have served this country by securing a final resting place for these heroes.