

Veterans' Health Today

WINTER 2006

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**VA DESERT PACIFIC
HEALTHCARE NETWORK**



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Veterans' History Proj



From left to right: WWII Veterans: Sgt. Joseph Pietroforte, US Army; 1st Lt. Mary Cobb, US Army Nurse; Sgt. Phyllis Capelle, US Marine Corp; Corporal Dave Swerdlow, US Marine Corps. Medic; PFC Pete Howenstein, US Army



Army Veteran Pete Howenstein pays his respects to his fallen comrades at the Omaha Beach Cemetery in France.

The Veterans' History Project (VHP) was created by the United States Congress on October 27, 2000 as part of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The mission of the VHP is the collection and archiving of wartime veterans' firsthand written, oral, or video histories plus other memoirs, photographs, letters, diaries, and official or historical documents.

Unlike any other project, the VHP is creating a treasure trove of historical snapshots created by the people who lived it – veterans. It will offer future generations the opportunity to glimpse the past as it was seen through the eyes of those who felt the moments that helped shape history and changed lives.

Becky James, Volunteer History Project Coordinator at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, is very active in documenting the ac-

tivities of veterans. James noted that “documenting veterans’ experiences leaves a legacy for their families and future generations that would otherwise be lost forever.” James is an Air Force veteran who served from 1974 to 1979. A primary interest of James is documenting the experiences of World War II service members and civilians who took part in the war effort, and “particularly those veterans with combat experiences who have never talked about their experiences. Documenting these experiences can also benefit present service members by learning about the experiences of prior generations,” she added.

James has been involved with the VHP since January 2005 and has conducted 35 veteran interviews so far with 50 additional veterans waiting to tell their stories. Among the benefits for veterans who participate in the project is meeting new friends with

common interests who shared common experiences. James has seen a therapeutic effect and sense of relief from a number of interviewees who have finally been able to tell their story to a sympathetic listener.

Following are some highlights of veterans’ contributions:

★ **Joe “Bazooka” Pietroforte** was awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star during the Battle of the Bulge. He saved his platoon by single-handedly taking out two German tanks with his bazooka.

★ **Phyllis Capelle** was one of the first women flight line mechanics and was one of the handful of women who received flight pay during WW II. She logged 240 hours flying. The co-pilot during her second flight was Tyrone Powers, who served in the Ma-

ject is for All Veterans



Becky James, Volunteer History Project Coordinator at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, made this WWII poster that includes photos of nearly every veteran she has interviewed for the history project. The poster also has copies of various documents from the veterans, such as Joe Pietroforte's Silver Star Citation.

The individual collections may be viewed by visiting the Library of Congress or via the VHP website at: www.loc.gov/vets after the documents have been digitized. Veterans from World War I through the current conflicts may contribute to the VHP. US citizen civilians involved in military related activities may also contribute their stories to the VHP.

The VHP collection today includes 25,000 individual personal recollections. The project grew by 12,000 individual stories in 2004. The VHP can accept only flat items such as documents or photos. Because the VHP cannot collect 3-dimensional artifacts, such as medals or uniforms, the VHP website contains a list of museums that can accept these items. Donations of the histories and artifacts of deceased veterans may also be included in the VHP collection.

Donated items are housed in the permanent collections of the Library of Congress. The VHP will digitize interviews and documents from its collection, which will permit viewing of the collections online without having to visit the Library of Congress. Archiving, cataloging, and digitizing of materials is ongoing and thus far, 2400 histories have been digitized for viewing online.

VHP

rines during WW II. She also once fueled up Charles Lindbergh's plane at Cherry Point Marine Base.

★ **Dave Swerdlow** was a hospital corpsman in the Marines 4th Division. He received a Purple Heart during the landing at Iwo Jima when he was shot through the ankle 20 minutes after he went ashore.

★ **Pete Howenstein**, a Battle of the Bulge veteran, received a Bronze Star and General Patton personally pinned his Purple Heart on him in an Army Field Hospital near Metz, France. He was also invited by Stephen Spielberg to the set as a military

advisor during the filming of "Saving Private Ryan".

All veterans, plus their families are encouraged to share stories of their wartime experiences. "This is an opportunity for the spouses of service members to tell others about their experiences and affords veterans an opportunity to tell the story in their own words," said James.

Anyone wishing to participate in the VHP – either as a contributor or as a volunteer – may go to the website at www.loc.gov/vets, or contact Becky James at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System at (818) 891-7711, extension 9661.



'Tis the Season to be Immunized

Flu and pneumonia season is here! Have you had your flu shot yet? Should you? According to Dr. David Webb, Infectious Disease Specialist, VA Long Beach Healthcare System, if you have certain risk factors, it is important that you get immunized. It is especially important, says Webb, if you are elderly (65+), in a nursing home, or have a chronic disease such as diabetes or diseases of the heart and lungs. These factors weaken your immune system, making you more likely to get flu (influenza). It isn't just an inconvenience – a week of fever, nausea, and chicken soup – it can be deadly. In fact, nearly 36,000 people die of flu each year. And don't forget your pneumonia shot (Pneumovax) to protect you against pneumococcal infection. Pneumococcus can cause a severe pneumonia; about 40,000 people die from this every year. You should protect yourself against both!

This is the season for flu and pneumonia even though pneumococcal

While immunizations are the primary defense against flu and pneumonia, there are many things that you can do to reduce your risk of getting sick:

- ▶ Avoid contact with people you know are sick.
- ▶ If you get an infection, stay home from work or school.
- ▶ If you cough, cover your mouth with a tissue or, if no tissue is available, your sleeve. Don't cough or sneeze into your hand.
- ▶ Wash your hands often. "Alcohol gel hand cleaners work fine to disinfect your hands," says Webb, "although soap and water should be used if your hands are visibly soiled."

infections can occur throughout the year. "Influenza is a viral infection," says Webb, "and doesn't respond to antibiotics. Pneumococcal infections are bacterial and can be successfully treated with antibiotics." Webb recommends that everyone over the age of 50 get a flu shot and those over the age of 65 get a pneumococcal vaccination as well. Those with chronic diseases which weaken their immune system should get vaccinated no matter what their age.

Although the nation has suffered from flu vaccine shortages in years past, Dr. Webb believes there will be enough this year. "This year," said Webb, "we delayed recommending immunizations for the general population to make certain enough supplies would be on hand to vaccinate those with high risk factors. And it appears the supply is sufficient."

If you think you have the flu, get plenty of rest, drink lots of fluids and avoid tobacco and alcohol. Medica-

tion can relieve the symptoms of the flu. Enrolled veterans can seek medical advice from their primary care provider or call the VA TeleCare line at 1-877-252-4866. If you think you have pneumonia, you need medical attention as soon as possible. TeleCare is a free, confidential service for enrolled veterans that provides answers to your health care concerns 24 hours a day. You can speak to a nurse who will listen to your questions, help you understand your options, and help you decide what additional steps to take. Whether you call your physician or TeleCare, it is important to write down all your symptoms so you won't forget. Keep your pen and paper handy to take notes about what you should do, who you should call, or when your appointment is scheduled.

If you haven't been immunized, Dr. Webb says, "Walk-in flu shots are available to make it easier for our patients." To find out where flu shots are available, call your primary care physician or VA Health Care Center.



“The VA’s success in improving quality, safety, and value have allowed it to emerge as an increasingly recognized leader in healthcare.”

- The American Journal of Managed Care, Nov. 2004

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Symptoms of pneumonia:

- ▶ A high, persistent fever and chills
- ▶ A productive cough
- ▶ Shortness of breath

Symptoms of flu:

- ▶ Fever (usually high)
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Extreme tiredness
- ▶ Dry cough
- ▶ Sore throat
- ▶ Runny or stuffy nose
- ▶ Muscle aches
- ▶ Gastro-intestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (more common in children)

VA Warns of Telephone Prescription Scam



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is warning veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information.

“Some unscrupulous scammers have targeted America’s veterans, especially our older veterans,” said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “VA does not call veterans and ask them to disclose personal financial information over the phone.”

The latest scam, currently centered in the Midwest, comes from callers who identify themselves as working for the “Patient Care Group.” They say VA recently changed procedures for dispensing prescriptions and ask for the veteran’s credit card number.

“VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines,” Nicholson said. “And we’ve definitely not changed our long-standing commitment to protect the personal information of our veterans.”

Veterans with questions about VA

services or their prescriptions should contact the nearest VA medical center or clinic.

PERSONAL EMERGENCY PLAN

If the Unthinkable Happens, **ARE YOU PREPARED?**

Have you and your family planned for the unexpected? Today, we are faced with both natural and manmade disasters. It has never been so important for you and your family to complete a family emergency plan. Here are a few tips to help you put your plan together:

- ▶ Decide where you will meet if you are not immediately together. Select two places, one close to your home in case of fire and one outside your neighborhood in case you are unable to reach your home.
 - ▶ Choose a person that everyone will telephone in case you are separated. Consider selecting someone who lives outside the immediate area to increase the chances that telephone calls can go through. Always carry the phone number with you.
 - ▶ Place important family records in a fireproof container.
 - ▶ Keep a supply of essentials ready; you should rotate the supplies every six months to keep them fresh. Some supplies to consider keeping are:
 - ✓ Water. Plan on one gallon per person per day. You should store enough to last three days.
 - ✓ Nonperishable packaged foods that can be eaten cold. (Don’t forget the manual can opener!)
 - ✓ Blankets or sleeping bags, and other items to help keep you warm.
 - ✓ Extra glasses, medications, car keys and other essentials.
 - ✓ Battery-operated flashlights and radios. Don’t forget to check the batteries periodically; keep extras on hand.
 - ▶ Put away some money; consider keeping small bills, such as ones and fives. If you are not able to get to the bank/ATM, you will have some money to buy essentials.
 - ▶ Plan what you will do with your pets. They depend upon you. Remember service animals are the only animals allowed in shelters. Identify the hotels and motels that allow animals, and locate animal boarding facilities that might accept your pets.
- Basic planning will save you and your family time and energy should a disaster strike. A few moments of planning today will pay off should you ever need to enact your personal emergency preparedness plan. For more information, please contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the American Red Cross.

Are You a No-Show?

Do you sometimes become frustrated waiting for the doctor to get to you? Sometimes it is not because of the patients the physician sees, but because of that patient he didn't see! Did you know that the clinic or facility staff will keep the appointment open for a 10-15 minute window, depending on the facility? If the patient doesn't show up, that is time wasted for the physician and the staff, and time waiting for you.

According to Melanie Sapasap, co-chair of the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network No-Show Committee, appointment no-shows are costly in both time and dollars. "While some clinics are meeting the target of a less than 10% 'no-show' rate, others can average a 'no-show' rate as high as 30%," says Sapasap. "At a rate of roughly \$118 per appointment, more or less depending on the clinic, this is a huge cost for each medical center. That is money that could be spent on improving other aspects of patient care."

Not only is the missed appointment time wasted for the physician and other patients, there is also support staff time – both nursing and clerical – spent processing no-shows, sending reminder letters and calling to reschedule. An even more valuable loss of time is the missed opportunity for another patient to use that time slot – delaying care that might be vital.

The staff at your local VA Health-

care Center is working to reduce no-shows by scheduling reminder phone calls (automated and/or personal depending on the facility). Appointment reminder letters or postcards may also be used in addition to, or in place of, phone calls at many facilities.

"It is important that you, as a patient, provide the facility or clinic with your current contact information," says Sapasap. "If we have current information, our staff can contact you to remind you of future appointments. Equally important, ask for updated clinic phone numbers if you do not already have them. We are working to ensure that our phone system and staff that take your calls will be able to assist you in a timely manner."

If you find you must miss an appointment, call the clinic or facility as soon as possible to reschedule so your appointment time is available to another veteran. If you miss an appointment without calling ahead of time, call the clinic as soon as possible after the missed appointment to determine the next course of action. If you have a history of no-shows, you may be referred back to your primary care provider.

Missed appointments delay care for you and others, increase wait times, and decrease the availability of the health care professionals and facilities for others who may need them. Make sure time's not a 'wastin' for you – don't be a no-show!

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157
714-776-0161

Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110
Corona, CA 92879-3123
951-734-0525

East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard
Suite 140
Commerce, CA 90022-5147
323-728-9966

Las Vegas Vet Center

1919 S. Jones Blvd., Suite A
Las Vegas, NV 89146
702-251-7873

Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard
Suite 150
Gardena, CA 90247-4129
310-767-1221

San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3315
619-294-2040

San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103-1003
619-294-2040

Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618
818-892-9227

Ventura Vet Center

790 E. Santa Clara
Ventura, CA 93001-2964
805-585-1860

Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104
Vista, CA 92083-6125
760-643-2070

West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230-6615
310-641-0326

REACHING US IS EASY

★ VA Medical Centers

**VA Southern Nevada
Healthcare System**
P.O. Box 360001
Las Vegas, NV 89036
702-636-3000

**Mike O'Callaghan
Federal Hospital**
4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North
Las Vegas, NV 89191
702-653-2215

**VA Loma Linda
Healthcare System**
11201 Benton Street
Loma Linda, CA 92357
909-825-7084

**VA Long Beach
Healthcare System**
5901 East Seventh Street
Long Beach, CA 90822
562-826-8000

**VA San Diego
Healthcare System**
3350 La Jolla Village Drive
San Diego, CA 92161
858-552-8585

**VA Greater Los Angeles
Healthcare System**
11301 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90073
310-478-3711

▲ Community Clinics

Anaheim
1801 W. Romneya Drive
3rd Floor, Suite 303
Anaheim, CA 92801
714-780-5400

Antelope Valley
547 W. Lancaster Blvd.
Lancaster, CA 93534
661-729-8655

Bakersfield
1801 Westwind Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-632-1800

Cabrillo
2001 River Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90806
562-388-8000



Symbol Key
★ VA Medical Centers
▲ Community-Based
Outpatient Clinics

Chula Vista
835 3rd Avenue
Chula Vista, CA 91910
619-409-1600

Corona
800 Magnolia Avenue #101
Corona, CA 92879
951-817-8820

East Los Angeles
5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150
City of Commerce, CA 90040
323-725-7557

Escondido
815 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Escondido, CA 92025
760-466-7020

Gardena
1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard
3rd Floor
Gardena, CA 90247
310-851-4705

Henderson
2920 Green Valley Parkway,
Suite 215
Henderson, NV 89014
702-456-3825

Imperial Valley
528 G Street
Brawley, CA 92227
760-344-9085

Lompoc
338 South Dakota Avenue
Vandenberg AFB, CA 92437
805-605-2120

Los Angeles
351 E. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-253-2677

Mission Valley
8810 Rio San Diego Drive
San Diego, CA 92108
619-400-5000

Oxnard
250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue
Suite 150
Oxnard, CA 93030
805-983-6384

Palm Desert
41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103
Palm Desert, CA 92211
760-341-5570

Pahrump
2100 E. Calvada Boulevard
Pahrump, NV 89048
775-751-2053

Pasadena
420 W. Las Tunas Drive
San Gabriel, CA 91776
626-289-5973

San Luis Obispo
1288 Moro St., #200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
805-543-1233

Santa Ana
Bristol Medical Center
2740 S. Bristol Street
1st Floor, Suite 100
Santa Ana, CA 92704
714-825-3500

Santa Barbara
4440 Calle Real
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
805-683-1491

Sepulveda
16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, CA 91343
818-891-7711

South Los Angeles
3737 E. Martin Luther King Jr.
Blvd., Suite 515
Lynwood, CA 90262
310-537-6825

Sun City
28125 Bradley Road
Suite 130
Sun City, CA 92586
951-672-1931

Upland
1238 E. Arrow Highway,
No. 100
Upland, CA 91786
909-946-5348

Victorville
12138 Industrial Boulevard
Suite 120
Victorville, CA 92392
760-951-2599

Vista
1840 West Drive
Vista, CA 92083
760-643-2000

Whittier/Santa Fe Springs
10210 Orr and Day Road
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
562-864-5565

Veterans' Health Today
5901 E. 7th St.
Long Beach, CA 90822



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