



California LEGIONNAIRE

THE AMERICAN LEGION
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LEADERS PAGES 8-9

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A month to recognize Black contributions to America

By **Autrey James**
Antioch Post 161

As we enter this February, a month designated as “Black History Month” I urge us all to rethink this month. I think of it as celebrating the contributions of Black Americans to American history. I want us all to think of this month as a way to celebrate the service of Black Americans who have fought and died on foreign soil and on American soil to make sure the America we love, lives up to the ideals of our founding fathers.

As a Black American Veteran, I know that I stand on the shoulders of giants who have paved the way for me. I am both grateful for the path they have laid and aware that it is my responsibility to pave the way for others who come after me.

As a Black American and a Veteran, I know that deeply ingrained in us are both the horrors we have endured in America and the pride in which we have continuously and faithfully served her. The history of

my own family is but one example.

My grandfather answered the call to arms when his nation, no, our nation needed him. James Waiters Sr. of New Orleans Louisiana was enlisted into the United States Army and went overseas for his country during World War I.

He never got the opportunity to fight for his country because at the time our country denied him that opportunity.

At that time our young country still had much to learn about living up to the ideals upon which it was founded.

My Grandfather served honorably, came home after the war, found work, took a wife and raised a family.

My grandmother’s youngest brother, Raymond Williams, also served our country when he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and trained at Montford Point making him one of the first Black Americans to integrate the United States Marine Corps. He also served honorably, returned home and raised

a family.

Both of these men raised families that contributed to this nation in the armed services, then continued to serve as police officers, teachers, peace corps volunteers and many other ways. My family is no different than many other American families in its commitment to service to this nation.

The difference may be that my grandfather and great uncle proudly and willingly served our nation in spite of the treatment towards Black Americans, particularly, but not exclusively, in the southern United States.

These men instilled in my family the love of country, people, and service to this nation. They believed that their service would pave the way towards making equality a reality as opposed to an idea.

Black Americans like my grandfather and great uncle have long believed that service to this nation in time of need would force America to live up to the ideals

See **HISTORY** page 3



The Department of California’s new interim adjutant, Barbara Lombrano, is the first-ever female to hold that position. (Photo: Lillian Moss)

New interim adjutant to focus on training, innovation

By **Jared Morgan**
Editor
California Legionnaire

The American Legion Department of California recently welcomed its newest staff member to the headquarters team in Sanger.

Barbara Lombrano is making California Legion history as the Department’s first female interim adjutant.

Lombrano brings with her 12 years of Legion experience. She’s served as adjutant for Area 6.

She was an Area 6 commissioner for the California Boys State Commission.

She served as commander for District 16 and for Post 502 in Moorpark. Lombrano’s passion for volunteerism doesn’t stop at veterans advocacy.

She’s volunteered at the

American Cancer Society for more than 15 years, during which time she trained volunteers and served as event chair for the organization’s Relay for Life held in multiple cities.

See **ADJUTANT** page 2



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Buffalo Soldiers in the 24th Infantry carried out mounted patrol duties in Yosemite.

**THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA**

1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801

☎ 559-875-8387 ✉ admin@caLegion.org

— LEADERSHIP —

Department Commander Edward Grimsley
commander@caLegion.org

Interim Adjutant Barbara Lombrano
adjutant@caLegion.org

California LEGIONNAIRE

— NEWSLETTER & DIGITAL —

Editor / Web Team Lead / Page Designer
Jared Morgan
editor@caLegion.org
310-750-9782

Web Team member
Rick Pushies
Webteam@caLegion.org

Facebook Manager
Lillian Moss
socialmedia@caLegion.org
facebook.com/caLegion

Photographer
Fred Shacklett

ADVERTISING:
contact the editor



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- Submissions to the Department website can be made at any time by visiting caLegion.org/ugc (please email the editor to let them know you've submitted online)
- Photos should be sent at the highest resolution possible
- Do not embed photos in a Word.doc. Send photos as email attachments with photo captions either typed in a word document or in the email body. Images that are pulled off of websites will not reproduce well, if at all. PDFs must be saved as high resolution from their original document
- All submissions become the property of The American Legion Department of California. All submitted material is subject to edit, rework and omission. We are not responsible for lost items or misplaced material
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Let's stay united



By Ed Grimsley
Commander
Department of California

My fellow Legionnaires,

The past year has been a tough one for all of us. The pandemic has physically separated and isolated

First female interim adjutant

From ADJUTANT page 1

Lombrano is currently the adjutant and finance officer for District 16 and took a leave of absence from her work as the veteran service officer of L.A. County Council at the Sepulveda VA.

Lombrano is an accredited veterans service officer and able to offer guidance to veterans seeking VA benefits.

Lombrano credits her volunteering with the American Cancer Society for bringing her into the Legion.

While volunteering for a community event in Moorpark, Lombrano met Peter Duncan and Jim Carpenter. The two have been her Legion mentors ever since.

A Navy veteran, Lombrano began her 12 years of military service as a yeoman in the engineering department aboard the USS Jason AR8, before becoming a dental technician and finally a hospital corpsman.

"Being a veteran myself it's a passion," Lombrano said. "Becoming a VSO, helping veterans – when I went through it myself I didn't have anyone. All the

many of us, while politics has worked to anger and divide us ideologically.

The combination of these things has created the perfect storm.

We may not all be in the same boat, but we are all under the same dark clouds and have to work together to navigate away from the rough seas of change.

Wherever you are riding out this storm, wherever you are, whatever you believe in, we are all connected by the same fact — we served our country with honor and we continue to serve community, state, and nation through The American Legion.

Let's not ever forget that and let's not allow the world outside this great organization to tear us from one another and from the good work we do every single day to make this country better for veterans, their families and the Americans we vowed to protect.

We are Americans. And if you love this country, you must accept the differences of all its people.

We are all different, but are bound together by the things that make us the same.

Let's never lose sight of that because it's what makes America great.

frustrations – if I can help a vet not go through that, I'm fulfilled."

When Lombrano attended Pierce College a few years ago, she became heavily involved in Student Veterans of America. She saw a need for the organization's presence on campus and decided to form a chapter.

For Lombrano, it's not difficult to pinpoint her "why." Why does she con-

All the frustrations – if I can help a vet not go through that, I'm fulfilled."

tinue to volunteer? Why has she spent the past 12 years volunteering for The American Legion?

"I believe in what we do," Lombrano said. "I come from a very long line of veterans."

Lombrano's father retired out of the Navy. All five of her uncles on her mother's side served in every branch. One was a Green Beret in the Vietnam era. Her mother's father was a doughboy in WWI and a Navy Seabee in WWII.

Being an interim adjutant



Autrey James (Photo: Lillian Moss)

From HISTORY page 1

that its founding fathers wrote of but did not implement in their time. The men of my family believed that war and service would be transformative for America. After all, how could any nation expect its citizens to go abroad and fight for democracy and then continue to deny democracy to those very citizens who risked their lives for the "American" way of life. My grandfather and great uncle were right. Their service was transformative for America but what they did not realize was though the fight over there was over it was just beginning at home.

The great fight for civil rights in America, one of America's greatest fights,

began as a result of Black Americans who after serving abroad in the most elite fighting force the world has ever known, came home after both WWI and WWII and were denied the democracy in their own country. After both World War I and World War II for Black Americans, merely wearing their uniform could get them killed or maimed for life, not by an enemy but by other Americans. Those acts and the understanding that America could not go back to what it was but must move forward was the catalyst for men like Charles Houston, Medgar Evers, Ralph Abernathy, and many, many other icons of the civil rights movement who served in uniform to organize and fight not just

for themselves but for the soul of America itself.

The men and women who fought for civil rights for all Americans, believed in and loved America in spite of her faults. These men and women fought, for the democracy that America believes in and cherishes. Those who fought for civil rights felt called to action to defend their country. When those whose minds they sought to change took up arms against them, they did not run from the fight. They forged ahead. The battles these Veterans fought, eventually won over the hearts and minds of their adversaries and in 1964 the Civil Rights act was signed into law followed in 1965 by the Voting Rights Act.

This is but one example of how Black Americans have continuously fought for America. The truth is Black Americans like my grandfather and great uncle have always fought for our country. In the Revolutionary War 8,000 men of African descent fought alongside the Patriots. During the Civil war some 200,000 Black Americans fought on the side of the Union. Black Americans

fought alongside Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War. They fought in the Indian wars, in Vietnam, and in every other conflict this young nation has been engaged in.

My grandfather never saw the results of his struggle as he died in 1950. My great uncle however lived until February 2020. My great uncle lived long enough to see the fruits of their labor. He lived long enough to be recognized by a grateful nation with a Congressional Gold Medal for his service to the fight for democracy and equality

within this country. He lived long enough to see his sons, nephews, great nieces, and great nephews serve this country with honor, distinction and love of this country and all of its people. I am grateful to both of these Black Americans for their contributions not to Black History but to the history of our nation. I am proud to be Black and proud to be an American and I am grateful to my grandfather, great uncle and others who lifted us all up to make this a better America. God bless America and all its people.



Raymond Williams is one of about 20,000 African-Americans who were trained as Marines at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949. In November 2011, the Montford Point Marines were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal -- the highest civilian honor bestowed by Congress for distinguished achievement -- for service that led to minorities and women being integrated into the Marine Corps. (Photo: Army)

February really is American History Month

Patricia Jackson Kelley
Jackie Robinson Post 252

The story of Black History Month began in 1915, half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States.

Black History Month is celebrated annually, identifying the achievements of African Americans and recognition of their central role in U.S. History.

We call it Afro-American History Month; however, it grew out of "Negro History Week." Carter G. Woodson is the noted brainchild.

Since 1976, every President has officially designated the month of February as Black

History Month.

Other countries around the world, including Canada, also devote a month to celebrate Black History and the United Kingdom.

Each year we spend time acknowledging

It is my hope that one day we will not need to separate Black History from America History.

the sacrifices, struggles, and successes of Afro-Americans.

We are on a natural high for the shortest number of days on the calendar for twelve months.

I am sad to say, this year approaching this "high" is not the same for me.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on almost every family I know.

Having experienced a personal attack of this virus, I realize how blessed I am that it was not a devastating attack on my health.

It has literally placed a hold on whatever form of freedom taken for granted.

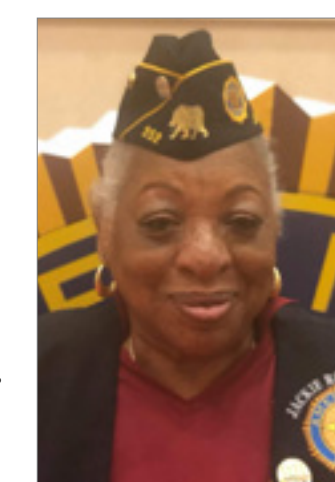
It is my expectation that this will be a low-keyed acknowledgment of this historical celebration. The uprising of our nation has placed some questions regarding our voting rights and the attempt to suppress any gains made in the past.

This year Black History month marks two significant anniversaries impacting voting rights for African Americans. 150 years ago, the 15th Amendment was ratified. "The right of citizens to vote shall not be denied or abridged.

On account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

Last year was the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment securing women's right to vote.

The theme for 2021 African American History month is "The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity." Each year the theme is set by the Association for the Study of African



Patricia Jackson Kelley

Americans Life and History (ASALH.)

It is my hope that one day we will not need to separate Black History from America History.

We can walk together as one, no separatism, just the human race.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2021

By Seth Reeb
Legislative Advocate
Reeb Government Relations

The 2021-22 legislative session convened on December 7 and the new 2021-22 Legislature was sworn in. On January 11, 2021, the Legislature will reconvene, and legislation will begin moving again. Since this is the beginning of a new 2-year legislative session, policy committees are reconstituted to accommodate newly elected legislators. For the first time the Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee is comprised

of all-veterans. The Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee has 2 members that were not on the committee last year. These Assemblymembers are Thurston "Smitty" Smith, elected 2020, and James Ramos, elected 2018. This brings the total number of veterans on these committees to 7 in the Senate and 2 in the Assembly. (See the end of this report for members of the committees)
A new legislative session also means that everything starts over. There is no holdover legislation from previous years. The bill introduction

deadline is February 19. We will begin analyzing newly introduced bills and are working with the legislative staff to obtain background sheets so that we can forward to the Legion's Legislative Commission with a recommendation to support, oppose, or watch the bills. Bills must be in print for 30 days before any action can be taken.
At this time, we are unsure how or if there will be limitations on legislation, like last year due to COVID-19. We should all be prepared to improvise adapt and overcome this year, as the legislature has

already postponed the start of the legislative year by one week so far. Reeb Government Relations is eager to work with the Legion and the Legislature to help improve the quality of life for veterans here in California.
The Governor released his 2021-22 budget proposal. The legislature will begin to evaluate what is proposed and we will need to keep a close eye on money for the veteran programs. After a quick review of the proposed budget veterans do not seem to be impacted negatively. This is just the start of the budget process, we

will keep you informed of any updates.
Feb. 19 is the last day for bills to be introduced.

2021 Military and Veterans Committees:

The Veterans committees for both houses have changed the names of the committees to "Military and Veterans Affairs". Previously, they had not mentioned military in the committee name, even though the military has always been part of the committees' purview. Assemblymember Irwin and Senator Archuleta have remained Chairs.

Assembly Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs
Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), Chair
Assemblymember Randy Voepel (R-Santee), Vice Chair
Assemblymember Tasha Boerner Horvath (D-Encinitas)
Assemblymember Tom Daly (D-Anaheim)
Assemblymember Jim Frazier (D-Oakley)
Assemblymember Devon Mathis (R-Visalia)
Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi (D-Torrance)
Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Laguna Beach)
Assemblymember James Ramos (D-Highland)
Assemblymember Rudy Salas (D-Bakersfield)
Assemblymember Thurston "Smitty" Smith (R-Hesperia)

For more information, contact:
Don Harper
Chair, Legislative Commission
govia@comcast.net

Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs
Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera), Chair.
Senator Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield), Vice Chair.
Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman (D-Stockton)
Senator Melissa Melendez (R-Lake Elsinore)
Senator Josh Newman (D-Fullerton)
Senator Richard D. Roth (D-Riverside)
Senator Thomas J. Umberg (D-Santa Ana)

Learn more about these legislators:
<https://www.assembly.ca.gov/assemblymembers>
<https://www.senate.ca.gov/senators>



Can you help us talk to Congress?

HELP WANTED

Join the congressional liaison team

If you are a Legion member who lives in one of these Congressional Districts, and would like to be on our select Congressional Liaison team, we'd like to talk to you.

We are looking for people who can talk to and work with their Congressional representative and staff about legislation affecting 18 million veterans nationwide. Our team members are politically savvy, dedicated, responsive, and knowledgeable. They travel to Washington DC when called on to walk the halls of Congress. They promote the Legion's 4 Pillars of values at town hall meetings, workshops, city council meetings - wherever the Blue Cap can make a difference. Think about it. Would you like to be one of us? If you're interested, or want more information, call or email Mike Brimer, Chair, National Legislative Council for California at: 707-429-4720 / endurance74@outlook.com

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT	GENERAL REGION	CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVE	OFFICE LOCATION
6	Sacramento City	Doris Matsui	Sacramento
9	San Joaquin County	Jerry McNerney	Stockton
11	Walnut Creek	Mark DeSaulnier	Walnut Creek
13	Marin County	Barbara Lee	Oakland
14	San Mateo County	Jackie Speier	San Mateo
17	Santa Clara / Milpitas	Rohit (Ro) Khanna	Santa Clara
18	San Mateo / Santa Clara	Anna Eshoo	Palo Alto
19	San Jose / Santa Clara	Zoe Lofgren	San Jose
20	Santa Cruz / Salinas	Jimmy Panetta	Salinas
34	Los Angeles County	Jimmy Gomez	Los Angeles
37	Los Angeles County	Karen Bass	Los Angeles
38	Whittier / Norwalk / Bellflower	Linda Sanchez	Norwalk
47	Los Angeles County	Alan Lowenthal	Long Beach
49	Oceanside / Dana Point	Mike Levin	Oceanside
50	Escondido / Temecula	Darrell Issa	El Cajon

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Department Web Team is Growing!

The Department Web Team is responsible for our Department website. Our website is growing and our web team is also growing.
We are looking for two good members of our Legion Family who want to come play on the Web Team to help keep the content of our website up-to-date and accurate.

Requirements:

Desire to to serve as a good Web Team player. Internet access, and a willingness to learn!
During the months of May, June

& July much of the website content changes as a result of leadership elections. We need help, especially during these months, to ensure content changes take place quickly and accurately.
Although knowledge of WordPress is helpful, most of the help needed involves word-processing.
The Web Team will provide any training needed.
If you would like to volunteer to play on our Web Team, contact:
Rick Pushies at
805-925-9144 or rpushies@yahoo.com

Join these video calls for spiritual support

Post 283 Chaplain Joe Ramirez has partnered with Post 283 member/Army National Guard Brigade Chaplain Nathan Graeser and District 24 Chaplain Donna Callaway to present a Chaplain's support program through Zoom conference calls. During the societal stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, our members have made great efforts to reach out to each other to keep spirits up and offer help where needed. Tapping into Joe Ramirez's skill as a minister, we organized this group to support our members with a formal program, and with the hopes that Joe, Nate and Donna can build a program with an expanded digital reach. This is also a unique opportunity to listen and encourage one another during the open discussion portion of the event. The first event which took place on December 21st was a success. Our next event is scheduled for Monday, March 1 at 7pm. Watch our Post's Facebook page and newsletter for details. Let's spread the word about their spreading the good Word.

The 'Warriors Road' to healing

By Jeric Wilhelmssen
Hollywood Post 43

When Navy veteran André Andrews signed up for Legion College, he didn't realize that the connections he would make could lead to the achievement of his dreams. The combination of wanting to bring a piece of home to his new residence in California and a desire to learn more about leadership opportunities within The American Legion turned out to be the perfect formula. With a little hard work and help from a trusted mentor, Andrews was able to start a veteran equine therapy program

called Warriors Road. Being a third-generation rancher, Andrews grew up around horses. After his time in the Navy, he found himself settling down in southern California where he didn't have exposure to the lifestyle of his youth. Wanting to get back into it, he volunteered at a ranch to fine-tune his skills with horses. It wasn't long before he had an idea, "... thinking up this fairly decent idea, wanting to work with veterans as well, I thought of this equine opportunity, or equine experience."

He wanted to create an equine healing non-profit organization where veterans could spend

quality time with horses. He brought up the idea with his instructor from Legion College, Post 502 Moorpark, Calif., member



Ronald Regan Palisades Post 283's Andre Andrews continues his Warriors Road equine therapy (Warriorsroad.org)

Barbara Lombrano. Lombrano had been around horses her entire life and jumped at the chance to be involved. "You know I really love this idea, so I told André whatever I can do to help, I want to be involved," she said.
Once he returned from Legion College, Andrews presented his idea to the leadership of his post, No. 283 in Pacific Palisades, Calif. Impressed with the quality of his proposal and love for horses they gave him what he needed to get started. Lombrano was able to help acquire additional forms of financial support, and now Warriors Road maintains six horses

and has helped more than 100 veterans.
There are several ways in which a veteran can spend time with horses at Warriors Road. Andrews' goal is to help them get to know all aspects of the horse, from feeding to grooming to tacking, and when ready, riding. Some veterans like to come out and just spend time with the horses while others get the full experience of going for rides on the trails. "We want a good, great, safe ride. We give the veterans an hour or two of riding out in nature, and provide them with this new challenge. And when they come back that's when we reflect with the veterans."



American Legion Redwood City Post 105 Family Members (Legionnaires, Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion and American Riders) partnered with the San Mateo County Veterans Service Office to provide FREE COVID-19 testing on Saturday, Nov. 21, 2020. The testing was targeted at the Veterans and their families in our community but open to anyone. We provided 96 tests and are looking forward to our next testing opportunity.

Members:
Sign up for American Legion Department of California email updates to receive training, membership info and other important updates.

bit.ly/calegion-emails



VA: Telehealth expanded to 12,000 veterans during pandemic

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced last month its Digital Divide Consult program has provided internet access or video-enabled devices to over 12,000 veterans in the United States—to include California veterans—in need of telehealth services.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, access to in-person VA health care has been limited.

As a result, the VA has urged veterans to take advantage of its telehealth services for minor concerns rather than risk unnecessary exposure.

This emphasis proved especially helpful in

California last fall, as wildfires and rising infection rates placed even greater strain on in-person medical care in the state.

The VA says that many veterans have adapted to telehealth services becoming the standard for medical care. According to a Jan. 6 press release, by November of last year, telehealth visits had increased over 1,600% since the beginning of the pandemic.

However, a significant number of veterans that are homeless, older, or who live in rural communities have not embraced telehealth services—allegedly due to limited access.

Recognizing this, the VA launched the Digital Divide Consult program to expand telehealth access to underserved communities.



A Vietnam veteran uses a tablet computer for VA telehealth services. (Photo: VA.gov)

Veterans who do not readily have internet access and/or an internet-connected device can reach out to VA providers who will put them in contact with a VA social worker.

The worker can evaluate a veteran's needs and determine eligibility for assistance.

Devices are free to borrow and internet

services can be provided through veterans' regular cellular carrier or a private telehealth location through the VA's ATLAS program.

Veterans that are part of the program are able to test the service before they conduct their first medical video visit so they can familiarize themselves with the process.

The VA also says in

its press release that it "intends to update the Digital Divide Consult as opportunities for future broadband and device discounts become available."

The VA has not provided an end date for the Digital Divide Consult program beyond noting that the program will be active at least until the pandemic ends.

COVID-19 relief grant program include veteran organizations

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

The California governor's office on Wednesday said it would now consider 501(c)19 veteran service organizations for its COVID-19 relief program after the American Legion's Department of California inquired as to why this wasn't previously the case.

The California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant Program is aimed at helping small businesses and nonprofits survive economic hardship brought on by the pandemic.

Before Wednesday, nonprofit organizations were only eligible for assistance from the program if they were registered as 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 entities and had an annual gross revenue of \$2.5 million or less. The grant application website explicitly listed "nonprofit

businesses not registered as either a 501(c)3 or 501(c)6" as ineligible for funds.

While some veterans service organizations (VSOs) met these criteria, many are registered as 501(c)19 or 501(c)23 nonprofit organizations, the official IRS status code for veterans organizations. As such, many VSOs in California had been barred from receiving funds from the grant program.

The American Legion Department of California and all of its 400-plus posts are classified as 501(c)19 nonprofits. Though some posts have 501(c)3 organizations attached for processing charitable donations, many do not.

The Department of California's lobby group, Reeb Government Relations, reached out to the Governor's Office of Business and Economic



Development and other relevant state agencies for clarification. The Governor's office responded early Wednesday morning, noting that VSOs that are registered as 501(c)19 nonprofit organizations are now allowed to apply for grant funds and that the grant application website is expected to reflect these changes sometime today.

Veteran-owned small businesses are also encouraged to apply for grants and may receive priority as these businesses are

labeled as underserved small business groups. The state will be accepting applications for the California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant Program from Dec. 30 until Jan. 8. Grant recipients will be named starting on Jan. 13.

American Legion Posts Have Suffered Under COVID-19

Legion posts throughout California and the United States have struggled under restrictions imposed

by local and state governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As recently as November, Legion posts in California petitioned Gov. Newsom's office to change their designation as "bars" so that they can reopen. Proponents of the change argue that posts serve vital functions in addition to providing a place for socializing, including providing valuable services and support for veterans that may have nowhere else to go.

The American Legion won't tolerate hate

American Legion
Department of California

The American Legion, like the rest of society, enters 2021 with a sense of reflection about what place we have in this world. The problems of 2020 would seem to be out of our control, but we are all responsible for our actions and reactions to that world.

As a non-partisan organization, The American Legion typically abstains from public political debates, but we exist in this world and so do our members. Of particular focus these days is our divided nation and the emergence of radical thinking and groups that leverage that perspective into hate.

When the scenario turns to hate, The American Legion cannot stand silent. It is no longer about free speech or simple political discourse, rather it morphs into an affront to both Legionnaires and our communities, states and nations. As sworn defenders of this country, when lines are crossed, we must take a stand. A prime example occurred in 2017, when a resolution was passed that reaffirmed an 84 year old position of The American Legion. The original resolution resolves that:

"The American Legion considers any individual, group of individuals, or organizations, which creates, or fosters racial, religious or class strife among our people, or

which takes into their own hands the enforcement of law, determination of guilt, or infliction of punishment, to be un-American, a menace to our liberties, and destructive to our fundamental law."

Each member of The American Legion takes an oath and lives under the Preamble to the Constitution of the organization. That Preamble is recited at the start of every meeting and is printed on the back of the very membership card that all members carry. These words are defining of both the individual and the larger organization. We pledge, among other things, to support ideals such as:

– "to promote peace and goodwill on Earth" – In this promotion of peace

and goodwill, we endeavor to be an inclusive organization, and in that mission, must reject the principles of hate.

– "to maintain law and order" – To this end, we cannot become lawless by creating, encouraging, or magnifying the chaos of violence, even if the individual feels a sense of moral justification.

– "to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation" – This clause binds us to the larger world. In this world, we lead by example, thus conducting ourselves with conduct becoming a Legionnaire. Violating this principle can be grounds for expulsion.

It should be clear that The American Legion has no room for hate in its

membership, nor will we silently tolerate hate in any form. With the current tone of the nation's dialog, these principles, without discipline and attention, can be lost in the fray.

This cannot and will not be tolerated. The American Legion has internal mechanisms to deal with actions of malintent that violate the core values of the organization, as voted on by the members of the organization.

The core values are not a reaction to any news of the day. They are printed and carried in our wallets. They are recited at our gatherings, and they reside if the hearts of those members who conduct themselves in congruence with the principles expected of Legionnaires.

Protesters gather at fortified US capitol

Associated Press

Small groups of right-wing protesters — some of them carrying rifles — gathered outside heavily fortified statehouses around the country Sunday, outnumbered by National Guard troops and police brought in to prevent a repeat of the violence that erupted at the U.S. Capitol.

As darkness began to fall, there were no reports of any clashes.

Security was stepped up in recent days after the FBI warned of the potential for armed protests in Washington and at all 50 state capitol buildings ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on Wednesday.

Crowds of only a dozen or two people demonstrated at some boarded-up, cordoned-off statehouses, while the streets in many other capital cities remained empty. Some protesters

said they were there to back President Donald Trump. Others said they had instead come to voice their support for gun rights or oppose government overreach.

"I don't trust the results of the election," said Michigan protester Martin Szelag, a 67-year-old semi-retired window salesman from Dearborn Heights. He wore a sign around his neck that read, in part, "We will support Joe Biden as our President if you can convince us he won legally. Show us the proof! Then the healing can begin."

As the day wore on with no bloodshed around the U.S., a sense of relief spread among officials, though they were not ready to let their guard down. The heavy law enforcement presence may have kept turnout down.

In the past few days, some extremists had warned others against falling into what they called a law enforcement trap.

The American Legion condemns U.S. Capitol violence

American Legion
National HQ

(INDIANAPOLIS, January 6, 2021) — The head of the nation's largest veterans organization unequivocally condemned today's attacks on the U.S. Capitol and called for law and order to be quickly restored in Washington.

"The Capitol is the people's house. An attack on all of us," American Legion National Commander James W. "Bill" Oxford said. "Just as The American Legion has condemned

prior attacks and riots in other cities, we condemn it here. Regardless of whether the violence is inflicted by right-leaning groups, left-leaning groups or unaffiliated civilians, it is never acceptable. This is not how we do things in America. We believe in civil discourse to resolve our differences. The entire American Legion Family proudly stands with the law enforcement officers and National Guard members who are risking their lives to restore safety."

The American Legion is the largest U.S. veterans organization with nearly

2 million members in more than 12,000 posts across the nation and in foreign countries. Chartered by Congress in 1919, The American Legion is dedicated to the motto of "Veterans Strengthening America."

Legionnaires accomplish this through the organization's four founding pillars of mentoring youth and sponsoring wholesome community programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security and continued devotion to servicemembers and veterans.



Your post can receive a credit for each dollar spent on the purchase of American Flags from Emblem Sales.

Legion.org/dispatch/flag

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J.R. Duarte
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Diane DeVries
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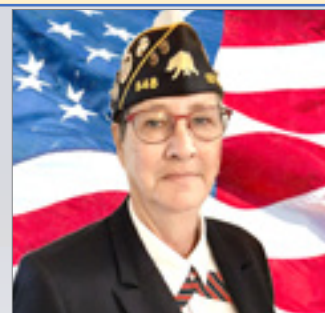


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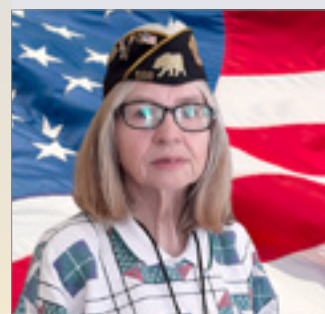
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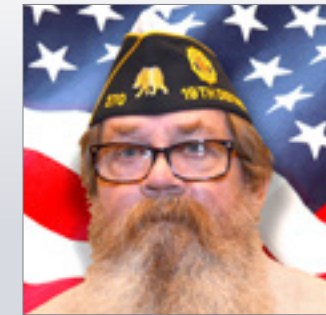
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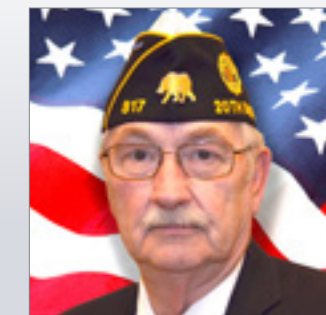
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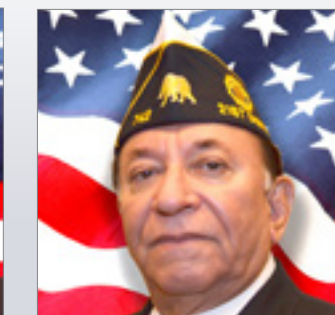
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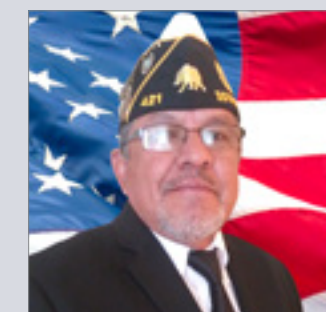
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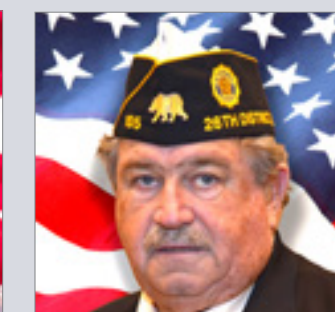
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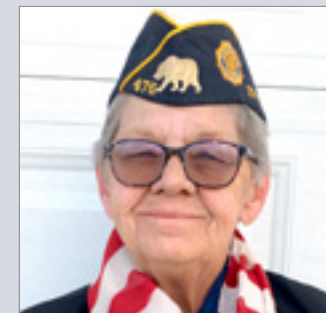
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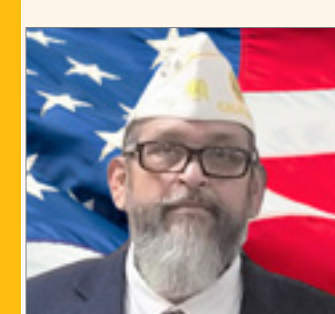
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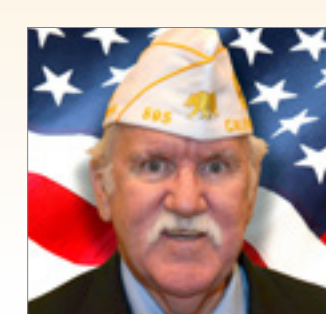
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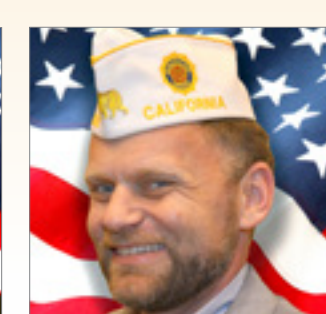
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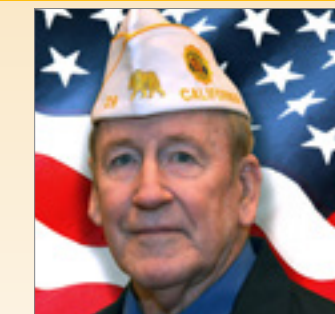


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OBITUARIES

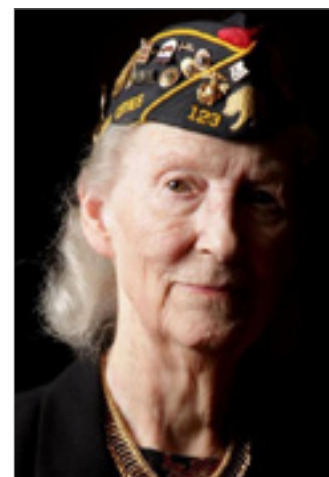


Anna Brown, a WWII era Marine and Legionnaire, was recognized during Pasadena Post 13 Sons of The American Legion Hall of Fame on Saturday, Nov. 16, 2019. (Photo: Jared Morgan, Post 123)

Brown was a Legion staple

By Robert Richter
Santa Monica Post 123

Anna Theresa Brown, a beloved Marine, Legionnaire, veterans organization leader, friend, sister, aunt, and party hostess died of natural causes on Dec. 25, 2020.



Anna Brown (Photo: David Tenenbaum)

Not one to go quietly, she had been battling an acute illness since early November, and survived a case of Covid-19 while in the hospital.

Born the oldest of 11 in Pittsburgh, PA on October 14, 1923, she spent much of her youth living all around the US from Nevada to Tennessee.

In 1940 she hitchhiked her way across the US

alone with \$15 in her pocket. After the start of WWII she enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Women's Reserve in 1943 and spent the duration of the war stationed at El Toro Airbase managing a Post Exchange.

After the close of WWII, Anna Theresa settled in Santa Monica, CA where she spent her working career as a technician and receptionist for a local orthodontist.

Her personal life was much more colorful and she enjoyed the lifestyle Southern California had to offer. Living in the same apartment in Santa Monica for 57 years, many friends, coworkers, and comrades can recount tale after tale of social gatherings.

Never marrying and without children, Anna Theresa spent much of her time advocating for veterans causes through multiple veterans organizations.

She was a member of the American Legion, American Legion Women's Post, the Women's Marine Association, among others. Her longest tenure was with the American Legion. Between 1950 and 2019 she only missed 2 national

conventions, and was known throughout the Legion for her social and outgoing nature.

Anna was preceded in death by her parents William and Anna Brown, siblings William J Brown, Marie A Mangini, Dorothy Chaves, George Brown, Barbara Keenan, Rose Mary Cagle Sister, James Brown, and Paul Brown.

She is survived by her brothers Thomas Brown and John Brown, multiple nieces and nephews, as well as a myriad of friends across the country.

Due to the current situation regarding the Covid pandemic, Santa Monica Bay Cities Post 123 of the American Legion will be delaying a formal memorial service until such time as an in person service is possible.

If you would like to hold a personal memorial until then, a Manhattan cocktail, some classical music, and the Marines Hymn would be appropriate. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to a children's cancer charity such as St Jude or Shriners Hospitals for Children.

Robert Richter is Santa Monica Post 123's finance officer and a former Marine.

Oldest living Marine Corps veteran passes away at age 107

By Harm Venhuizen
Marine Corps Times

The nation's oldest living Marine veteran passed away on Jan. 7.

Sgt. Dorothy "Dot" (Schmidt) Cole enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1943 after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The 29-year-old initially had attempted to join the Navy two years earlier but was told she didn't meet their height standards.

The Marine Corps recognized Cole, born Sept. 19, 1913, in Warren, Pennsylvania, as the oldest living Marine in 2020 on her 107th birthday.

"Everyone was out doing something – there were women helping the Red Cross, or even in churches they were knitting things," Cole said in a memorial video tweeted by the Marine Corps. "So I decided that I wanted to do something and I would go into the Marine Corps."

She joined just months after the Marine Corps Women's Reserve began training women to fill positions in male-dominated fields. Her service laid the foundation for women to serve in roles across the Marine Corps today.

"Women Marines have served at every rank up to lieutenant general, leading and making Marines," Marine Corps spokesman Capt. Joseph Butterfield told Marine Corps Times on Cole's 107th birthday in September 2020. "Marines like Sgt. Cole helped pave the way for this continued tradition of service and sacrifice."

After completing six weeks of boot camp at Camp Le Jeune, North Carolina, Cole proceeded to spend two years typing correspondence for officers in Quantico, Virginia.

The centenarian Marine passed away at her daughter's home in Kannapolis, North Carolina, the Charlotte Observer reported.

She is survived by her daughter, two granddaughters and six great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, Cole requested that donations be made to Covenant Presbyterian Church in Concord, North Carolina, where she was a member four more than 40 years, or the Marine Corps League Cabarrus Detachment, according to her obituary.

Marine Corps Times reporter Jared Morgan contributed to this story.



Post Everlasting

Give your condolences and share your memories of the departed online at www.ca.Legion.org/categories/obituary.
Email obituaries to editor@ca.Legion.org.

OBITUARIES



Capt. Theodore G. Lumpkin Jr. (Photo: Associated Press)

WWII Tuskegee Airman from Los Angeles passes away at 100

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

Former Tuskegee Airman and World War II veteran Capt. Theodore G. Lumpkin Jr. of Los Angeles passed away on Dec. 26, according to an announcement made by the Los Angeles City College on Jan. 8. Lumpkin was 100 years old at the time of his passing, only a few

days away from his 101st birthday.

Lumpkin was drafted by the U.S. Army in 1942 and soon after was assigned to the 100th Fighter Squadron—better known as the famed Tuskegee Airman—an all-black unit that fought Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in the European theater of WWII.

Lumpkin was recently featured in the Los Angeles County Department

of Military and Veterans Affairs' documentary "Unsung Heroes of the Greatest Generation."

In the documentary, Lumpkin speaks of his time in Italy, where the Tuskegee Airmen were tasked with escorting Allied bombers attacking Axis targets throughout Western Europe. He notes that his goals during the war were twofold. One, to help win the war, and

two, to help "better the lot" of black Americans still facing segregation and discrimination at home.

According to a recent Los Angeles Times interview with his family, Lumpkin earned his bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Southern California. He worked as a social worker for Los Angeles County until he retired years later and began a new career in real

estate. Lumpkin was "able to live life on his own terms." He frequently traveled, meeting with President Barack Obama in 2007 and enjoying his favorite spots until testing positive for COVID-19 late in 2020. He later succumbed to complications caused by the virus. Lumpkin is survived by his wife, two sons and daughter, grandchildren, and one great-child.

Brawley Post 60 Legionnaire was volunteer fireman

Art Quevedo Ramos of Calipatria, formerly of San Diego passed away on December 22, 2020.

He was born July 24, 1943 in Brawley and attended schools in Brawley, IVC and schools in San Diego.

He retired from the California Dept. of Transportation as an

Engineering DE. He was a former officer with the U.S. Dept. of Justice.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970 and was a decorated combat infantryman with the first infantry division in Vietnam.

Art was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7420 in San Diego

and the American Legion Post 60 in Brawley.

While residing in Brawley, he was a volunteer with the Brawley Fire Dept.

He enjoyed being with his friends, brothers and sisters-in-law. His hobbies were remodeling his home, gardening, and though a self-described "Lousy

Fisherman," he tried to catch a few with his buddies.

He was preceded in death by his parents Donato Ramos and Maria Quevedo Ramos and by his brother Daniel Ramos.

Art is survived by his dear wife Elsi; brother, Ricardo Ramos (Lydia) of Brawley; and sister, Connie

Ramos of Brawley; sisters-in-law, Olivia Ramos of Brawley, Luz, and Celia of Mexicali and Yolanda Bonillas of Imperial.

He is also survived by his grandchildren, Isabela and Marcela Drew of Lake Forest plus numerous nieces and nephews and many dear friends and extended family, and his loving pets.

MEMBER VIEW

This California Legionnaire was a pilot, race car driver

By **Kevin Burns**
Chair
Aerospace Commission

Eddie Rickenbacker, a beloved veteran of the American Legion, first rose to prominence as a race-car driver having appeared in every Indianapolis 500 race before World War I, and as a driver for the factory teams of Peugeot and Maxwell. Rickenbacker wasn't merely a good driver and pilot. Before his skill at the wheel was recognized, Rickenbacker had studied engineering via a correspondence course. An early internal-combustion enthusiast, he had also worked for the Columbia Buggy Company selling its Firestone-Columbus automobiles.

Rickenbacker made an arrangement with General Motors founder Billy Durant wherein he had the dealership rights to promote the GM Sheridan model car in California. He used San Francisco as a base for his California dealership, because its central location afforded potential access by air to all parts of the state. He got a good deal on the lease of a single-seat Bellanca, and then flew to Bakersfield, Stockton, and other places interviewing dealership applicants.

Among his other American Legion activities, Rickenbacker spent the first eight months of 1921 traveling the Golden State, promoting the Sheridan and opening new dealerships there.

When the new Sheridan model car was released, Rickenbacker had 27 dealerships across California and had sold more than 700 cars.

During this time, Rickenbacker was a member of the American Legion's Military Affairs Committee

under the National Security Commission and made a statement to the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the American Legion at its meeting in Washington, DC on 25 January 1922. The statement, which summed-up the Legion's position, outlined the following direct quote points:

"It is positively necessary to create a separate department of aeronautics, and to have a Secretary of Air" "If there was a department created for aeronautics, aeronautics would advance far more rapidly and to a much greater advantage."

"We need 'A department for commercial aviation, which after all is the foundation and must be the future of aeronautics in this quarter, as well as a Department of Research."

"Without a commercial department for aviation I don't believe that it is going to be possible for the United States, the army and the navy in time of war to develop or build up an industry."

"We must create a demand for the commercial airplane in time of peace, which will build the industry on a solid foundation, which can be converted overnight into a defensive weapon."

"In that way in my opinion, we are not only training pilots, but also ground force."

"The pilots, in my estimation, who are capable of flying across country for any commercial venture are eighty five to ninety percent war perfect."

"A man who can find his way in times of peace and travel on schedule is much more efficient than a man who is trained in time of war, with the haste and hysteria of that goes with it"

"Industry - if they were



Eddie Rickenbacker (Photo: Air Force)

building planes, could put through with a new design without any great difficulty."

"The ships that are used for commercial purposes, after all, with a few alterations are adapted to war use."

"There are certain essential fundamentals needed in both cases: the ability to carry a maximum load, ability to maintain a maximum speed over a maximum number of hours."

"Then for the research: America gave the airplane to the world. Naturally it is inherent with the American to be interested in the development of that invention."

"Carry on with the Research Department. That is so vitally important to aeronautics that the government should have a hand in it - should support it - especially during these years of infancy, when it is badly needed."

"Its relationship to the defense of the United States in peace time can

also be utilized by creating and developing National Guard air units."

"I don't believe that today there are 1% of the pilots trained by the United States who are able to go out and successfully handle a plane. And yet they would all be very happy and willing to keep up their flying if they just had the opportunity."

"Every state in the Union ought to have its own air unit, controlled by the National Guard of that state, or possibly two or three units."

The NEC directed the National Adjutant, Lemuel Bolles, to send the statement out to every Post. This was done with Memorandum Number 47 which was sent out on 11 April 1922.

Right up until war was upon our doorstep in the 1930s the pleas from the American Legion to build our military aviation defense capabilities fell largely on deaf ears in the government. With its membership representing

all branches of service, it was one of the few powerful organizations that fully appreciated the dependence of the nation's security upon the strength distributed among the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and the Merchant Marine. Admirals and Generals were inclined to exalt the virtues of their own branch of service and the weapons they used.

By 1946, all of the points that Eddie Rickenbacker outlined and promoted by the American Legion had come to fruition, including an independent Air Force, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (precursor to NASA), Air National Guard units across the country, and the Air Commerce Act was passed in 1926 and the Bureau of Air Commerce (precursor to the FAA) was established in 1934. All of these things came about with the lobbying and support of the American Legion and its Aeronautics Commission.



Pearl Harbor veteran Ray Chavez poses at Honolulu International Airport, on Dec. 3, 2016. (Photo: Official U.S. Navy Imagery)

San Diego post office to be named after WWII Pearl Harbor veteran, Ray Chavez

By **Christian Southards**
Contributing Writer

Ray Chavez, the oldest surviving veteran of the Attack on Pearl Harbor,

died in 2018 at the age of 106. Thanks to legislation signed by President Donald Trump on Dec. 21, the U.S. Post Office at 13308 Midland Rd. in San Diego, CA will be adopting Mr.

Chavez's namesake. Chavez, a San Diego native, grew up in the neighborhoods of Old Town and Logan Heights. In 1938, Chavez enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served aboard the USS

Condor, the first ship to report Japanese naval activity just hours before fighter planes began attacking U.S. warships and personnel during the infamous Pearl Harbor attack.

After World War II, Chavez eventually started his own landscaping business in Ponway, where the aforementioned post office is being renamed.

Months before Chavez's passing, he traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with President Trump to be honored for his service. When asked about Chavez's death, President Trump said, "his legacy is forever etched into our country's rich history."

The First American Shots of World War II

When the ship that Ray Chavez served on spotted suspicious activity in the waters near Hawaii before Imperial Japan attacked on Dec. 7, 1941, it reported its findings to the USS

Ward. With the assistance of a PBV plane, the Ward eventually spotted what was actually a Japanese submarine and fired the first American shots of World War II.

With the submarine destroyed, the Ward sent a message to shore just before 7 a.m., but the message didn't reach Admiral Kimmel until 7:30.

Only 25 minutes later, Japanese fighter planes began attacking Pearl Harbor.

Both the Ward and USS Condor survived the initial Japanese attacks. The Condor, a relatively small craft acquired by the Navy in 1940 and repurposed for minesweeping, continued to patrol Hawaiian waters throughout the war and was decommissioned in 1946.

However, on Dec. 7, 1944, the third anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, the USS Ward was sunk by Japanese Kamikazes off the coast of the Philippines.

CalVet: 81% vaccination rate at West L.A. facility

By **Christian Southards**
Contributing Writer

Some 81 percent of veterans living at the West Los Angeles CalVet home were given a COVID-19 vaccination last week, according to an internal California Department of Veterans Affairs email circulated Wednesday. The facility administered the vaccine between Jan. 9 and Jan. 11, Hugh E. Crooks Jr, chairman of the California Veterans Board, told caLegion. The email also notes that of the 81 percent, all Residential Care for the Elderly (RCFE) patients had been vaccinated.

The remaining 19 percent of residents were not at home during the vaccinations, but will receive their shots when they return, Crooks said. It should also be highlighted

that the email only specifies the West Los Angeles facility, so what progress other CalVet facilities have made thus far is also unclear.

COVID-19 and the VA

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs previously announced some success with its vaccination campaign, noting most of its health care workers and long-term care patients have been vaccinated thus far with subsequent groups becoming eligible soon, if not already.

In the meantime, the VA has expanded access to its telehealth services to better connect veterans in underserved communities with medical professionals with care that doesn't require in-person meetings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected



A VA doctor administers a COVID-19 vaccine to a patient at a West Los Angeles VA Health Care facility. (Photo: CalVet)

California veterans significantly since it began early last year.

Nonprofits like The American Legion have instituted many programs since then to combat negative trends such as a possibly rising veteran suicide rate with efforts like the ramped up Buddy

Check program. Both state and local government bodies have launched funds and new policies that are friendly to veteran-owned businesses. For example, in November, Orange County adopted a policy that would ensure all veterans and their spouses that apply for a

county job would automatically receive an interview provided they meet the minimum requirements.

California also enacted a policy change that would allow nonprofits and veteran-owned businesses to receive grant funds to help survive through the pandemic.

OPINION

VA secretary has failed Los Angeles veterans

By Robert Rosebrock
Old Veterans Guard

Editor's note: This article is the sole opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect any position the American Legion Department of California takes on any issue contained within. Opinions or responses to opinions can be submitted here or emailed to editor@caLegion.org for consideration. This opinion was written in response to a Jan. 14 VA blog post "VA

Secretary Robert Wilkie discusses recent VA accomplishments."

Fellow Veterans and Friends of Veterans, VA Secretary Robert L. Wilkie was a total failure at overseeing the Los Angeles VA, which is deeded for the sole purpose and benefit of disabled U.S. Military Veterans.

Instead, it is the biggest and most corrupt VA in the nation as Wilkie gave away Veterans' Building

207 -- RENT FREE -- for 75 years to a wealthy, local private developer and then gave a RENT FREE easement on a multitude of VA acreage to LA METRO to build a public station / parking garage for a public subway.

Wilkie never charged rent to any of these robber barons as he gave away some of the most valuable land in the USA while disabled Veterans are denied their disability benefits and

live on the sidewalk outside the VA.

Greater LA is still the capital for homeless Veterans even though the VA promised to end it six years ago as stipulated in the fabricated and phony "settlement agreement."

The ACLU has failed our Veterans by not enforcing the settlement agreement and judgment. Wilkie did nothing to help our disabled, disadvantaged and needy homeless Veterans

-- he only helped the wealthy elite with a takeover of Veterans VA land, which was aided and abetted by top echelon bureaucrats at the Los Angeles VA.

If Trump had the slightest clue what this despicable traitor did he would've fired him in a nano-second. Unfortunately, those whom Trump trusted shielded him from the truth about the land-fraud and rampant corruption at the Los Angeles VA.

An open letter to VA Secretary-designate McDonough

By Carrie Ann Alford
Torii Coaching & Consulting

Many were surprised by the announcement from the Biden-Harris transition team of Mr. McDonough as secretary-designate for Veterans Affairs. This open letter is not a criticism of him, the selection or the VA.

I have served Virginia's veterans for the past eight years, and I am also a non-veteran. I appreciate President-elect Biden's willingness to think outside the box and look forward to learning more about Mr. McDonough's vision for the future of the VA. Based on my experience building cutting-edge, collaborative programs and

services in Virginia, these are six of the top issues that if the VA works into a four-year strategic plan and implements wisely — and with partnerships with DoD, states, veteran service organizations (VSOs) and others — the agency will truly be at the cutting-edge of benefits for our nation's veterans.

Looking ahead to the next four years and where the VA can go during the Biden administration, I would like to offer six ideas for not just improving the status quo, but taking the VA to the next level and creating a full continuum system to support our nation's veterans. In Virginia we have led the way in many aspects of support for transitioning service members (TSM), veterans,

National Guard, and family members.

First, women veterans. It is no secret that many were hoping for a woman to lead DoD or VA. Women have served honorably since the Revolutionary War. Secretary-designate McDonough should reach out early and often to women veterans, and work to ensure each state has created staff positions dedicated to supporting women veterans. Women veterans are less likely to refer to themselves as veterans — unless another woman veteran comes alongside them as a support. Then they are more active and utilize the benefits they have earned at higher percentages than male veterans. In Virginia, we hold regular "round

table" discussions (pre-COVID) and an annual conference to share and gather information and provide a supportive networking space for women veterans. VA medical centers (VAMC) and community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) need to continue to focus on providing the care that women veterans need and in a professional setting that makes them feel comfortable accessing that care.

Second, the VA should partner with functional medicine doctors, "bio-hackers," leading university health researchers and Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs on cutting-edge health, nutrition and scientific advancements and integrate those practices, technologies and

nutritional strategies into VA care. Additionally, veterans who utilize these cutting-edge technologies, nutritional supplements, and alternative therapies such as yoga and mindful meditation, should be rewarded with stipends that encourage positive, healthy behaviors, reducing the strain on the health care system, improving their lives, while not financially penalizing healthy choices. Right now, the system rewards those who need higher disability ratings and are in need of regular medical care. This is bad for the veteran, bad for agency efficiency and morale, and bad for the American taxpayer.

This opinion article was originally published on MilitaryTimes.com.

Get our troops out of Afghanistan

In the December issue of the California Legionnaire, we asked you whether you agreed with the decision to withdraw troops U.S. from Afghanistan in January. Be sure to submit your response to for the April issue.

I say why have they waited so damn long to do it? I mean, we should have learned our lesson in Vietnam. I had to serve two

tours there and we didn't accomplish anything. The communists still took over but there was no domino effect and I don't see that we've benefitted ourselves in any way there. WWII, we made a big mistake letting the French back in.

We need to get out of these little wars that are using up our manpower and our resources and

bring our troops back and let them work on some projects in the United States like we did during the Great Depression.

Our bridges are falling apart, our roads are falling apart.

We need military people to supervise the work of the unemployed.

—Forrest Wilde, Santa Barbara Post 49

YOUR VOICE:

What do you think of the U.S. COVID vaccine rollout?

Give us your opinion and we might use it in a future edition of the California Legionnaire in print and online at caLegion.org.

Be sure to include your full name, post city and post number, your phone number and a photo (A headshot in your Legion cap is preferred).

Email your responses to: editor@calegion.org
Phone in your responses by calling: 310-750-9782
Mail your responses to: California Legionnaire
1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801

VA SPOTLIGHT



A doctor is about to give a shot to a patient (Photo: Getty Images)

VA: 55,000 health workers, patients vaccinated

By Christian Southards
Contributing Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced last month it had issued at least one dose of a

COVID-19 vaccine to over 50,000 health care workers and 5,000 long-term care patients since Dec. 14 at 165 sites, including eight in California.

Recent Department of Veterans Affairs accomplishments

By Robert Wilkie
VA Secretary

Coping with crisis and emergency situations is nothing new to VA. We trace our birth back to the Civil War, when an exhausted President Lincoln called on America to care for everyone who took up arms in that bloody battle. VA evolved in leaps and bounds when World War II called for a nationwide system to care for the men and women who liberated Europe. In 2020, VA faced a very different kind of crisis in the form of COVID-19, and it became VA's responsibility once more to see our Veterans through it.

Many would agree that VA probably wasn't up to this task just a few short years ago, after VA leaders were caught misrepresenting Veterans' access to health care. Morale within VA was low, and polls showed most Veterans didn't think very much of a bureaucracy that was failing them. Six years ago, a CNN poll showed that just 37% of Americans approved of VA's performance.

But over the last few years, VA was reborn. Today our approval rating stands at about 90% for health care, and among our fastest growing population — women — we have an 86% approval rating.

Morale soared. From 2014 to 2016, VA was near the bottom of federal agencies in a survey of best places to work in the government. Now VA is sixth, and we expect to be fifth when new numbers come out in March.

We did it by listening to our employees and the Veterans we serve. I visited every state in the union and nearly every territory to talk to Veterans.

Veterans had been demanding options outside of VA care for years, and we delivered real, permanent choice to them through the MISSION Act. Now, millions of Veterans are getting care right in their communities and are finally at the center of their own health care decisions.

Giving Veterans choice didn't mean the end of VA. Instead, we made VA more accountable and empowered VA staff to once more

live up to the legacy of this department, and they rose to the occasion. Recent studies show VA measures up to the private sector on access and quality. Veterans liked what they saw and started voting with their feet. VA completed a record number of appointments in fiscal year 2019 — 59 million! — the same year the MISSION Act took effect. The more Veterans we served, the more Veterans trusted us. Trust in VA care hit a record high in April 2020.

VA achieved what all the experts in Washington said was impossible by rolling out a modernized health record that will make it easier than ever for health professionals to access Veterans' medical history. No longer will Veterans have to lug boxes of paper records around, as my father did after serving in Vietnam.

We turned VA into a more welcoming place for women Veterans. VA now provides a full range of services for women Veterans and has a military sexual trauma coordinator at each of its medical centers.

We put staff, patients

available to subsequent groups, such as veterans that are not residing in long-term care facilities. Additionally, it is unclear what groups will next receive vaccines.

So far, the VA has only announced that "veterans who are high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 will be next."

January 2021: California Veterans and the COVID-19 Pandemic

In California, eight VA facilities have received vaccine supplies thus far, including the Palo Alto and Greater Los Angeles VA Health Care Systems. CalVet recently announced that its seven remaining long term care facilities will begin vaccinating health care

and visitors on notice that we have a zero-tolerance policy for sexual assault and harassment. Our ongoing campaign aimed at preventing these incidents is just one way of making a difference — another is the growing number of women we have in leadership roles who oversee our employees, 63% of which are women. VA has tackled some of the most chronic problems facing Veterans with renewed energy. VA is working with states to reduce Veterans' use of harmful opioids, which fell 48% over the last four years.

We're working with local governments and companies to end Veteran homelessness. And VA is leading the effort not only to end Veteran suicide, but to begin a nationwide dialogue to prevent this tragedy among all Americans.

By the time COVID-19 hit, VA was a different organization than the one you read about in 2014 — we were ready for this mission. While the virus was a serious threat to many non-VA nursing homes, VA's early actions to protect its most vulnerable patients resulted

in far fewer infections at the homes we manage. We also used telehealth to keep in touch with patients at a time of social distancing. VA's performance during the crisis was so strong that 1,000 VA staff members deployed on more than 3,700 missions to assist non-VA health networks, including those that serve Native Americans.

VA has tested more than 1.3 million people for the virus and treated more than 125,000 Veterans. As of January 4, 2021, VA had administered more than 146,000 initial vaccine doses to Veterans and health care employees just a few weeks after it became available.

Before 2016, VA was falling short of Lincoln's promise. Today, thanks to thousands of dedicated employees across the nation, VA has undergone the most transformational change seen since the end of World War II, and emerged from that process with renewed strength. As a result, VA is now closer than ever to fulfilling the vision Lincoln had for our brave men and women who wear the uniform.

workers and long-term patients "over the course of the next few weeks."

A more specific timetable has yet to be released.

In general, California has struggled with distributing the vaccine.

As of Jan. 4, only 28.1% of available COVID-19 vaccine doses had been administered, a percentage that ranks 41st in the country.

Efforts have been made, however, to counter the economic struggles caused by the virus.

California recently launched a new grant program that will provide relief for small businesses and non-profits in the state, including veterans service organizations.



Jesse L. Brown - First African American Naval Aviator

AFRICAN AMERICAN FIRSTS



ENS Phyllis Mae Dailey - First African American Nurse



ADM Michelle J. Howard - First African American (Woman) to command a ship at sea.



ENS Frances Wills Thorpe and LTJG Harriet Ida Pickens - First African American Officers in the Waves



VADM Samuel L. Gravely, Jr. - First African American Flag Officer



CAPT Winston E. Scott - First African American Naval Astronaut in U.S. Navy History

IN MILITARY HISTORY

Illustrations by Willie Kendrick, DoD



EN2 Fred "Tiz" Morrison - First African American Special Warfare in U.S. Navy History