

Potter County Veterans News

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Worthington New Veterans Affairs Director



Potter County has a new Director of Veterans Affairs. Will Worthington completed state training with top honors and special commendation. A Shinglehouse native and 20-year U.S. Army veteran, Worthington was hired by the Potter County Commissioners. He is a recent retiree from the Coudersport Post Office. Worthington said he is anxious to build on the record of expanded services established by his predecessors, and to maintain strong relations with veterans' service organizations around the county. He can be reached at the Gunzburger Building (814-274-8290,

Ext. 210) or wworthington@pottercountypa.net. Office hours are Tuesdays, 8 to 4:30 (by appointment) and Wednesdays, 8 to 4:30 (walk-ins and follow-ups).

Honoring Our Korean War Veterans



Potter County Department of Veterans Affairs has announced plans for a ceremony to honor the county's veterans of the Korean War sometime in 2013. Details will be announced. In the meantime, Veterans Affairs Director Will Worthington is compiling a roster of Korean War veterans from Potter County, as well as survivors of deceased Korean War veterans, to include in notifications about this year's program, tentatively set for July. He can be reached at 814-274-8290, Ext. 210, or at wworthington@pottercountypa.net. The National Association of Counties is encouraging

county directors of veterans affairs, county commissioners and local veterans service organizations to coordinate recognition ceremonies for Korean War veterans in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of the conclusion of the war in July 1953.

Package Of Veterans Bills Signed Into Law



Veterans' advocacy groups are applauding the recent passage of five bills in Harrisburg. Of particular note is **Act 176**. It offers a special designation on Pa. driver's licenses for veterans. The designation will make it more convenient for veterans to receive benefits, both from government and from businesses that offer discounts. Other measures that were passed by the legislature and signed by the governor:

- **Act 185** encourages state agencies to contract with veteran-owned small businesses and provides training to help those businesses learn how to apply.
- **Act 181** brings the State Employees' Retirement System (SERS) into compliance with the Federal Heroes Earning Assistance and Relief Act of 2008 (HEART).
- **Act 194** establishes guidelines and funding for the Pa. Veterans' Trust Fund and creates an "Honor Our Veterans" license plate, whose sales will benefit the fund.
- **Act 189** enacts the Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act to simplify the process of absentee voting for United States military and overseas civilians.

Bridges Named In Memory Of Vietnam Casualties



Two Potter County bridges were recently named in memory of soldiers who were killed in the Vietnam War. The bridge carrying Rt. 607 over Freeman Run in Austin is now the Captain Edgar E. Nuschke Memorial Bridge. A bridge carrying Route 872 over the East Fork of Sinnemahoning Creek in Wharton Township is now the PFC Edward Ritsick Memorial Bridge.

- **Capt. Edgar Erwin Nuschke** (left) was three months from retirement from the Air Force when the aircraft he was piloting was struck by enemy ground fire on Jan. 21, 1967. He was born May 17, 1922, to Edgar Erwin and Mabel (Carlson) Nuschke. A 1940 graduate of Austin High School, he entered the Air Force in 1941. He served in the European Theatre during World War II, flying 100 successful missions and attaining the rank of captain. He completed his education at the Northern Illinois School of Optometry, and then returned to the Air Force, serving in both Korea and Vietnam.
- **PFC Edward Ritsick** (right), son of Andrew and Dorothy (Watson) Ritsick, enlisted in the Army in November 1966, six months after graduating from Austin High School. He was assigned to the 65th Engineering Company. Ritsick was serving with the 25th Infantry Division when he was killed in action on the perimeter of Saigon on March 11, 1968, 19 days after arriving in Vietnam.
- Efforts are also underway to have a bridge in the Galeton area named after **Clark Douglas**, another Vietnam War casualty.

County Working With Vietnam Wall Organization

Potter County officials have signed on to a nationwide campaign to assure that all of the county's Vietnam War casualties are properly memorialized at the "Education Center at the Wall." A collaborative effort between the National Park Service and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, the center is planned for the National Mall site adjacent to the Vietnam Memorial. It will be a two-story underground learning facility designed to inform future generations of the honor and sacrifices made by those who served their



country in war. A prominent feature will be the larger-than-life pictures of service members whose names adorn the polished black panels of The Wall. The pictures will be displayed on service members' birthdays and will add faces to the more than 58,000 names on The Wall and tell the stories of those who served.

Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Education Center at The Wall will be completely funded through private donations. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund has embarked on a campaign to secure the nearly \$85 million needed. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in November and sponsors are hoping to begin construction late this year. More information is available at the website, buildthecenter.org.

County officials across the country are being asked to support the project. Veterans Affairs Director Will Worthington reports that the first assignment is to collect photographs and information about Potter County's Vietnam War casualties. He's compiling a roster that so far includes the names of **Capt. Edgar Nuschke** and **PFC Edward Ritsick** (see preceding story), as well as:

--**Sgt. Bruce Maynard**, 26, of Coudersport served with the U.S. Army for four years and had signed up for another six years when he was killed in action on June 6, 1969. Sgt. Maynard, a 1965 graduate of Coudersport High School, was an infantryman with B Co., 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry, 25th Infantry Division in South Vietnam.

--**Sp/4 Donald L. Stiles**, a Coudersport native, was the community's first fatality in Vietnam. Stiles was killed by a land mine in Binh Duong Province, South Vietnam, on April 2, 1968. He was an atomic demolition munitions specialist, serving with A Battery, 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery, 1st Infantry Division.

--**Staff Sgt. Garreth L. Kibbe**, 24, of Roulette, died June 24, 1967, when lightning struck while he was working on a dynamo in South Vietnam. Kibbe was a metalworking foreman with the 98th Maintenance Co., Army SPT Command, 1st LOG CMD, USARV.

--**Sp/4 Gerald Stonemetz** died in Vietnam on Jan. 8, 1969, having served with the Army overseas for nine months. A Shinglehouse resident, he succumbed to injuries suffered in a vehicle accident at a work site. Sp/4 Stonemetz was a construction equipment repairman, serving with the 15th ENG Co., 299th ENG Battalion, 937th ENG Group, 18th ENG Brigade in Kontum Province, South Vietnam.

--**Pvt. Edwin Franklin Tubbs** of Coudersport had been in South Vietnam only five weeks before his death on Jan. 12, 1969. Tubbs left for overseas on Dec. 4, 1968 and was serving as an infantryman, stationed at Dinh Tuong, when he was hit by gunfire. He served with D Co., 6th Battalion, 31st Infantry Reg., 9th Infantry Division.

--**Spc/4 Clark Douglas** of Galeton was killed in action Nov. 11, 1969, while serving as a medic with the HHC 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam. He had been scheduled to leave Vietnam in May 1970. Douglas was in an aircraft landing zone when the area came under attack by hostile forces.

Items of interest to our veterans



VA Medical Center In Potter County. The Potter County Board of Commissioners worked with the Bath (N.Y.) VA Medical Center to establish a medical clinic in a county building at the Mapleview property off Rt. 872 in Coudersport. The center is staffed by personnel trained to process new enrollments, update patient information, conduct screenings and

deliver primary care and/or referrals, depending on each individual veteran's needs. It is open Thursdays from 8 am to 4:30 pm. Veterans interested in being seen at the Coudersport office should call 814-260-9342. Specialty services beyond primary care are available through the Bath center.



Potter County Official On National Panel. A member of the Potter County Board of Commissioners will advocate for military veterans at the national level. Paul Heimel has been appointed to the Military/Veterans Affairs Committee for the National Association of Counties (NACo). The VA is facing growing pressure to meet the needs of returning veterans, while more vets from previous wars are turning to the VA for help. NACo works with Congress and lobbyists to hold the government accountable for caring for the veterans and their families. Commissioner Heimel is also vice chairman of the County Commissioners of Association Military/Veterans Affairs Committee.



New Vets Employment Officer. A new veterans' employment representative has been hired to work out of Pa. CareerLink offices in Coudersport and Bradford. Byron Sutton will help veterans and their spouses take advantage of employment and training opportunities. Sutton will also assist veterans in transitioning to the civilian workforce, setting career objectives and applying for services. He can be reached at the CareerLink office on Rt. 6 West (Port Allegany Road); phone 274-9330 or email bysutton@pa.gov.



Desert Shield/Desert Storm Bonuses. Veterans who served on active military duty in the Persian Gulf during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm could qualify for the Persian Gulf Conflict Veterans' Bonus. Those on active duty (including mobilized National Guard and Reserve personnel) between Aug. 2, 1990, and Aug. 31, 1991, receive up to \$75 per month for every month of active Gulf War service. Veterans who received a Southwest Asia Service Medal and were residents of Pennsylvania at the time of their service are also eligible. More information is available at 814-274-8290, Ext. 210.



Executive Order Boosts Vets Services. In September 2012, President Obama signed an executive order directing federal agencies to expand suicide prevention strategies and improve access to mental health and substance abuse treatment for veterans, active service members and their families. Citing an “obligation to build an integrated network of support,” the order includes directions for the VA, Health and Human Services Department and other federal

agencies. Collaboration with community-based providers (including community mental health clinics and substance abuse treatment facilities) was encouraged, particularly in areas where the VA has challenges in providing timely access to services for veterans.



Supporting veterans families. Recent studies pinpoint a need for a “reverse basic training” concept. Returning from deployment can be stressful and disappointing. Once the veteran and family members understand the potential challenges and a realistic set of behavior expectations, reunions are generally much less stressful. There’s growing pressure in the VA to expand services for veterans’ caregivers and address the diagnosis of “Secondary PTSD” that strikes family members of an affected service member. More than

1,000 family members per month are turning to the VA for help. In the interim, a private support network is doing what it can to help families (FamilyOfAVet.com).



Help for homeless veterans. The number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who are homeless has more than doubled in the past two years. Department of Veterans Affairs reports about 27,000 are living on the streets, at risk of losing their homes, staying in temporary housing or receiving federal vouchers to pay rent. That’s up from 10,500 in 2010. Numbers could be higher because they include only the homeless the VA is aware of. Effects of war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, and a slow economic recovery have contributed to veterans’ homelessness. The issue is particularly acute as the military continues to draw down its ranks. About 307,000 are likely to leave the military in each of the next four years. A

program instituted in 2011 provides community non-profit groups with cash to help keep troubled veterans in housing or get them off the streets. Expenses can cover housing costs, health care, child care, transportation and training. Funding for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families has grown from \$60 million in 2011 to \$300 million in 2013, or about \$5,000 for every homeless veteran. In Pennsylvania, HUD and VA Homeless Veterans Collaboration Team hold regular conference calls to help manage new regulations and policies, solve problems and gather feedback on particular case scenarios. The agencies also hold joint training conferences geared toward helping homeless veterans.

Recognizing Those Who Served . . .



A refurbished Wall of Military Honor that was recently installed at the Coudersport Arboretum has generated several inquiries from relatives of military veterans about having their family members' names added to the wall. American Legion Post 192 of Coudersport has spearheaded the project. An initial wall that was installed in 2008 began showing signs of wear and instability. Legionnaires stepped up and replaced it. Wall panels bear the names of military personnel dating back to the Civil War. Anyone who served in the military from the Coudersport Area School District, as defined by today's boundaries, is eligible for inclusion. Wartime service is not required. Those who would like to have a veteran's name added should contact Ted Parsell, veterans service officer at Post 192, by calling 274-8536.



Potter County Veterans News is a publication of the Potter County Department of Veterans Affairs. Copies are available for free download from the county's website, pottercountypa.net (click on Veterans Affairs). Local veterans' service organizations are encouraged to submit material for inclusion in the newsletter through email to pheimel@pottercountypa.net.