

# CONNECTION



Connecticut Chapter 120

Greater Hartford  
Over 37 Years of Service to Veterans

November 2020

Visit Our Website at [www.vva120.org](http://www.vva120.org)

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## Meetings

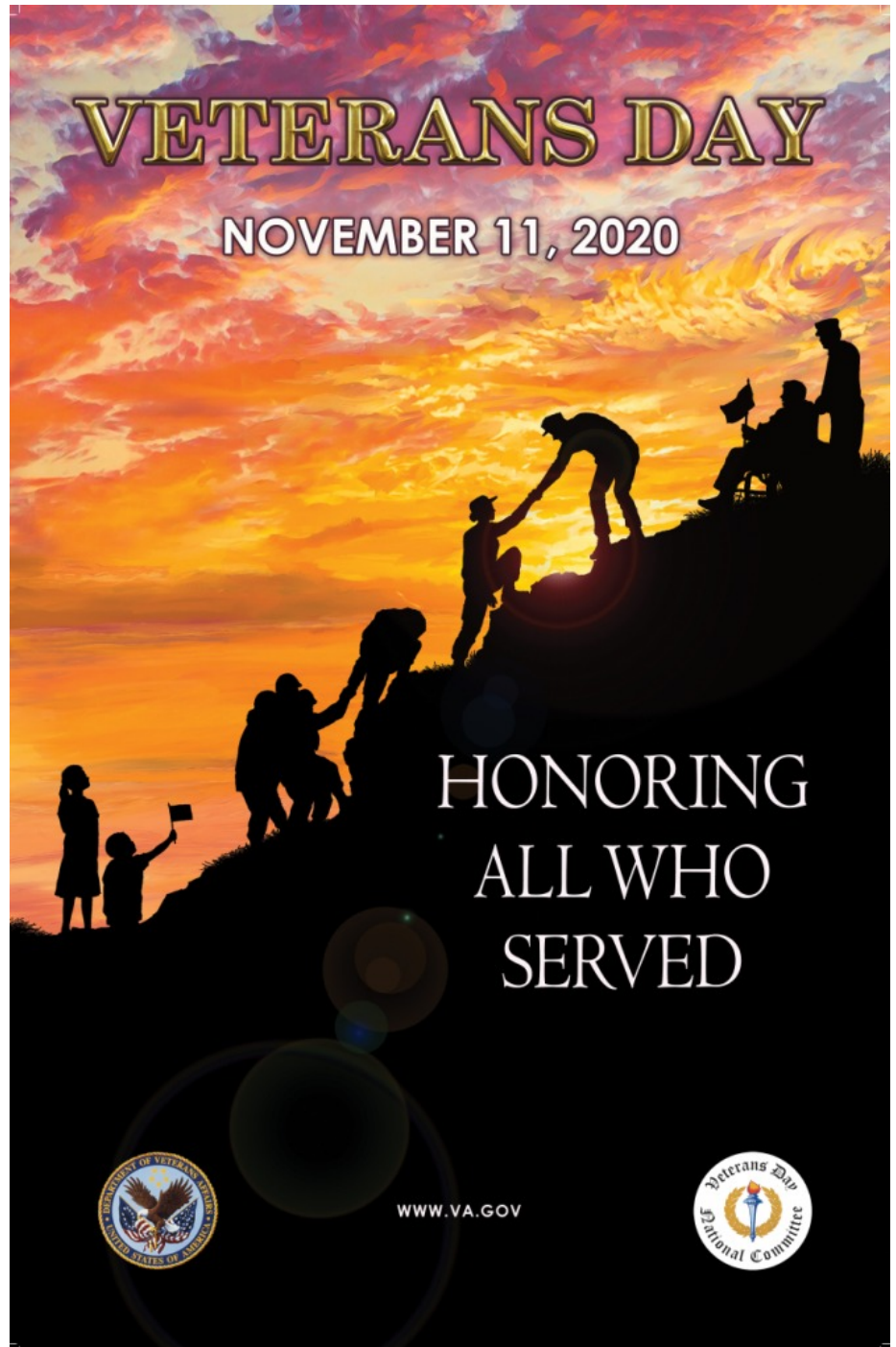
The Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, November 5, 2020 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford.

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, November 19 at 7:00pm. Call the Chapter office for any changes in schedule. Chapter members are welcomed to attend.

## Notice

If you have moved or changed your address, PLEASE notify us immediately. Call the Chapter office at (860) 568-9212, mail us at the address on the back of this newsletter or e-mail the Newsletter editor at [ctchapter120@aol.com](mailto:ctchapter120@aol.com).

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Leigh Lovering	528-8312
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Gary Gazdzicki, Sr.	812-5703
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**Vet Centers**

Hartford (Area Code 860)	563-8800
New Haven (Area Code 203)	932-9899
Norwich (Area Code 860)	887-1755
Danbury (Area Code 203)	790-4000

***All Telephone Numbers are Area Code 860 unless otherwise noted***

***Chapter/State News*****Chapter Elections**

Chapter elections for Officers, Board of Directors, State Council Delegates and the Elections Committee were held on October 1, 2020. Results are as follows:

**Officers:**

President: Bob Burgess  
 Vice President: Phil Morneault  
 Secretary: Pete Lund  
 Treasurer: Phil Morneault

**Board of Directors:**

Roger Anderson  
 Paul Barry  
 Pete Galgano  
 Leigh Lovering  
 Frank Zizzamia

**State Council Delegates:**

Paul Barry  
 Bob Burgess  
 Ken Lewis  
 Phil Morneault  
 Frank Zizzamia

**Elections Committee:**

Ken Lewis  
 Frank Mello  
 Tim Siggia

Congratulations to all!

***From Journal Inquirer*****Andover vet hopes to build memorial to Agent Orange veterans**

When Gerry Wright was a young man serving in the Army in Vietnam, he sprayed Agent Orange from a tanker truck onto the vegetation where the enemy could hide — and onto himself.

"I didn't know what it was," he said, during a recent interview. "No hat, no shirt, no gloves ... I just remember getting a blast back and burning my nose."

Agent Orange was used extensively during the Vietnam War to clear vegetation that could be used as cover.

"At the time it was great," he said.

It wasn't until years later that he learned how exposure to the chemical would affect him and thousands of others — too late, in some cases, to qualify for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"We've been fighting this for 55 years," Wright said during the interview at Andover Veterans Monument Park, where he hopes to erect a monument to those affected by Agent Orange, including veterans who've died and those who've survived with related health conditions, as well as their families and friends.

**Birthday Wishes**

Birthday wishes go to our members born in November. May you have many more!

<i>Rocco N. Arturo</i>	<i>Eugene Bacon</i>
<i>Michael Belliveau</i>	<i>Patricia M. Dumin</i>
<i>William F. Ellis</i>	<i>Joseph Goyette</i>
<i>Robert W. Hoover</i>	<i>Robert L. King</i>
<i>Samuel Mack</i>	<i>Frank J. Mello Jr.</i>
<i>Robert Perritt</i>	<i>Paul Scappaticci</i>
<i>Jerry D. St Amand</i>	<i>William R. Zenga</i>

***Happy Birthday!***

Wright pointed around him at the forest and heavy brush that stand well above his head around the memorial park.

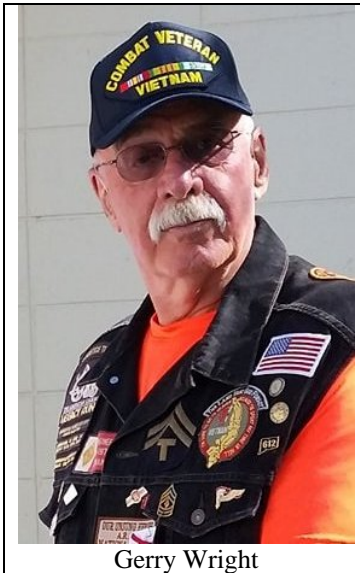
“Within three days, all that right there would be twigs,” if sprayed with Agent Orange, he said.

Wright said he was asked to spray roughly every two months during his 18 months in the country.

The herbicide was also dropped from planes over the jungles, Wright said, sometimes landing in bodies of water, and when it rained, the chemical washed into rivers and basins.

“We were scooping this water up, taking it back to our compounds. Drinking it — showering in it the whole time,” he said.

Wright began having symptoms from his exposure to the chemicals, from severe rashes to blisters the same year. In 1973, he went into cardiac arrest before finding out he had heart disease and other ailments from the chemical exposure.



Gerry Wright

Over the years, Wright has advocated at the state's and nation's capitals for better medical coverage for veterans from the Department of Veterans Affairs. He was a guest of Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., at the 2018 State of the Union address for his work advocating for veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

Agent Orange is linked to several types of diseases, including various cancers; however, VA benefits have limitations on coverage of

some that allow benefits only if the person affected files within one year of exposure to the chemical.

“But they didn't tell us for eight years,” Wright said.

Wright has raised awareness for the cause by riding his motorcycle around the country with the words “Sprayed and Betrayed” and “I was killed in Vietnam. I just haven't died yet,” sprawled across his bike.

To date, he has driven more than 22,000 miles and collected nearly 7,200 signatures on a petition supporting legislation to remove the end dates on treatments.

“We are trying so hard to keep it in the limelight to let people know that we're still out there fighting for this,” he said.

Now, Wright wants to honor veterans exposed to Agent Orange right in Andover.

Standing on the green at the corner of routes 6 and 316, Wright points to an outline of white spray paint in the grass where he envisions an Agent Orange monument being placed that would honor those lives.

“Over 250,000 vehicles a week will see it and be a reminder of what our government did to us and is still doing to our veterans,” Wright said.

Wright is trying to raise \$25,000 for a monument at Veterans Monument Park. So far, he's raised about \$8,000 by taking to social media and distributing flyers to local businesses.

The monument will be made by Nolan's Hamden Monument Co., whose artist etches everything freehanded with diamond pens, according to Wright, who is also working with a sketch artist with the Coventry Police Department to design the back of the monument.

Should all go as planned the monument will be unveiled in late spring/early summer 2021.

“This monument is dedicated to every veteran, every family member, and anybody that was poisoned by our government by a dioxin called Agent Orange ... This reminder of this monument is for future generations not to make the same mistake that our government did in 1961,” Wright said.

Donations can be dropped off at the American Legion Post 95, 18 Main St. Hebron. Checks should be made out to the American Legion Post 95 and can be mailed to the Post, c/o Gerry Wright, PO Box 95, Hebron, CT 06248. Donations are tax deductible.

For information, visit:

[www.facebook.com/Sprayed-Betrayed-AO-406812189768330](https://www.facebook.com/Sprayed-Betrayed-AO-406812189768330)

## Agent Orange Monument

This monument is a painful reminder of the poisonous dioxin sprayed upon US troops who served in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Korea, and Military bases in the United States, as well as bases all over the world from 1961-1972 or so.

Made of special black granite with Agent Orange heart in the center. The back of the polished stone will have a scene depicting all branches of service exposed. The unveiling is scheduled for late spring or early summer 2021. The face of the monument is designed to match an Agent Orange monument standing in Ennis, TX. The back will make ours the only one like it in the country. Two black granite benches for viewing will be placed front and back.

The Finished cost is \$25,000. The Town of Andover, Ct. will be the caretaker after the monument is in place.

# AGENT ORANGE



## We need your help to pass HR 566

HR 566, *Agent Orange Exposure Fairness Act*, expands eligibility for a presumption of service-connection for veterans exposed to certain herbicide agents (e.g., Agent Orange) during military service in Vietnam. Specifically, the bill removes the manifestation period required for the presumption of service-connection for chloracne, porphyria cutanea tarda and certain cases of acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy. Under a presumption of service-connection, specific disabilities diagnosed in certain veterans are presumed to have been caused by the circumstances of their military service. Health care benefits and disability compensation may then be awarded.

Certain limitations were placed on these diseases, establishing unreasonable and punitive onset dates, resulting in loss of earned disability compensation. Therefore we are asking our elected and appointed officials to remedy this wrong and award earned benefits through the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Three illnesses believed to be caused by contact with Agent Orange, *under VA regulations*, must be at least 10% disabling within one year of contact with herbicides.

**Chloracne** – skin condition, skin rash, looks like acne; appears anywhere on the body at anytime, lesions are often found behind the ears, in the armpits, and in the groin region which are itchy and get hot.

**Porphyria Cutanea Tarda** – a rare illness that can make your liver stop working correctly.

**Peripheral Nephropathy** – illness of the nervous system that causes numbness, tingling of hands, feet and legs; weakness of muscles, and loss of coordination and reflexes.

Currently, veterans suffering from these conditions have an incredibly challenging evidentiary burden.

Veterans were not asked if they were exposed or even came into contact with Agent Orange. Many veterans were treated for skin rashes in Vietnam but the evidence of treatment was never put into their medical files. According to the VA, there is a one-year cutoff date for these veterans to have told about any of their symptoms, but many were not known, or did not show until later.

Call your representatives and please ask them to support and co-sign HR-566. We have until December 2020 to get this bill passed in the 116 congress, otherwise we have to start all over again in January 2021. We need your help to get this bill passed now. Note: The Senate sister bill, S 332, was passed in committee on Sep. 15 and is now on the Senate calendar.

Please share this with your post, your chapter, your friends and your family. Share to anyone and everyone that you can, and have them call as well.



## POW/MIA News



From The National League of  
POW/MIA Families  
UPDATE: October 8, 2020

**AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR:**  
The number missing (POW/MIA) and otherwise unaccounted-for (KIA/BNR) from the Vietnam War is now 1,585.

A September 24th DPAA release stated that Air Force Maj. Paul A. Avolesse, 35, was a radar navigator assigned to the 4133rd Bombardment Wing. That day, he was part of the crew of a B-52D Stratofortress bomber conducting a bombing mission from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, to a target in Vietnam. During a maneuver over the South China Sea, Avolesse's bomber collided with another B-52, causing both aircraft to fall into the sea. Four of the crew members from his aircraft were rescued, but Avolesse was never recovered. He was declared dead on July 24, 1967. There was no mention when remains were recovered or by whom, but interment services are pending.

In a July 14th release, DPAA announced that 1st Lt. Alva R. Krogman, USAF, KIA/BNR, was accounted for on July 7th. 1st Lt. Krogman was flying an O-1F Birdog aircraft on a visual reconnaissance mission over Savannakhet Province, Laos, on January 17, 1967, when his aircraft was hit and went down. Search and Rescue (SAR) operations were initiated immediately, but were shut down within a few hours after one of the SAR aircraft was also shot down. In February of this year, a US team of unexploded ordnance removal specialists initially recovered remains while clearing the site in preparation for an April joint recovery mission. This was only the second identification of a previously unaccounted-for Vietnam War Veteran to be announced since July 26, 2019.

## On The Hill



## President Signs Veteran Suicide Measures into Law

President Trump signed legislation on Oct. 20 that contains several measures aimed at preventing suicide among veterans, including a multimillion-dollar grant program for state and local groups. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the committee's ranking Democrat, said the bill had the potential to improve veterans' access to lifesaving mental health services.

"This is a significant day for veterans, and I am grateful to Ranking Member Jon Tester, President Trump and many of my colleagues for working tirelessly this Congress to get this

landmark bill signed into law and improve suicide prevention research, services and programs for our nation's veterans," Moran said in a statement.

Most notably, the new law offers up to \$174 million during the next five years to state and local groups that provide suicide-prevention services to veterans and their families. It will also boost mental health research and staffing at the VA.

Lawmakers believe the program will create better collaboration between the organizations and the VA. They think the partnership will result in earlier identification of veterans who are at risk of suicide, giving mental health providers more time to intervene.

The law honors Commander John Scott Hannon, who was a former Navy Seal. He received treatment while in retirement and helped other veterans seek help. Hannon passed away in 2018 due to suicide at age 46.

"I couldn't be prouder to have worked alongside the Hannon family and Chairman Moran to successfully push for this monumental bill to become law," Tester said. "Together, we are following through on our commitment to supporting our nation's heroes, making sure that no veteran falls through the cracks."

Suicide among veterans is disproportionately higher than the rest of the U.S. population, with an estimated 20 veterans dying by suicide each day, according to VA data.

"Many of our veterans are suffering from daunting, sometimes overwhelming mental health challenges, that have only been made worse by this pandemic," Moran said. They lack "access to modern, effective and compassionate mental health care and suicide prevention services."

He said the law would improve suicide prevention research, services and programs.

It also orders the Government Accountability Office and the VA Office of Inspector General to initiate investigations into a host of issues, including one on the VA mental health workforce and others on VA Vet Centers and the effectiveness of the agency's suicide-prevention outreach.

Trump also signed into law the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 on Oct. 20. It designates 9-8-8 as the universal phone number for mental health emergencies.

Multiple suicide prevention hotlines will be united under the 9-8-8 number within the next two years. Until then, veterans can still reach the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255, and then press 1, or via text at 838255.

Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., a Marine Corps veteran, was one of the lawmakers to lead the legislation through Congress.

"It is a national step forward out of the shadows of stigma that prevent too many people from getting help and into a new era when mental health care is easy to get and normal to talk about,"

Moulton said in a statement. "This is a win for every American who has been affected by mental illness."

## **Veterans Affairs News**



*From Nextgov*

## **VA Takes Important Step in Prep for New Health Records Launch**

The Veterans Affairs Department announced Thursday Oct. 15 the successful migration of clinical and demographic data for 88,000 veterans to its new electronic health records system.

The migration, which took place Oct. 1 at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Washington, was a primer for the new health system's launch in the Pacific Northwest, slated for Oct. 24.

"Giving our VA clinicians quick, secure access to patient data means we are making progress to improve Veteran safety and health outcomes," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement. "Moving and organizing the data ensures Veteran information is readily available for clinicians at Mann-Grandstaff as part of this historic modernization program."



The patient data transfer is the latest step in VA's journey to modernize its electronic health records system, beginning with a \$10 billion contract to Cerner in 2018. VA

initially targeted a go-live date of March 28 for its Pacific Northwest system, but in February, officials warned Congress that training issues mandated a launch delay. Then the COVID-19 pandemic forced VA to focus on health care operations to meet increased demands in patient care. In August, VA reset its go-live date to Oct. 24, and plans a second large-scale rollout of the electronic health records system by spring 2021.

The system aims to provide VA clinicians and administrative staff with simplified access to veterans' health care records, and is billed to be interoperable with the Pentagon's new electronic health records system, which is also in development.

*From Stars & Stripes*

## **VA plans to outsource all compensation and pension exams**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is eliminating its in-house compensation and pension exam program and will outsource all of the exams, which are crucial to determining whether veterans are eligible for VA benefits.

In a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on Tuesday Oct. 20, Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Va., said the plan was developed with no notice to Congress. She's concerned the move could slow work

to reduce a backlog of compensation and pension exams, commonly referred to as C&P exams, and she's worried about the VA's ability to oversee the contractors. Luria also criticized the department for cutting federal jobs during a pandemic.

"For many veterans, thorough and accurate C&P examinations are crucial to securing service-connected benefits," Luria wrote. "VA's quiet decision to carry out a major reorganization of its C&P program without a plan to make key improvements, reduce backlog, or retain employees is unlikely to deliver the high-quality results we expect."

Luria leads the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, part of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. During a hearing she led last year, the VA said it would contract with more outside medical providers to perform C&P exams. Lawmakers were led to believe the contracted examiners merely supplemented the existing program, primarily to help rural veterans and those veterans facing long wait times, Luria said.

Recently, however, VA staff told Luria's office about the department's plan to shutter the C&P program at the VA and contract with the private sector for 100% of the exams.

"VA privately advised my staff of the decision after it was made, without a press release or communication to the affected veterans, advocates, or labor representatives," Luria said. "Such a consequential decision should have been communicated directly to the chair and ranking member of this subcommittee and should not have moved forward during the turbulence of the pandemic."

The VA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The change comes as the VA is working through a backlog of requests for exams. The department suspended the exams in April, as coronavirus cases grew across the United States. During that time, the backlog grew to about 350,000 requests.

The VA resumed in-person exams in some locations May 28. As of mid-October, exams were being scheduled in all areas of the U.S. In all the new instructions about the resumed exams, the VA notes that a "VA contract medical examiner" would be in touch to schedule them.



During a C&P exam, a health care provider examines a veteran to help determine whether his or her disabilities are connected to military service. The information gathered during the exam is used by the VA to make a decision on a veteran's claim and to issue a disability rating. The rating determines how much monthly compensation the veteran is due.

The VA has increasingly relied on

contractors to perform the exams – spending nearly \$6.8 billion on exam contracts in 2016. Recently, contractors were performing about 60% of exams, Luria's letter states.

The Government Accountability Office reported in 2018 that the department doesn't track whether contractors are meeting quality and timeliness standards. The VA has not yet implemented the recommendations the GAO made in that report, Luria said. She's worried that as the VA expands its use of contractors, the department lacks the ability to oversee them.

"More than two years later, [the VA] has not fully implemented these recommendations it agreed were necessary for proper oversight," Luria wrote to Wilkie. The "failure to implement these recommendations raises concerns about its ability to oversee contractors as they increase their workload from 60% of C&P examinations to nearly 100%."

Luria sent a list of questions to Wilkie, including how many C&P examiner jobs the VA would eliminate and whether those employees would be able to remain at the agency in some capacity.

Luria also wants to know whether the VA has considered maintaining in-house exams for veterans suffering from Gulf War Illness, military sexual trauma and traumatic brain injury – all conditions unique to veterans and that often call for specialists. She asked for responses by Nov. 16.

*From MilitaryTimes*

## **Delay in release of annual veterans' suicide report raises concerns**

Lawmakers are raising concerns about Veterans Affairs officials' delayed release of the annual suicide report, saying the information may not be made public until sometime after the November elections.

The report, a key tool for a host of government researchers and veterans' advocates, has been released in late September or early October each of the last two years. Department of Defense officials released their annual report on suicides among active-duty personnel on Oct. 1.

In a statement, VA press secretary Christina Noel said the department is "still finalizing its annual suicide data report and will be releasing it this year. A release date has not been set yet."

But in a letter to the department earlier this month, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano, D-Calif., lamented the delay as worrisome given the importance of finding solutions to the problem of veterans' suicides.

"At a time when VA has been advocating strongly for and against specific pieces of federal legislation related to veteran suicide prevention, it is especially vital that the department share its most recent report now, to ensure that Congress has the opportunity to review VA's current and proposed prevention efforts in the context of actual data," he wrote.





Last year, VA researchers reported that about 17 veterans a day die by suicide, along with three more active-duty, Guard and Reserve connected personnel.

The “20 a day” figure has been widely cited by administration officials, members of Congress and outside veterans groups to illustrate the scope of the problem of veterans’ suicide. That figure has remained largely unchanged in recent years, despite concentrated efforts (and increased funding) on support and outreach programs.

Compiling the annual report is a significant task, requiring department researchers to comb through census data, state death reports and a host of internal documents to account for the full tally of the problem. Prior to 2016, department officials used only estimates for the work, then using the figure of “22 a day” as a rough approximation.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee has requested a formal briefing on any partial findings by Nov. 1 if the full report is not released before then.

When the report is made public, it is likely not to include much data on the impact of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic on veterans' mental health and suicide. The data typically lags about two years behind current timing.

On Oct. 20, President Donald Trump signed into law a pair of bills designed to help prevent veterans’ suicide, including a measure to establish a new three-digit national crisis line similar to 911 for mental health emergencies.

Earlier this summer, the White House completed a 15-month review of federal policies and research on veterans’ suicide prevention measures, unveiling a plan for more federal coordination with community providers on mental health outreach and a new public awareness campaign on the topic.



*From Vietnam Magazine*

## The U-2C “Dragon Lady” Spy Plane



Beginning Aug. 4, 1959, the CIA conducted a series of U-2 missions over North Vietnam that provided the first confirmed evidence of the communist country’s airfield construction and other military activities. In the era preceding satellite imagery, the U-2, nicknamed the “Dragon Lady,” was America’s only reliable way to produce concrete views of developments in non-accessible regions.

The Air Force rejected Lockheed Corp.’s initial design, the CL-282, in 1953, but President Dwight D. Eisenhower decided to purchase the plane for the CIA to collect photographic evidence of Soviet nuclear weapons and bomber production. Lockheed’s pioneering engineer Clarence E. Johnson led the design team, designating the plane a utility aircraft (general-purpose transport plane) to maintain secrecy. The prototype first flew on Aug. 1, 1955.

Everything but the engine was unique. The plane had a specially designed radar altimeter and used fuel with a low-freeze and high flash point. Its “bicycle” landing gear placed the forward wheels just aft of the cockpit’s position and the rear wheels forward of the engine exhaust. Auxiliary wheels called “pogos” descended below the wings while on the ground. Early models had a three-camera system with a 24-inch focal length. Resolution was 24 inches from 60,000 feet.

Essentially a powered glider, the U-2 proved difficult to fly at mission altitudes (above 65,000 feet). Pilots flew their entire mission just 8 knots (9 mph) above stall speed until more powerful P&W J-75 engines were introduced in 1959. To prevent decompression sickness, pilots ate a special pre- and post-mission diet, wore specially tailored pressure suits and breathed 100 percent pure oxygen during missions.

Although no U-2s flew over North Vietnam after 1966, their superior imagery resolution provided critical intelligence and mapping support. Many variants have been built over the years, including two models for aircraft carriers. Originally designed for aerial photography missions, the aircraft, in its latest iteration, the U-2R, can carry a variety of electronic equipment, infrared sensors, side-looking radar and electro-optical sensors, ensuring the Dragon Lady’s continued service into the 2030s.

## Helping Hands for Our Fellow Veterans



### ***Won't You Please Give a Helping Hand to a Brother or Sister Veteran?***

Several veterans have contacted Chapter 120 asking for help in paying the most basic of needs for themselves and their families. These veterans are those who do not qualify for regular federal, state or local assistance – they fall into that financial category where they make too much to qualify for assistance, but not enough to afford basic needs for their families, like food, fuel for heat, or clothing for their children.

Chapter 120 has decided to ask you – our members – to lend a helping hand to your fellow veterans and their families. Won't you please consider donating for this worthy cause? Even a small amount of \$5 can make a difference – or more if you can afford to help a fellow veteran and his or her family.

Please send your generous gift, made out to Connecticut Chapter 120, to:

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.  
Connecticut Chapter 120  
Attention: Helping Hands for Veterans  
P.O. Box 4136  
Hartford, CT 06145

Chapter 120 has established a separate line item in the budget to collect donations to assist these fellow veterans and their families in need. *And don't forget, your donations are tax deductible.*

## Newsletter articles/ stories/photos

Any articles, stories and/or photos submitted for the newsletter must be received by the "cut off" date for any given month. Photos must be accompanied by text which describes the event, names, dates and any other pertinent facts so our readers understand the story behind the photo(s). The newsletter editor will announce the "cut off" dates at each Chapter meeting. The "cut off" date for our December 2020 newsletter is 20 November 2020. Due to space availability, the editor reserves the right to include or not include photos for a given month.

### ***This newsletter printed by***



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