

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**



GARY R. BAKER
DIRECTOR
JEAN FRICK
ASST. CSO

TELEPHONE: (803) 359-8400
FAX: (803) 808-2105

605 WEST MAIN STREET
SUITE 101
LEXINGTON, S.C. 29072

VET NEWS

April-May 2003

From the Veterans Affairs Officer:

I want to take this time to introduce myself as the new Lexington County Veterans Affairs Officer. The Lexington County Legislative Delegation appointed me interim director effective February 1, 2003, to replace Wyman M. Rish, whose health precluded him from serving further. The Delegation reappointed me on April 10 to a two-year term that begins on July 1. This appointment is a high honor and privilege to serve my fellow veterans and their families to obtain benefits for which they are entitled.

Our mission is to serve the veterans of Lexington County. We assist veterans with service-connected and non-service-connected claims, educational benefits, home loans, and burial benefits. In addition, we certify and record discharge papers (DD-214s) and assist with correcting military records. I would like to offer the services of this office to all veterans and their families.

We are located in the Auxiliary Administration Building (formerly Kroger's), 605 West Main Street, Lexington, SC 29072. Jean Frick is the Assistant County Service Officer and Barbara O'Connor is the Veterans Affairs Clerk.

This newsletter is just one means of keeping communication open with Lexington County veterans. We anticipate publishing it periodically to keep you informed of issues and matters of interest to veterans and their families. The office's website will be on-line shortly at www.lex-co.com. Contact me if there are any functions or issues that need to be brought to the attention of the veterans of Lexington County through these forums. Please also put this office on your mailing list for newsletters so we can keep up to date on activities and provide publicity for any special events.

Since taking office, I have been attempting to visit all the veterans' organizations in Lexington County. Please notify me if you would like me to speak at or visit your organization. In addition, please contact me if there are any special functions where my presence would be beneficial. I would also like to be contacted with the names and locations of any veterans who are hospitalized or residing in nursing homes so that they can be visited periodically. Please also let me know of any deceased veterans if we can provide assistance to the family or if there is any veteran, veteran spouse, or children needing the services of this office.

Please feel free to contact me if we can provide assistance to you and/or your constituents.

Gary R. Baker
Veterans Service Officer

COUNTY MEETING ON MAY 1

There will be a meeting of veterans organization officials on Thursday, May 1 at 7:00 pm at the Auditorium in the Auxiliary Administration Building, 605 West Main Street, Lexington, to discuss several issues of importance to veterans of Lexington County: a Rally for Our Troops; videotaping combat veterans; and other issues of interest to veterans of Lexington County. This is also an excellent opportunity for the veterans organizations to express how the Veterans Affairs Office can serve the needs of veterans.

Each post or organization is invited to send one or two representatives.

VIETNAM SURVIVORS' DAY

The South Carolina Combat Veterans Group (Disabled) will celebrate Vietnam Survivors' Day on Friday, May 2.

The program begins at Memorial Park in Columbia at 9:45 am with a wreath laying ceremony to honor South Carolinians who made the ultimate sacrifice.

At 12 noon, a ceremony at Dorn VA Medical Center will honor all Vietnam Survivors. The ceremony will be held at the Avenue of Flags located across from the front entrance to the Medical Center.

WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

Family members, friends, and concerned citizens can support our troops who are deployed. They may:

- Provide a Blue Star Banner to family members of service members. They can be purchased at <http://emblem.legion.org>
 - Donate a calling card to help keep service members in touch with their families at Operation Uplink at <http://operationuplink.org>
 - Send a greeting via email through Operation Dear Abby at <http://anyservicemember.org> or <http://www.OperationDearAbby.net>
 - Sign a virtual 'thank-you' card at the Defend America web site at <http://www.defendamerica.mil/nmam.html>
 - Make a donation to one of the military relief societies:
 - Army Emergency Relief at <http://www.aerhq.org/>
 - Navy/Marine Relief Society at <http://nmcrs.org/>
 - Air Force Aid Society at <http://www.afas.org/>
 - Coast Guard Mutual Assistance at <http://www.cgmahq.org/>
 - Donate to Operation USO Care Package at <http://www.uso-metrodc.org/care1.html>
 - Support the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services at <http://www.redcross.org/services/afes/>
- Volunteer at a VA Hospital <http://www.va.gov/vetsday/> to honor veterans from past conflicts
- Support families whose loved ones are being treated at military and VA hospitals through a donation to the Fisher House at <http://www.fisherhouse.org>
 - Reach out to military families in your community, especially those with a loved one overseas
 - Send a personal message via *Stars and Stripes* at messages@estripes.com (messages are limited to 50 words and printed on a first-come, first-served basis.

- Participate in the Gift of Groceries program at <http://www.commissaries.com/certifcheck/index.htm>

UPCOMING EVENTS 2003

April 26, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm Retiree Appreciation Day, Fort Jackson

May 2 Vietnam Survivors' Day

9:45 am Wreath Laying Ceremony at Columbia Memorial Park

12 noon Ceremony (Dorn VA Medical Center)

May 3, 7 am-1 pm Garage Sale, VFW Post 8738

May 3, 7:15 pm Flag Disposal Ceremony, AL Post 7

May 4 Loyalty Day, VFW Post 8738

Senator Phil Leventis, Guest Speaker

May 13, 7 pm Flag Disposal Ceremony, AL Post 142

May 15-18 DAV Convention, Sheraton

May 17 Armed Forces Day

May 22, Flag Disposal Ceremony, AL Post 130

May 23, 10:00 am Memorial Day Program (Dorn VA)

May 26 Memorial Day observed

July 4 Independence Day

MILITARY RECORDS- MEDALS

Copies of military records for discharged, deceased, or retired veterans, may be obtained from:

National Personnel Records Center
Military Personnel Records
9700 Page Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63132

Use a VA Form 180 to request these records. These records will include military personnel records, and probably military medical records. The form may be obtained from this office or at http://www.archives.gov/research_room/vetrecls/.

Use the same form to request decorations or service medals which were never issued. Medals which have been lost, stolen, or destroyed may be requested using the same form.

DISCHARGE PAPERS (DD-214)

Copies of Discharge Papers (DD214) are available to the discharged veteran, next of kin, or legal representative if filed with this office. Copies which are not available from the Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office may be obtained from the National Personnel Records Center (see above).

These discharge papers are important for filing claims, seeking funeral benefits, or for obtaining other Veterans Administration benefits.

The process of recording takes only a few minutes and provides a backup copy in a safe, easily-accessible location.

VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE WEBSITE

The Veterans Affairs Office maintains its website at www.lex-co.com. Check out this website for upcoming events, flag flying days, information about the office, and important information.



BURIAL BENEFITS

National Cemeteries

Veterans and service members who meet eligibility requirements, and their dependents, may be buried in one of the Veterans Administration's National Cemeteries. Currently, there are two national cemeteries in South Carolina, in Beaufort and Florence.

Headstones and Markers

The Veterans Administration provides headstones and markers at no charge for service members who die while on active duty and for eligible veterans.

Military Funeral Honors

Military members and eligible veterans will be provided military funeral honors consisting of the folding and presentation of the United States flag and the playing of Taps by either a bugler, if available, or by electronic recording. A detail consisting of two or more uniformed members of the armed forces will perform the ceremony.

Reimbursement of Burial Expenses

The Veterans Administration will pay a burial allowance up to \$2,000 if the veteran's death was service-connected.

A burial and funeral expense allowance of \$300 will be paid if the veteran, at the time of death, was entitled to receive VA pension or compensation.

A \$300 plot allowance will be paid under conditions in which the veteran was discharged from active duty due to disability; the veteran was in receipt of VA pension or compensation at the time of death, or the veteran died in a VA facility.

The funeral home will be able to assist with the above benefits.

KOREAN WAR SERVICE MEDAL

Veterans who served during the Korean War are eligible to wear a medal recognizing their service. These medals are provided by the government of the Republic of Korea. Eligible veterans must have:

- (1) served between the outbreak of hostilities, June 25, 1950, and the date the armistice was signed, July 27, 1953;
- (2) been on permanent assignment or temporary duty for 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive days; and
- (3) performed their duty within the territorial limits of Korea, in the waters adjacent thereto or in aerial flight over Korea participating in actual combat operations or in support of combat operations.

Veterans, regardless of service branch, must provide a copy of their discharge paper (DD-214) to HQ AFPC/DPPRA, 550 C Street West, Suite 12, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas 78150-4714.

Additional information can be obtained from the Air Force Personnel Center, Monday-Friday, 7:30 am- 4:30 pm (CST) at (800) 558-1404.

KOREA DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL

On December 2, 2002, President Bush signed the National Defense Authorization for year 2003 which included the Korea Defense Service Medal to be awarded to all armed forces veterans who served in the Republic of Korea from July 28, 1954 to a date to be determined.

This medal, not to be confused with the Korean War Service Medal (mentioned above), will be available in the near future. Further information can be obtained at www.kdvamerica.org.

RETIREE APPRECIATION DAY

On Saturday, April 26, Fort Jackson will be hosting Retiree Appreciation Day. All military retirees are invited and encouraged to attend.

Activities start at Darby Field with a military colors ceremony at 9 am followed by refreshments and a display of modern Army equipment. At 10 am, Fort Jackson's senior leaders will greet attendees at the Post Theater and provide an update on services available to retirees.

Information and personnel service booths will be at the Community Activity Center from 9 am to 2 pm. Services include medical and dental screening, recreational services, Department of Veterans Affairs, legal assistance, identification card renewal, and vehicle registration.

BLUE STAR BANNER PRESENTATION

On Saturday, April 12, American Legion Post 7 in Lexington presented 29 Blue Star Banners to families of servicemen and servicewomen currently serving around the world. Wayne Caughman, Post Vice-Commander and a retired Colonel in the SC Army National Guard, gave the keynote speech.

Caughman and Doris Reynolds, American Legion Auxiliary Unit #7 member, presented the banners on behalf of the post to the family members.

The Blue Star Banner program originated in World War I. Families hung the banners in their windows to indicate that they had a family member in the military. Each star on the banner represented the number of family members serving. Usually the banner has one blue star denoting one family member serving. Up to 5 stars can be indicated on a single banner. If the family member dies in military service, the blue star is overlaid with a slightly smaller gold star so the blue star presents a background for the gold star.

Sheriff James Metts informed the ceremony attendees of a crime prevention program to assist military families. Officers from his department will visit a home to conduct a security assessment. They will inspect the home and provide written recommendations about simple, common sense measures to reduce opportunities for home break-ins. Deputies will periodically visit or call the home to ensure that the military families are safe and secure.

FLAGPOLE DEDICATION

Two flagpoles in front of the County Auxiliary Administration Building, 605 West Main Street in Lexington, were dedicated on Friday, April 4. The building houses the Veterans Affairs Office as well as the Voter Registration Office, part of the Assessor's Office, Magistrate's Office, Records Management, and Clemson University Extension Service.

The Air Force Junior ROTC from Lexington High School raised the colors on the 30 foot flagpoles before a crowd of 100. Senator Jake Knotts, Chairman of the Lexington County Legislative Delegation, and County Council Chairman Smokey Davis made remarks.

Commander Bill Masters and Chaplain Furman Younginer of American Legion Post 7 dedicated the flagpoles.

Gene Alexander on behalf of Woodmen of the World presented the Veterans Affairs Office with a

set of US and state flags with stands and staffs for the office.

VIETNAM TRAVELING WALL

The Vietnam Traveling Wall was on display at Saluda Shoals Park from April 17-20 thanks to Celebrate Freedom Foundation. The wall, a half-scale replica of the Vietnam Monument in Washington, contains the names of the more than 58,000 men and women who died during that conflict. Participants could find specific names on the wall through a computer search.

Congressmen Joe Wilson gave the keynote address at the opening ceremony on April 17. War memorabilia and a scout dog exhibit were displayed.

WAR REMINISCENCES

The military service of Paul Hawkins and Joe Derrick have recently been highlighted in lengthy articles in the Twin City News.

Hawkins, who retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in the SC Air National Guard, graduated from flight school in late 1944, too late to get into the fighting in World War II. He served in the Guard and was on active duty in 1960-61 during the Berlin Crisis.

Derrick served as a combat MP in Luzon, spending time guarding the home of General McArthur. He also recounts guarding President Harry Truman during a visit to Luzon in 1946.

HOW TO FIND A LONG-LOST MILITARY BUDDY

Army: <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg>

Navy: NPRC, 4400 Dauphin Street, New Orleans, LA 70149-1832

Air Force: USAF World Wide Locator, HQ AFMPC-Room 1QL, 55 C Street West, Room 50, Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4752

Marine Corps: CMC, HQ, USMC, Code MMSB-10, 2008 Elliott Road, Suite 201, Quantico, VA 22134 (enclose check for \$3.50)

Coast Guard: Commanding Officer (RAS), Coast Guard Human Resources Services & Information Center, 444 SE Quincy Street, Topeka, KS 66683-3591

NOAA: Commissioned Personnel Center, NCI N009 (CTC), 13115E West Avenue, Room 12100, Silver Springs, MD 20910

US Public Health Service: US Public Health Service, Dept. of Health & Human Services, 330 Independence Ave. SW, Room 1040, Washington, DC 20201

Source: Columbia Chapter, Retired Officers Assn.