



# The Alabama Veteran

*"Proudly Serving America's Finest"*

SPRING 2006

## DATES TO REMEMBER

- **Armed Forces Day**  
May 20, 2006
- **Blue Star Salute**  
Calera, Alabama  
May 20, 2006
- **Memorial Day**  
May 29, 2006
- **Board of Veterans Affairs Meets**  
July 14, 2006

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## Commissioner's Corner

My fellow Alabamians and noble veterans, it gives me a great deal of pride and professional satisfaction to publish this inaugural edition of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) quarterly newsletter. This publication, "The Alabama Veteran" was created as a conduit for the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide information about veteran's benefits, upcoming events and current news items of interest to veterans, their family members and interested citizens.

I continue to be pleased with the progress that ADVA is making to improve veteran advocacy. We are not there yet as there is still a lot of work to do and improvements to be made. I am excited about the possibilities and look forward to seeing many of you as I visit the different county offices.

The 2006 legislative session ended on April 18<sup>th</sup> and was very successful as evidenced by the amount of legislation passed. Alabama's state senators and representatives were all very supportive of veteran's issues. Bills that were enacted into law regarded Vietnam Veteran Distinctive license plates and the personalization of veteran's license plates as well as authorizing active and retired members of the U.S. Armed Forces to make purchases at National Guard Post Exchanges and Canteens.

Our recent budget requests for the Veterans Assistance Fund, Education Trust Fund, and Veterans Home Trust Fund were approved and allocated as submitted. Due to a shortage of available funds, our General Fund budget request was reduced and is now deficient in the amount of \$415,000. These funds were requested to support agency training, the addition of personnel, and associated insurance costs. We will pursue alternative methods of supporting training objectives.

Governor Bob Riley has signed a recent proclamation which proclaimed May as "Salute to the Military" month. In addition, the Governor also proclaimed November 11<sup>th</sup> as Veterans Day in Alabama and encourages all Alabamians to acknowledge veterans and support veteran observances. I would like to personally commend all members of the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee for their diligent work and staunch support. I can assure you that the Governor, legislators, and veteran service organizations support Alabama veterans 100 percent.

We at the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs have accepted the privilege and responsibility for caring for "those who have borne the battle and for their widows and orphans."

**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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W. Clyde Marsh  
Brenda Ingram—Executive Assistant

**ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS**

Christopher Ammerman— Personnel  
Willie Moore— Logistics  
Mike Northcutt—Information Technology

**VETERANS HOME COORDINATOR**

Kim Justice

**BUDGET / FINANCE**

June Rogers—Senior Accountant  
Dixie Black—Senior Accountant

**LOCATION**

RSA Plaza  
770 Washington Avenue  
Suite 530  
Montgomery, Alabama 36104  
Telephone: (334) 242-5077  
Fax: (334) 242-5102

**MAILING ADDRESS**

Department of Veterans Affairs  
PO Box 1509  
Montgomery, Alabama 36102-1509

**INTERNET WEB ADDRESS**

[www.va.state.al.us](http://www.va.state.al.us)

Comments concerning this publication or its contents may be directed to the attention of:

Mike Northcutt  
Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs  
PO Box 1509  
Montgomery, Alabama 36102

E-mail: [mike.northcutt@va.alabama.gov](mailto:mike.northcutt@va.alabama.gov)

## Death of Two Medal of Honor Recipients

Within a two week span, Alabama has lost two of its surviving Medal of Honor Recipients - Desmond T. Doss and Michael J. Novosel.

Desmond Doss, the only conscientious objector to receive the Medal of Honor passed away March 23, 2006. During World War II, instead of accepting a deferment, Mr. Doss voluntarily joined the Army as a conscientious objector. Assigned to the 307th Infantry Division as a company medic he was harassed and ridiculed for his beliefs, yet he served with distinction and ultimately received the Congressional Medal of Honor on October 12, 1945 for his fearless acts of bravery. Mr. Doss was buried April 3, 2006 at the Chattanooga National Cemetery.

Michael J. Novosel, a veteran of three wars, passed away April 2, 2006. Mr. Novosel, a commercial pilot, returned to active duty as a patriotic response to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Mr. Novosel was awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on October 2, 1969. Mr. Novosel was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

With the deaths of Mr. Doss and Mr. Novosel, Mr. (Retired Colonel) Ola Lee Mize remains as Alabama's sole surviving Medal of Honor Recipient.

## New Museum Seeks Purple Heart Recipients

The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor is currently under construction in New York's Hudson River Valley at the New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site. Its mission is to collect and preserve the stories of Purple Heart recipients from all branches of the service and across the generations in an attempt to ensure that all recipients are represented.

Their stories will be preserved and shared through exhibits, live and videotaped interviews with the veterans themselves, and the Roll of Honor, an interactive computer program preserving the stories of each individual. The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor is the first in the nation to recognize the more than 800,000 Americans wounded or killed in action while serving in the United States Military.

For more information or to have your story preserved as a Purple Heart recipient, contact Michael J. Clark, Project Coordinator, National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site, P.O. Box 207 (374 Temple Hill Road), Vails Gate, NY 12584-0207, telephone 845-561-1765, or fax at 845- 561-6577.

## Obtaining Copies of Your DD Form 214

The National Archives has a website that allows individuals to request their DD-214s online. You may use this system if you are:

- A military veteran, or
- Next of kin of a deceased, former member of the military
- The next of kin can be any of the following: surviving spouse that has not remarried, father, mother, son, daughter, sister or brother.

The website can be found at: [www.archives.gov/veterans/evetrecs/](http://www.archives.gov/veterans/evetrecs/). If you would prefer to call the National Archives, they can be reached at: 1-866-272-6272. If you do not have access to the internet, you may contact your nearest County Veterans Service Office for assistance in obtaining these documents.

## Work Continues Toward Veterans Cemetery

Congressman Spencer Bachus has announced that progress is being made on construction for the proposed U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs Cemetery in Montevallo.

“The construction of this cemetery is significant for Alabama's aging veteran population,” Bachus said. “I am pleased to see the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs steadily moving forward on this project. “It is only fitting those in Alabama who have served our country with honor are afforded a final resting place near their loved ones.”

During the year, local property owners surrounding the American Village have cooperated with the department to facilitate access to their properties by an environmental assessment team.

VA officials believe the department will recommend purchasing several of the small properties pending the results of the assessment, he said, and the land acquisition should be complete in a year. Construction will begin with the cemetery set to open in 2008 with enough acreage to accommodate burials for 40 or 50 years.

An environmental assessment of the site is required to ensure that the land meets the soil type and topographical criteria necessary to support a large-scale national cemetery such as the one proposed at the Village. MACTEC, an Atlanta-based engineering firm which is already under contract with the VA, is overseeing the assessment.

In 2003, the department was directed by Congress to establish a new cemetery in the Birmingham area that currently has a population of more than 212,000 veterans who have no practical burial option in a national cemetery.

### ALABAMA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Charles Stephens—Fort Payne

### Military Order of the Purple Heart

Robert Hewitt—Blountsville

### Vietnam Veterans of America

Ken Rollins—Oxford

## HHS and VA to Target Diabetes, Obesity Among Americans

With obesity and deadly diabetes at higher levels among America's veterans, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have announced a coordinated campaign to educate veterans and their families about ways to combat these health issues.

"Central to our goal of controlling the cost of health care is the promotion of wellness, fitness and the prevention of chronic disease," HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt said. "We are working to encourage Americans to adopt healthy lifestyles and to take the responsibility for making wise choices to improve their fitness and health." Veterans are nearly three times as likely as the general population to have diabetes, one of the major complications associated with being overweight. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease (part of the National Institutes of Health), seven percent of the U.S. population has diabetes. Among veterans receiving VA health care, the rate is 20 percent.

"Inactive lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits can cause needless suffering for America's veterans," VA Secretary R. James Nicholson said. "Obesity and diabetes are major threats to the health and lifestyles of our veterans, who are deserving of a robust campaign to educate them on healthy habits."

In a recent news conference, Secretary Leavitt, VA Secretary Nicholson, VA Under-Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin and Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona announced the start of a campaign called "Healthier US Veterans" -- a multi-pronged educational effort to encourage healthy eating and physical activity among veterans, their families and members of their communities. VA medical centers will be the hubs of the program where they will promote nutrition and exercise with participating "Steps to a Healthier US" grantee organizations, throughout the country.

## Veterans Get Nearly \$81 Billion in Historic FY 07 Plan

Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson recently announced that President Bush will seek a record \$80.6 billion in the fiscal year 2007 budget for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The FY '07 budget proposal calls for \$38.5 billion in discretionary funding -- mostly for health care. This budget contains the largest increase in discretionary funding for VA ever requested by a President. For health care alone, the President's request is an increase of \$3.5 billion over the FY '06 level. The budget proposal also would provide \$42.1 billion in mandatory funding, mostly for compensation, pension and other benefit programs. It further ensures that the Department of Veterans Affairs will be able to care for those veterans who count on VA the most. A few highlights of this budget include:

- Continuing the commitment to work closely with the Department of Defense to ensure that those returning service members and their families receive timely, high-quality services and benefits.
- Provide care for an estimated 5.3 million patients.
- Provides \$1.4 billion for prosthetics and sensory aids, a \$160 million increase over FY '06.
- Funding for non-institutional long-term care would increase by nearly 10 percent over FY '06, with a total investment of \$535 million in the President's proposed budget.

## State Veterans Home Programs

The State of Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs operates three Veterans Homes located throughout the state. Each home has a capacity of 150 beds which provides skilled care nursing services to eligible veterans. Bill Nichols State Veterans Home, opened in 1989, is located in Alexander City. The Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home and William F. Green State Veterans Home, both opened in 1995, are located in Huntsville and Bay Minette, respectively.

The Eligibility Criteria to be admitted into the State Veterans Home Program includes:

- Must be honorably discharged from military service with a minimum of 90 days of active duty service.
- Must meet the qualifications as set forth by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs criteria for skilled nursing care.
- Must have been a resident of Alabama for the immediate past 12 months.
- Applicants may not have medical/nursing care needs that the Home is not equipped to provide or have a diagnosis/behavioral traits that may prove dangerous to the well-being of themselves or others.
- Peace time veterans may be admitted on a space available basis, but will not be placed before a war-time veteran.

Applications are available by contacting your county's Veteran Service Officer, the Department Representative at the Home, or by downloading from the department's website.

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs contracts with a private management company to operate all three homes. There is an on-site Department Representative at each of the homes for contract oversight. The current contract was awarded June 2004 to Health Management Resources – Governmental Services, Inc. (HMR) of Easley, South Carolina. HMR also manages State Veterans Homes in two other states.

Out-of-pocket costs for the Veterans Homes are very minimal. The Federal VA and State VA pay more than \$140.00 per day leaving only an \$11.64 per day charge to the veteran. This averages to less than \$355.00 per month. Some veterans are eligible to receive supplemental income (Pension with Aid and Attendance) to offset recurring medical care costs. Medications are provided by the in-house VA Pharmacy for \$8.00 per prescription per month. Other services may be billed to Medicare Part B or supplemental insurance.

Within these state-of-the-art facilities, each veteran is assigned a physician who closely monitors the resident's plan of care. Vision and Dental screening are provided in the facility as well as Specialized Therapy Services. Transportation for all local appointments and the VA Medical Center is provided. The homes have many scheduled activities which promote physical skills and social interaction among the veterans. The activities are based upon the interests and capabilities of the individual. We invite you to visit one of the state veteran's homes yourself and spend time with Alabama's Heroes.

Additional information concerning the State Veterans Home Program may be obtained by contacting the Department Representative in the State Veterans Home or by contacting Kim Justice, State Veterans Homes Coordinator at (334) 242-5077 or by e-mail at [kim.justice@va.alabama.gov](mailto:kim.justice@va.alabama.gov).

## Federal VA Benefits

The following are benefits provided through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs:

- Disability
- Education
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Home Loan Guaranty
- Burial
- Dependent and Survivor
- Life Insurance
- Health Care

If you have any questions regarding the above or any benefit listed in this publication, feel free to contact your County Veterans Service Officer. Our Service Officers are located at the courthouse or in the immediate vicinity within each county and are assigned to counsel and file VA claims for veterans and their family members.

## ADVA Mission Statement

The mission of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs is to be an innovative, professional, and dynamic organization that consistently exceeds statutory and moral obligations in serving those who served our grateful nation.

## Medal of Honor Highway

In celebration of Medal of Honor Day, the stretch of Interstate 20 between Birmingham and Georgia has been dedicated as the Medal of Honor Highway. This designation recognizes 21 Alabama residents who received the nation's highest honor for their actions in combat.

State Senator Hank Erwin, who is the son of Medal of Honor recipient Henry Erwin, introduced the resolution several months ago to dedicate this section of highway.

Retired Army Colonel Ola Lee Mize of Gadsden, who received the Medal of Honor in 1953 during the Korean War helped unveil the sign while family members of other Alabama Medal of Honor recipients looked on.

## History of Memorial Day

Memorial Day, also known as Decoration Day, is a day set aside to honor and remember those that have died in our nation's service.

The origin of the holiday dates back to the Civil War. It was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers.

The 1868 celebration was inspired by local observances of the day in several towns throughout America that had taken place in the three years since the Civil War. Though several Northern and Southern cities claim to be the birthplace of Memorial Day, President Lyndon Johnson, declared Waterloo, N.Y., the official birthplace of Memorial Day.

In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday in May. For more information regarding the history of Memorial Day, visit: <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/memorial/>.

## Alabama State Veterans Homes

Anyone who may know of interested eligible veterans are asked to encourage them to make application for admittance to the home in their geographic area. For more information and/or an application, contact:

### Bill Nichols State Veterans Home

1784 Elkahatchee Road  
Alexander City, Alabama 35010  
Kathryn Fuller—(256) 329-3350

### Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home

2701 Meridian Street  
Huntsville, Alabama 35811  
Charlotte Eason—(256) 851-2807

### William F. Green State Veterans Home

PO Box 1461  
300 Falkner Drive  
Bay Minette, Alabama 36507  
Lavon Henley—(251) 937-8049