

**President's Corner**

By Bob Pecoraro
Col U.S. Air Force (Retired)

Thank you for your trust and confidence in electing me as your next President of the WNY MOAA Chapter. First, many thanks to Tim Balunis for his leadership and vision during the past 4 years as he kept us focused on our mission. My vision is to continue what Tim started and to challenge the membership:

1. To become more active/visible in the local Veteran community.
2. To have fun and become better comrades/supporters. I introduced this concept at our February 2018 Board Meeting and solicited Lt Col Jamie Scotland (USAF Ret), a member of the NYS MOAA Council of Chapters, to lead a team to create the conditions to implement this vision. If you would like to be a member of this team, please email me at pecoraror@aol.com and I will put you in contact with Jamie.

Secondly, I want to thank the WNY MOAA Board of Directors for their leadership. They are truly an outstanding group of officers who have your interests at the forefront of our engagement. I am especially thankful for the newest members who committed themselves to serve in leadership positions in the Chapter, including 1st Vice President CAPT Brian Roche (USCG Ret), 2nd Vice President LTC Frank Sparacino (USA Ret), Secretary LTC Terry McGuire (USA Ret), and Directors LTC Steve Bunch (USA Ret) and CDR (Fr) Michael Zuffoletto (USN Ret).

Finally, thank you for being a Chapter member; we are **all** here:

1. To inculcate and stimulate love of our Country and our Flag.
2. To defend the honor, integrity, and supremacy of our National Government and the Constitution of the United States of America.
3. To advocate military forces adequate to the defense of our country;
4. To foster fraternal relations and facilitate camaraderie among all branches of the various services from which our members are drawn.
5. To aid active and retired personnel of the various services from which our members are drawn and their dependents and survivors, in every proper and legitimate manner.
6. To provide useful services for, and to protect the rights and interests of members and their dependents and survivors, and to present their rights and interests when service matters are under consideration.
7. To promote the education of the children of service personnel.
8. To actively support the legislative and other objectives of the Military Officers Association of America.



To accomplish this, we need YOU!

Please give serious consideration to joining Jamie's team as we reach out into the community and continue service to our great nation.

Webmaster / EMAIL Coordinator

By Mike Concannon
CAPT USN (Ret)

MOAA National and MOA WNY: moving the ball forward in the digital age

As most chapter members are aware, we established a Chapter website in February of 2008, and have gradually expanded our email efforts in order to both improve communication and extend our member contact.

Prior to late 2017, our chapter leadership was required to comply with a relatively cumbersome annual reporting process to national headquarters regarding chapter membership. Each year, this has been a painful and time-consuming effort, particularly as it involves reporting postal and email addresses. Obviously, national MOAA desires this information be kept current in order to disburse their national printed and internet information to valid national members, as well as to recruit new members who may not be national members but are members of local chapters.

Keeping our chapter membership information is not easy; people move, pass on, change internet email providers, etc. At the end of each year when we send out chapter dues notices, our membership chair is faced with collecting mailed in renewals for several months because members do not necessarily react to renewal notices in a punctual fashion. In addition, the chair is left to wonder, if a tardy renewal notice is not answered - sometimes at all - is that person now not interested, or moved on?

Fortunately, MOAA national has taken two recent steps to help improve chapter membership management:

1. A person can renew their CHAPTER membership on line at the national web site, rather than mailing it in to our North Tonawanda PO Box. This process has been in use for about two years and some chapter

members are already using it. We urge all members to seriously consider moving to this annual chapter dues renewal method in order to greatly improve membership tracking and communication connectivity.

The specific MOAA national web page to use this feature, which includes excellent instructions, can be reviewed at <http://www.moaa.org/Content/Chapters-and-Councils/Chapters-and-Councils.aspx#Chapter-Dues>

2. MOAA national recently established an excellent membership database to replace their paper and email-based system. This database allows specific chapter officers to query, update and/or extract chapter membership data for email lists and postal mailing efforts. It is a big step forward in reducing the manual labor previously required of the chapter membership chair.

However, updating this information is the responsibility of our chapter membership chair. The chair must be provided with current information through the efforts of YOU, the individual member.

As your email coordinator, I am aware of the fact that not everyone chooses to have or use an email account; however, the majority of members do so. My email listings typically result in an approximate 15% "bounce rate" due to addresses that have been canceled or inaccurate.

I am asking each member who reads this article to send me a test email so that I can hopefully improve our distribution accuracy. If you simply send an email titled "MOA WNY EMAIL connectivity test", and in the email body enter your name, rank and postal address, I will reply with an acknowledgement that it was received. The information will also be cross-referenced with our membership chair database efforts.

My email address, if you do not have it, is mconcannon.tha@gmail.com.

Finally, I want to point out the importance of paying for membership renewal in a timely fashion each year. These funds are the means by which we are able to support charitable/ scholarly donations, subsidize our annual membership / holiday meeting and miscellaneous circumstances that may occur. I urge each member to renew regularly and appreciate that this small sum has a positive effect.

Your attention to these matters is appreciated.

Legislative Liaison Report

By Anthony F. Caruana
Brigadier General U.S. Army (Retired)

Once again, this year, MOAA's major legislative effort is to get Congress to "Repeal Sequestration". Unless current law is changed, sequestration will return next year and automatically trigger deep cuts to the Department of Defense (DoD). These cuts will exhaust military resources and capabilities in immeasurable ways, and the toll on our military and our families will likewise be incalculable!

The **FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)** had bipartisanship approval of a \$700 billion defense policy bill, with a Pentagon budget far exceeding what President Trump had asked. The budget has not passed, but another continuing resolution was passed to fund the government again in the short term. These stop-gap strategies will not allow DoD to manage services' readiness requirements, planning future challenges, and do nothing to serve our nation's military members and their families.

There were five (5) key policy decisions in the NDAA.

1. **A 2.4 percent active Duty Pay Raise:** The President requested 2.1 percent, however, MOAA influenced Congress to fully support the higher pay increase. But even with this pay increase, there remains a 2.6 percent pay gap compared to the private sector because of caps imposed in the 2014, 2015, and 2016. MOAA will continue to push for equality.
2. **Unchanged Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) Calculation:** The Senate tried to mess with this, especially with dual-military families, but MOAA persuaded Congress to leave it alone.
3. **Tricare:** Tricare pharmacy fee increases went into effect in January despite MOAA efforts to prevent them. They are projected to continue to increase in to 2026.
4. **More Troops Authorized:** 20,000 total troops: Army to increase by 7,500; navy by 4,000; Marine Corps by 1,000; Air Force by 4,100, and Reserve forces by about 3,400. MOAA fully supported these increases.
5. **Lessens the "Widows Tax":** MOAA has pushed to have this permanently extended. By extending the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) and indexing future increases to COLA, Congress shows it is making the effort to address the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset otherwise known as the "Widow's Tax".

MOAA's 2018 Advocacy Mission for legislative efforts in Congress is to protect health care and retirement benefits, military pay, force levels, and wounded warriors and caregivers.

MOAA's TOP 10 LEGISLATIVE GOALS to protect OUR Pay and Benefits:

1. Ensure any TRICARE reform sustains access to top quality care and avoids disproportional TRICARE fee increases.

2. Sustain military pay compatibility with the private sector.
3. Block erosion of compensation and non-pay and quality of life benefits, (BAH, Special Incentive Pays, commissary, exchange, morale, welfare and recreation benefits which are harming recruitment and retention).
4. Protect military retirement and Cost of Living Allowances (COLA).
5. Sustain Wounded Warrior programs and expand caregiver support.
6. End financial penalties to disabled service members.
7. End financial penalties to survivors (the "Widow's Tax") dollar- for- dollar offset to DoD's SBP from the VA's DIC.
8. Ensure the Guard and Reserve system supports requirements for an operational reserve.
9. Recruiting and retention of an all-volunteer force require alignment of spouse and family support programs.
10. Ensure timely access to VA health care and preserve veterans' earned benefits.

Membership Report

By Jerome Privitera
Maj U.S. Army (Retired)

Our total membership is currently at 177. Below is a breakdown of the members who have or have not paid their dues for 2018.

Active members who paid their 2018 dues	115
Exempt members	3
Members who did not pay their 2018 dues	59
Total	177

The total number on the MOAA National Roster shows 181.

The three Exempt members are:
CWO3 Harold F. Contact, Army
LCDR Thomas B. Mangus, Navy
1LT James S. Pietraszek, Army

We have 70 Auxiliary Members in our Chapter.

Personal Affairs

By Richard A. Scalfani
CWO4 U.S. Army (Retired)

TAPS:

COL EARL E. KRAMER, USA (Ret.)

Died on September 30, 2017.
He was a WWII veteran who served for 39 years in the Army and Army Reserve. He was 92 years old. He took part in the Normandy Invasion as a heavy machine-gunner with the 2nd Armored Division and served on a light tank in the Battle of the Bulge. He went on to serve in several campaigns across France, Belgium, Holland and Germany where he was wounded. In 1945 he was discharged with the rank of First Sergeant. In 1949 he was appointed as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Armor Branch. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Buffalo. He also graduated from the Army Command and General Staff at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After serving on active duty he worked for Bell Aerospace for 37 years in various management positions.

LTC Robert A. Brown, USA (Ret.)

Former Chapter member passed on Mar. 13, 2013. He was a graduate of Army Command and General Staff at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He served as an instructor in the 1151st USAR School at DeGlopper USAR Center in Tonawanda, NY. He was employed for over 20 years at the Niagara County Waste Water Treatment Plant from which he retired in 1998. He also was a substitute teacher for the Niagara Wheatfield School District.

WELL WISHES:

On behalf of the chapter members we wish all those members that are experiencing health or other life issues a speedy recovery or resolution of those issues.

ITEMS of INTEREST--Veterans Hotline:

Hotline agents answer inquiries, provide directory assistance, document concerns about VA care, benefits and services, and expedite the referral and resolution of those concerns. Agents undergo regular updates and training on VA services based on hotline trends and are assisted by newly implemented tracking software to help VA capture and improve its response, referral and resolution processes to best support Veterans.

The hotline can be accessed at 855-948-2311 and is VA's first non-clinical, non-emergency around-the-clock call center. It provides Veterans a supplemental option to report issues if they are not being addressed through VA's normal customer service channels.

The hotline's agents are located at a VA facility in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Agents have access to a multitude of resources and contact information to help Veterans. The hotline also generates real-time reports to VA experts who can help address the specific issues of Veterans as well as make better-informed decisions on where program improvements are needed.

TRICARE CHANGES

Prescription Costs (increase in copayments effective Feb. 1, 2018). Your prescription costs depend on who you are, where you fill your prescription and the type of drug.

Active Duty Service Members

You can get prescriptions filled from any pharmacy at no cost.

- You may be required to pay up front for prescriptions from network and non-network pharmacies.

- You'll get a full reimbursement when you file a claim with Express Scripts.
- Your provider must establish medical necessity for you to get non-formulary drugs at no cost.

All Other Beneficiaries

Network Pharmacy Options

Point of Service	Generic Copays	Brand Name Copays	Non-Formulary Copays
Retail Network <i>(30-day supply)</i>	\$11	\$28	\$53*
Home Delivery <i>(90-day supply)</i>	\$7	\$24	\$53
Military Pharmacy <i>(90-day supply)</i>	<i>Still \$0 copay for all formulary drugs at military pharmacies</i>		<i>Generally not available without medical necessity</i>

If you want a 90-day supply from your network pharmacy, you'll pay the cost for each 30-day supply. For example, a 90-day supply of a generic drug will cost \$33. Copayments remain the same as 2017 rates for dependent survivors of Active Duty Service Members and medically retired service members and their dependents.

**Some non-formulary drugs are only covered through Home Delivery. Check with Express Scripts before filling prescriptions for non-formulary drugs at a retail network pharmacy.*

Non-Network Pharmacy

You'll pay more to get your prescription filled at non-network and overseas retail pharmacies.

- The costs are based on where you are, who you are and, in some cases, what plan you're using
- You may need to pay up front and file a claim for reimbursement.

Non-Network Pharmacies in the United States and U.S. Territories	
Who You Are	What You Pay
Active Duty Service Members ¹	You will get a full reimbursement.
All Other Beneficiaries	<p>If enrolled in a Prime plan, you pay 50% cost-share after <u>point-of-service</u></p> <p>For all other plans, you pay:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulary drugs: \$28 or 20% of total cost, whichever is more, after you meet your <u>annual deductible</u> • Non-formulary drugs: \$53 or 20% of total cost, whichever is more, after you meet your <u>annual deductible</u>

¹Includes activated Guard/Reserve Members

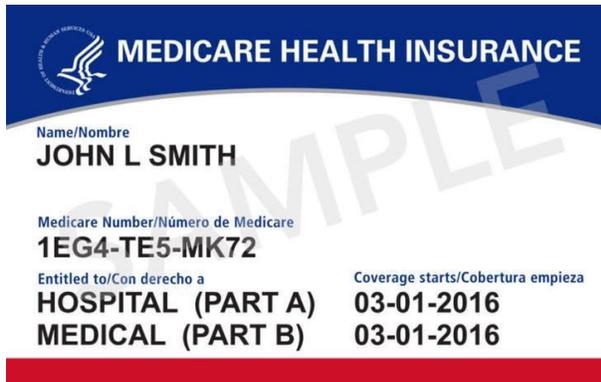
Non-Network (Overseas Retail²) Pharmacies in all other Overseas Areas	
Who You Are	What You Pay
All Beneficiaries Enrolled in a TRICARE Prime Overseas Plan	You will get a full reimbursement when you file your claim
Active Duty Family Members using TRICARE Select Overseas & Beneficiaries Using TRICARE Reserve Select	20% cost share after you meet your annual deductible
All Other Beneficiaries	25% cost share after you meet your <u>annual deductible</u>

TRICARE beneficiaries taking certain maintenance drugs (i.e. any drug you take regularly for a chronic condition) for diabetes or high cholesterol are now paying lower or no copayments as part of a pilot program. The Medication Adherence Pilot Program, launched on 1 FEB, will examine whether people are more likely to follow a medication treatment plan when those drugs are available at no-or-reduced cost. The program affects prescriptions purchased at in-network retail pharmacies and through the TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery.

The Defense Health Agency (DHA) chose two high-value medications for the pilot program: Lantus[®] Pens, an insulin shot to manage diabetes, and rosuvastatin, the generic version of Crestor[®], to manage high cholesterol. Lantus Pens will be offered at reduced cost. Rosuvastatin will be offered at no cost at a retail network pharmacy and through home delivery.

Medicare ID Cards ► What You Must Know About the New Card

Every Medicare beneficiary will receive a new identification number and card soon. The measure is part of an effort to help protect beneficiaries from identity fraud, according to Medicare, a federal health insurance program primarily for folks ages 65 and older. Currently, Medicare identification numbers are based on Social Security Numbers. The new cards will look like:



What seniors need to know about their new Medicare cards:

These IDs:

- Are free. So, there is no cost to beneficiaries.
- Will be mailed out beginning in April 2018.
- Will be mailed automatically. So, beneficiaries don't need to do anything to ensure they are issued a new card.
- Will be mailed to the beneficiary addresses on file with the Social Security Administration. So, beneficiaries who need to update that address should log into their SSA.gov accounts.
- Have no bearing on beneficiaries' coverage or benefits. So, coverage and benefits will not change in connection with the new IDs.

Once you receive your new card, the Medicare program advises that you take three important steps:

1. Destroy your old Medicare card right away.
2. Use your new card. Doctors, other health care providers and plans approved by Medicare know that Medicare is replacing the old cards. They are ready to accept your new card when you need care.
3. Beware of people contacting you about your new Medicare card and asking you for your Medicare number, personal information or to pay a fee for your new card. Treat your Medicare number like you treat your Social Security or credit card numbers. Remember, Medicare will never contact you uninvited to ask for your personal information.

Tip No. 3 touches on an important point: You still must safeguard your new Medicare number and card. That's because receiving a new ID number or card is not enough in itself to prevent fraud. Medicare numbers will no longer give away Social Security numbers, which may help prevent fraud. But Medicare numbers will still be unique identifiers, which means they're still useful to thieves.

Non-deployable Troops ► Separation Policy Under Review

Service members who have been non-deployable for the past 12 consecutive months or more will be separated from the military, based on new Defense Department policies that are under final review. The "policy will require the services to process members for admin or disability separation," according to a draft summary of the policy obtained by Military Times. "This memo will be followed by a [Department of Defense Instruction], which will take several months to complete." The new retention policy is being reviewed by the service chiefs and Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan.

Approximately 11 percent, or 235,000, of the 2.1 million personnel serving on active duty, in the reserves or National Guard are currently non-

deployable, according to Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell, the senior enlisted adviser to Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joe Dunford. As continued operations overseas have stressed the military, the Pentagon has begun to target that 11 percent to either get deployable, or get out. Of that total non-deployable force, about 99,000 are on that list for administrative reasons, such as not having all their immunizations or their required dental exams. About 20,000 are not deployable due to pregnancy, and 116,000 are not deployable due to either short- or long-term injuries.

Service members can be categorized as non-deployable for many reasons. For example, service members in the middle of a permanent change of station, who are not up to date on immunizations, who are nearing retirement, who have a medical condition that will take 30 days or more to heal, or who face legal problems can all be classified as non-deployable. In addition, service members who fail fitness or body fat tests must get a waiver to be considered deployable — a challenge that the department is targeting separately in a review of its fitness programs and standards. For certain non-deployable personnel, such as wounded warriors, the services would retain the ability to grant exceptions to the retention policy.

GI Bill Update --'Forever' Bill

This legislation will enable veterans to use the education benefits they've earned through the G.I. Bill when and how it suits them best, setting them up for future success in whatever career they pursue. The Forever G.I. Bill will erase the expiration date on the benefits themselves for current and former service members and their dependents. The main features of the Bill:

~ Eligibility Fix. Time spent in recovery due to battlefield injuries will count towards G.I. Bill eligibility effective August 1, 2018

~Purple Hearts Get More. Approximately 1,500 Purple Heart recipients will become eligible for the G.I. Bill effective August 1, 2018.

~ More Children Get the Yellow Ribbon Program. Children who lost a parent in the line of duty will

have access to the Yellow Ribbon Program effective August 1, 2018.

~ More National Guard & Reservists Get Their G.I. Bill. Authorizes additional G.I. Bill funding for members of the National Guard and Reserve. It increases money and eligibility for individuals who served at least 90 days but less than six months on active duty, from 40% to 50% benefit payable. It also does the same for individuals who serve at least six months but not 12 months, from 50% to 60% benefit payable effective August 1, 2020

~ National Guard & Reservists Get Their Benefits Back. Education benefits that were pulled unexpectedly from Reservists and National Guard members in 2015 — when Congress repealed the Reserve Educational Assistant Program (REAP) — will have them reimplemented effective immediately.

~ Housing Stipends Improve. A student taking online classes will be compensated more accurately for their cost of living. It happens by changing the way living stipend amounts are calculated — from the living stipend payment being based on where the school is located to having it calculated based on where the student takes classes. Effective August 1, 2018.

~ Vets Won't Be Charged a Whole Month for Testing. Under the old rules, a veteran would be charged a whole month's entitlement to pay for any national test (GMAT, GRE, SAT, etc.) or one for state licensing. It'll now change, to pro-rate just the cost of the test itself effective August 1, 2018.

~ Restoring Benefits Wasted on Schools That Closed. It gives back benefits lost at schools that closed out of nowhere and it continues education assistance programs for vets who were disapproved or who "would not have the term during which their studies were interrupted count toward the aggregate of their G.I. Bill entitlement." It also allows vets to continue collecting payments for education assistance "through the end of the term, quarter, or semester in which the school closes, or for 120 days from the date of the school closure, whichever is less." Effective November 14, 2017 (applies to closures after January 1, 2015).

~New Transferability Option. A vet can now transfer months' worth of a G.I. Bill to another dependent if the original dependent owner dies without getting through all of the benefits. A dependent can also transfer benefits to another dependent after the death of the service member or veteran. Effective August 1, 2018.

~STEM Scholarship. The VA can now offer a scholarship (additional G.I. Bill funds) to allow a student veteran to finish a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) degree effective August 1, 2018.

~End of 15-Year Time Limit. The 15-year time limitation to use the G.I. Bill will no longer exist for new service members effective immediately for service members and dependents discharged on or after January 1, 2013. Effective immediately for service members and dependents discharged on or after January 1, 2013.

~Pro-Rate Housing Allowance for Activations. The VA can now pro-rate housing stipends for Reservists who get called up for active duty during the middle of a month effective August 1, 2018 (for members of the Reserve component of the Armed Forces pursuing an educational program using current G.I. Bill benefits).

~VA Must Now Submit Performance Reports. The Secretary of the VA must now submit reports from institutions on students' performance to Congress (no later than March 1 of every year) effective immediately.

~\$30 Million to Improving Claims Process. About \$30 million will go to improve G.I. Bill claims processing, an IT system effective fiscal year 2018 and 2019.

~Tech Pilot Program. The VA will create a five-year pilot program that gives vets the chance to enroll in tech courses, like coding boot camp, garner IT certifications, and more. It'll provide tuition and other payments on a scale while also giving the participating schools an incentive to graduate the veteran students as well as help them find a career within their field of study effective no later than 180 days after August 1, 2018

~Work-Study Program Extended. Repeals the sunset date of the VA work-study benefits for

outreach to student veterans effective immediately.

~DEA Benefits Consolidated. The number of months of entitlement changes for those eligible for the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA) from 45 months to 36 months (similar to other programs) effective August 1, 2018.

~DEA Payments Increased. Monthly payments for assistance under the DEA will be increased by \$200 per month effective October 1, 2018 (applies to all survivors eligible for DEA benefits).

~Independent Study Programs. Someone eligible to receive G.I. Bill benefits can now use them toward accredited independent study programs (including open circuit television) at qualifying schools and institutions effective immediately (for those currently using G.I. Bill benefits).

~G.I. Bill Comparison Tool Addition. This useful tool provided by the VA will now have to include whether or not a school a priority enrollment system in place especially for veterans effective immediately.

~VA Advisory Committee on Education (VACOE). Extends the authority of the VACOE from December 2017 to December 2022 effective immediately.

~Codification of Vet Success on Campus (VSOC). Right now, there are almost 100 schools with a VSOC program, a system that provides a counselor at each participating institution to assist vets with their transition from military to college. Effective immediately.

~12304(b) Reservist Equity. Individuals who serve under the 12304, 12304(a) and 12304(b) orders will now be eligible for Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. Effective August 1, 2018 (applies to National Guard members and Reservists who have received 12304(b) orders after June 30, 2008).

~12304(b) Reservist Order Equity for Vocational Rehab. Vets receiving Vocational Rehab (VR&E) benefits will now be able to "pause" their benefit time after being called up for 12304(a) and 12304(b) active duty orders. Effective immediately (for National Guard members and Reservists with service-connected disabilities).

~Housing Allowance Fix. Some time ago, the annual percentage increase to active duty BAH (Basic Allowance for Housing) was reduced to 1% a year for five years, but G.I. Bill payments were exempt. They will now be aligned so that a G.I. Bill recipient will get the same allowance as an E-5 active-duty service member with dependents. Effective January 1, 2018 (for those using G.I. Bill benefits after this date).

~World War II Mustard Gas Exposure Restitution. The Department of Defense will be tasked with investigating the sites of mustard gas exposures during World War II, then submitting their findings to the VA and Congress effective February 12, 2018.

New Federal Veterans ID Card:

Update – January, 2018: VA Again Accepting ID Card Applications. The VA began accepting applications for the Veterans Identification Cards at the end of November 2017. Shortly afterward, the VA announced they were unable to process ID card requests due to the overwhelming response. Veterans were instructed to submit their email address on a waiting list to be notified when the VA would be able to resume processing applications.

Veterans ID Card for Identification Use & Proof of Service Only. The new ID cards will only be valid for proving military service. The new cards cannot be used for [benefits through the VA](#), to access military installations, or to receive other military or veterans benefits. These ID Cards will include a photo of the veteran, their name, and a non-Social Security identification number.

You can apply for the ID card **at the VA website**.

Waiting list: Due to the high volume of requests, many veterans were instructed to place their name on a waiting list. As of January 2018, the VA is again issuing ID cards. However, there may still be a waiting list as the VA works through the backlog of applications. Keep in mind it can also take up to 60 days to receive your ID card once

you submit your application. Please note there is a very high volume for applications and there may be delays before cards are issued.

When will I receive the Veterans ID Card?

Veterans who apply for a card should receive it within 60 days and can check delivery status of their cards at vets.gov. A digital version of the VIC is available online.

What You Need to Apply for the Veterans ID Card:

- A copy of a state or federal issued ID (driver's license, state issued identification card, or Passport).
- A photo of yourself
- File size limit for each image is 3MB.
-

The photo of yourself must meet the following specifications (similar to a passport photo, so if you have one of those, you can use that).

- Be of the same person.
- Color photo, 2 x 2 inches in size. Sized such that the top of the head and the neck or sides of the face are not cropped (this is the typical size of a passport photo).
- Be taken within the last 6 months. It must be full front view of face with a neutral expression and both eyes open.
- Provide visibility of the face, head and shoulders without cropping any portion of the head or shoulders.
- Not contain sunglasses, hats or head coverings (unless the individual submits a letter that it is traditional religious attire).
- Have full visibility of the face with no shadows or obscured hairline.
- Not have visible headphones or wireless hands-free devices.
- Be taken on plain white paper or an off-white background.

You should be able to get an image fairly easily if you have a decent cell phone. Have someone take your photo (or take a selfie) and crop the image to

size. Otherwise you can go to WalMart, or some other location to get a passport photo taken.

Create or Log-in to your Vets.gov account. Once you have your required documentation on hand, you will need to log into your [vets.gov](https://www.vets.gov) account, or create one. I had to create an account, which took about 3 minutes. Creating an account requires verifying your veteran status, which is done through [ID.me](https://www.id.me), which has a contract with the VA to match your details to the various military databases.

Here are the instructions provided by the VA:

1. Visit <https://www.vets.gov/> and click the **“Sign in”** link in the upper right corner.
2. Sign in with an existing account by selecting **“Sign in with DS Logon”** or **“Sign in with [ID.me](https://www.id.me)”**. If you don’t have an existing account, select **“Create an [ID.me](https://www.id.me) account”**.
3. In the top right corner of the screen, select **“Account”** under your name and then select **“Apply for a Veteran ID Card”**.
4. If you do not see the **“Apply for a Veteran ID Card”** link in your profile, you can go directly to <https://www.vets.gov/veteran-id-card> to view detailed information.

Verify Your Identity:

You may need to verify your identity on the [vets.gov](https://www.vets.gov) website if you do not already have a premium account, or if you signed in with your DS Logon credentials. There should be a link to click, which will verify your identity with [ID.me](https://www.id.me).

This usually only takes a click on the page, then the website verifies your veteran status with the database. You may need to contact VA if you run into issues.

Request Your VIC

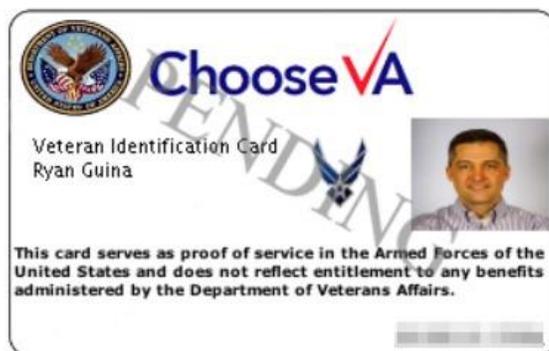
After you have done these steps, you should be taken to the VIC application page. This is where you will enter your information and upload your copy of your ID card and photo of yourself. Some of the information, such as your name and

address, may already be populated on the application form. Verify this is correct, then move to the next section.

Upload images of your ID card and Photo:

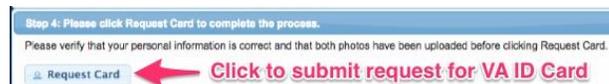
Make sure you have your copies as described above. The following screenshot shows where the images are uploaded. Click the **“Upload ID”** button (#1 on image below), and navigate to the file on your computer. Make sure you click **“Upload (#2 on image below) to upload the image to the VA website. Repeat the process for your photo of yourself (step 3 & 4), then click **“Preview Card.”****

You should then see a preview of what your Veteran ID Card (VIC) will look like. Here is the preview of my card:



Sample VA ID Card

One last step: Once you preview your VA ID Card, you need to submit your application to request your VIC. Simply click the Request Card button, and your application will be submitted. You should receive a message stating your VIC application is now pending review. Here is the final button to click:



Initial estimates put the wait time around 60 days to receive your VIC. I’ll let you know if that is an accurate estimate once I receive mine.

Keep reading if you haven't been able to access the application or if you need a more immediate proof of military service.

Other Ways Veterans Can Prove Their Service

There are several methods for proving your military service if you have not been able to obtain the new Veterans ID Card. Here are the most common methods and availability:

- **Military ID Card:** Current service members and retirees can use their issued military ID card. [Schedule an appointment through RAPIDS for a new military ID card.](#)
- **Veterans' Health Identification Card:** Available through the VA for eligible veterans.
- **State Issued Driver's License or ID Card:** Available through most states.
- **VA Proof of Service Letter:** Available through the VA's eBenefits Logon Service.
- **Veterans Organization Membership Card:** Many [Veteran's Service Organizations](#) give members ID cards that certify their military service.
- **More methods to prove military service.**

VA Proof of Service Letter Instructions

Here is an example of a VA Proof of Service Letter. Follow the guide below to generate and print your own Proof of Service Letter.



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

April 29, 2016
Ryan Guina

Dear Mr. Guina:

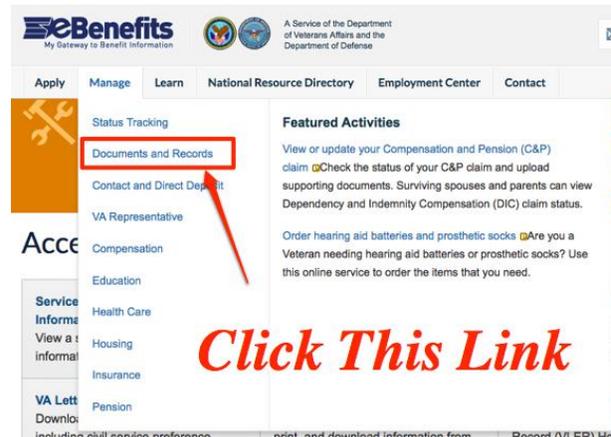
Please use the cut-out card below as verification of your honorable service in the Uniformed Services of the United States.

<p><front of card></p> <p>This card is to serve as proof the individual listed below served honorably in the Uniformed Services of the United States.</p> <p>Ryan Guina</p> <p>Effective as of: April 29, 2016</p>	<p><back of card></p> <p>United States of America Department of Veterans Affairs</p> <p>General Benefit Information 1-800-827-1000 Health Care Information 1-877-222-VETS (8387)</p>
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You can print a VA Proof of Service Letter from the VA eBenefits website by first logging into your account [on the eBenefits site](#), then using the following instructions

1. At the top of the page under the eBenefits logo, hover your mouse over the "Manage" tab. In the dropdown that appears below it, click on "Documents and Records."
2. In the left column on the following page, click on "VA Letters."
3. At the bottom of the following page, click on "Veteran Proof of Service."
4. Print.

Step One: Documents & Records



Step Two: Access Your VA Letters

Access Your Documents and Records

<p>Service Member Personnel Information</p> <p>View a summary of your personnel information in DEERS.</p>	<p>Service Member Civilian Employment Information</p> <p>View and update your civilian employment and student information.</p>
<p>VA Letters</p> <p>Download and modify VA letters, including civil service preference, commissary and exchange privileges, and service/benefit verification.</p>	<p>VA Medical Records</p> <p>Use the VA Blue Button tool to view, print, and download information from your My HealthVet account.</p>
<p>myPay</p> <p>Change or review pay information, leave and earning statements, W-2s and more.</p>	

Step Three: Download Proof of Service Letter

Download VA Letters

Verify that your address is correct, then select a letter template from the list that follows your address.

<p>Step 1: Confirm Your Address on File</p> <p>Below is your address on file with Compensation and Pension. If this is incorrect, please update your contact information before proceeding to Step 2 (on right) to generate your letter.</p>	<p>Step 2: Select a letter from the following list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit Summary - Veteran Benefits Create a Benefit Summary Letter to show you are receiving certain benefits from VA. • Benefit Verification Send this letter to confirm details about the VA benefit that you are currently receiving. • Disabled Veteran Civil Service Preference Send this letter to establish your Veteran's preference for civil service employment. <small>Related: Application for 10-Point Veteran Preference Send this form if you are applying for Federal jobs and want to apply an additional 10-point examination credit based on your military service or that of a spouse or child.</small> • Proof of Creditable Prescription Drug Coverage Create this letter to show you are eligible for Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. • Proof of Minimum Essential Coverage Create this letter to show you meet the individual responsibility requirement under the Affordable Care Act. • Service Verification Send this letter to confirm your Branch of Service, Date Entered on Active Duty, and Date Discharged from Active Duty. • Veteran Proof of Service Create a Proof of Service card to confirm you've honorably served in the Armed Forces.
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Step Four: Clicking the Veteran Proof of Service Letter link will open a new tab or automatically download a PDF (depending on your browser settings). You can print this letter, then cut out the card. An image of my letter is copied above with my personal information redacted.

NYS COC Convention

By Timothy Balunis
CDR U.S. Coast Guard (Retired)

The 2018 NYS Council of Chapters Convention will be conducted at the Niagara Falls Reserve Air Force Base from 10 thru 13 September. Following the new format, this event will be hosted by the NYS Council and conducted by a state-wide team consisting of members from Chapters across the State. Although planning is still in a formative stage, the intent will be to focus on off-site activities on the 11th in the City of Buffalo. This will include access to and luncheon at the Erie County and Buffalo Naval and Military Park with a memorial service at the same venue. The next part of the day will include an interesting, entertaining guided excursion around Buffalo aboard an

authentic double-decker tour bus from London, England. Dinner is being arranged at a well-known downtown eatery. The morning of 12th will include the business portion of the Convention at the Heritage Center on the AF Base. The afternoon will feature access to the Niagara Aerospace Museum and optional free time to explore the Niagara Falls State Park, the NYS Power Authority Power Vista, Seneca Casino and/or the NF Outlet Mall. The evening of the 12th we'll have the Installation Banquet at the Heritage Center on Base. As planning and some details are incomplete, a cost estimate is not available. However, we do fully intend to ensure that this will be the most affordable and memorable State Convention in recent times. Our Convention Team does need volunteers to share in planning, preparations and activities. LtCol Norma Weissend USAF Ret (Genesee Valley Chapter) is the Chair for the 2018 Convention. Interested helpers are cordially invited to contact me (at Balunis@roadrunner.com). Stay tuned.

WNY Armed Forces Week

By JoAnne Lichwala
Newsletter Editor

The luncheon is Thursday, May 10th, at Salvatore's Italian Gardens, 6461 Transit Road, Depew. Cocktail hour (cash bar) begins at 11:00 a.m. and a sit-down luncheon at 12:00 p.m. A donation of \$30 per person includes gratuity.

Saturday, May 12th, is the Ball at Salvatore's. A cash bar begins at 6:00 p.m. and the dinner begins at 7:00 p.m. Donation is \$50.00 per person.

The deadline for ticket sales is **April 17th**. Please contact afwtickets@wnyafn.com for ticket questions.

Sunday, May 20th is the Salute to Our Armed Forces at 12:00 p.m. at Buffalo Riverworks.