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NJ Dept of Military and Veterans Affairs

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President Bush signs Veterans Benefits Expansion Legislation.

In an Oval Office ceremony on 16 December 2003, President Bush signed H.R. 2297, The Veterans Benefits Act of 2003, a bill authored by Congressman Chris Smith (NJ-4), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The new law authorizes \$1 billion over the next ten years for new and expanded benefits for disabled veterans, surviving spouses, and children. The Veterans Benefits Act increases educational benefits for widows and children of veterans who are totally disabled or who died from service-related causes. Congressman Smith said, "Furthermore, for those widows of veterans who died of service-related causes, my legislation allows them to remarry later in life without suffering the loss of survivor benefits." The legislation provides a one-year window for widows and widowers who lost their benefits by remarrying to reapply for them. The new law includes increased grants from \$9,000 to \$11,000 to adapt automobiles for the disabled and increases the specially adapted housing grants from \$48,000 to \$50,000 for the severely disabled and from \$9,250 to \$10,000 for the less severely disabled. The law's provisions call for increased monthly benefits for spouses and children of disabled veterans, coverage of self-employment training and entrepreneurship courses, and the creation of "sole source" contracts for small businesses owned by disabled veterans. "For disabled veterans who own or want to start a small business, this new law requires agencies and departments to give special consideration during federal contracting and procurement," said Congressman Smith. Last year, he said, disabled veteran-owned firms received just 0.13 percent of federal contracts, even though there is a 3 percent statutory goal.

Governor McGreevey signs bill to extend veterans benefits.

On December 17, 2003, Governor James E. McGreevey signed legislation that will provide veterans benefits to those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Assembly Bill 3564/Senate Bill 2822, sponsored by Assemblyman John J. Burzichelli (D-Gloucester), Assemblyman Craig A. Stanley (D-Essex), Senator Stephen M. Sweeney (D-Salem) and Senator Joseph Coniglio (D-Bergen), extends eligibility to certain veterans' benefits to veterans of Operations "Enduring Freedom" and "Iraqi Freedom." Veterans who served at least 14 days in the theater of operation of those campaigns and in direct support of those operations are eligible. The benefits include Civil Service preference, veterans' retirement allowance under the Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund or the Public Employees' Retirement System, the ability to purchase additional military service credit in the Police and Firemen's Retirement

"The seasons are what a symphony ought to be: four perfect movements in harmony with each other."...
Arthur Rubenstein

System, TPAF and PERS systems, and entitlement to the annual property tax deduction allotted to veterans.

CERT Classes are now forming. Contact LTC(Ret) Jack Dillie at 609-530-7107 if you are interested in participating.

Interesting Fact:

One-fifth of the men in the labor force are veterans. The medium age of these workers is 50 years, compared with an average age of 39 years for non-veterans.

Winter Arrives...

Monday, December 22, 2003. The precise moment of the 2003 Winter Solstice will be at 2:04 A.M.

The Four Stages of Life

- You believe in Santa Claus.
- You don't believe in Santa Claus.
- You are Santa Claus.
- You look like Santa Claus.

Holiday elves are working overtime at the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey.

The National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey, in conjunction with St. Denis Church in Manasquan, has sent off over 400 gifts to the veterans at Menlo Park. For the past four years, St. Denis Church has been setting up a Christmas Giving Tree for parishioners to donate gifts. The elves at the museum cut out stars with ribbons to hang on the tree. Each star has a label with a gift written on it that has been selected from a wish list provided by the staff at Menlo Park. This year the generosity of the parishioners at St. Denis has been extraordinary! The gifts that have been received for the veterans include five 13" televisions, walkers, bath chairs, board games, CD players, and lap blankets. Clothing for men and women ranged from socks, sweaters, jackets, sweatshirts, slippers and robes. One gift was a copy of the recently published grand volume of The Complete History of the United States Navy! Two hundred Black Watch scarves were donated, so all will be warm when they go out. Even the nutritionist got her wish this year – two smoothie makers for those drinks that keep our veterans healthy. On a cold, wintry morning, all of these gifts were picked up at St. Denis by the staff at Menlo Park and a museum elf. The van looked like Santa's sleigh, full of beautiful gifts, when it pulled away from the curb. The elves at the museum are happy and thankful for this wonderful generosity, and wish everyone a beautiful holiday season and a healthy new year.

Notre Dame High School sends Holiday Greetings to the 253rd.

The Senior Service class of Notre Dame High School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey developed a project to let our men and women overseas know that they are in everyone's thoughts and prayers. Service Director, Mrs. Martin, organized student volunteers to write Christmas cards to each of the soldiers of the 253rd Transportation Company serving in Iraq. Thank you to the volunteers who took time out of their busy holiday schedules to remember the soldiers of the 253rd with kindness.

Master Sgt. Joe Burkel and Tech Sgt. Jimmy Johnson hit the mark.

Master Sgt Joe Burkel and Tech Sgt Jimmy Johnson, members of the 108th Air Refueling Wing Marksmanship Team, both took first place honors within their classification at the New Jersey Service Rifle Championships on November 15, 2003. The championship match was held at the Cumberland Rifleman Range in Vineland, NJ. The team has been putting in extra range time recently, which contributed to these outstanding results. MSgt Burkel shot a 759 – 17X to take first place in the expert classification. TSgt Johnson shot a 748 – 16X to top the marksman classification.

Veterans honored at Lawrenceville ceremony.

Colonel Maria Falca-Dodson, Deputy Adjutant General, presented 116 veterans with the New Jersey Distinguished and Meritorious Service

Medals at a ceremony held on 17 December 2003, at the NJ National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, NJ. Honored guests included Senator Peter Inverso and Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein. CW5 (Ret) Robert Wimberly acted as Master of Ceremonies, and was assisted by DMVA employees, Ms. Karen Hansen and Ms. Michele Johnson.

State Employee Community Emergency Response Team training has been developed.

The state of New Jersey is sponsoring Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training for its State employees in 2004. The training is made available to State employees through a partnership between the NJ Department of State, Office of the Attorney General, Department of Personnel, State Police Office of Emergency Management, Governor's Office of Volunteerism, and the State Citizen Corps Council. Further details are available at <http://www.citizencorps.gov/programs/cert.shtm>.

Initially, CERT programs were developed to assist communities in taking care of themselves in the aftermath of a major disaster when first responders are overwhelmed or unable to respond because of communication or transportation difficulties. The state's goal is to develop groups of trained co-workers for immediate response to disasters in the workplace who could also contribute in their home communities. The training programs consist of eight 2.5-hour classes, usually held once a week. Subjects include recognizing hazards, first aid, fire fighting, light rescue, and a final exercise. Training will be conducted during paid State work hours and locations will be based on the number of applicants from each DMVA worksite. If you are interested, call or e-mail DMVA's CERT Coordinator, LTC (Ret) Jack Dillie, at 609-530-7107 or john.dillie@njdmava.state.nj.us. The deadline to apply for CERT training is December 28, 2003.

Members of the 108th Air Refueling Wing, the 177th Fighter Wing, and Fourth Graders from the Seaview Avenue School visit veterans at the Vineland Home.

On Monday, December 15, more than 40 members of the 108th Air Refueling Wing and the 177th Fighter Wing of the NJ Air National Guard joined with Fourth Graders from the Seaview Avenue School in Linwood, NJ for a holiday visit to the Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland. Students and airmen visited with the residents of the home, caroled through the hallways and rooms, and brought plenty of goodies to distribute to the veterans who live at the home.

The 177th FW, along with the Absecon VFW and American Legion, gave the Vineland Home a refurbished golf cart for transporting staff around the ground, particularly during the construction phase. They also presented the veterans with electric razors. The 108th ARW gave the staff of the home money to be used toward the purchase of cell phones for the staff for their use during official travel. Boxes of gifts from the students, ranging from sneakers to toiletries, filled several long tables. Kindergarten students from Seaview Avenue School sent along boxes of cookies for the residents. The trip brought smiles to the faces of the students, airmen, and residents alike.

Off she goes...

In the crisp, clear air on the morning of November 10, 2003, the 108th Refueling Wing's Master Sgt. David Pearl and his crew launched Aircraft 57-2606. As the plane took flight, they were all acutely aware that they probably would not see her again.

"The Volunteer," as 2606 was known, was on her way to Kansas to undergo the extensive engineering upgrades and re-engine process necessary to convert the airframe from a KC-135E to a KC-135R. On this day "The Volunteer" left the 108th flight line for the last time. After the "E" to "R" conversion, 2606 will go to Kansas for Depot-level maintenance, then it's on to Washington state to become part of their R model Air Wing.

Aircraft 2606 was delivered to the U.S. Air Force in February of 1959. In 1961 the jet was turned over to the Puerto Rico Air National Guard. The plane remained there until 1978 when she was transferred to the 170th Air Refueling Group, New Jersey Air National Guard. Master Sgt. Robert "Ralph" Kaelin, and his assistant, Staff Sgt. George Laird, maintained the aircraft from 1978 to 1991. During that time, the aircraft was chosen to be the first New Jersey aircraft to be upgraded from an "A" model to an "E" model. In March of 1983, she was delivered back to the 170th as the first "E" model on the ramp. After Master Sgt. Kaelin's retirement in 1991, Tech. Sgt. George Laird and his crew maintained the jet until 1996. Upon Tech. Sgt. Laird's retirement, Tech. Sgt. Mark Keilblock took over the jet and maintained it until Master Sgt. David Pearl and his assistant, Tech. Sgt. Kurt Reinert, were assigned in 1998. Pearl gave her the name "The Volunteer" and, he and his team, which includes Staff Sgts. Bob Hess, Chris Smith and Airman 1st Class Tyler Chytaus maintained her until Nov. 10, 2003.

During the 26 years 2606 spent at McGuire, over nine thousand flight hours were logged on the airframe. "The Volunteer" was involved in a variety of conflicts including Vietnam, Desert Shield/Storm, Iraqi Freedom, Noble Eagle, and The War on Terrorism, to mention just a few. She will undoubtedly continue to serve the Air Force proudly and will be a great asset to any unit in which she serves. The 108th crew chiefs wish her well and will miss her.

NJ Army National Guard welcomes two Warrant Officer Army Aviation Appointments.

CW5 Al Curving, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the NJ Army National Guard, and COL Paul Ciervo, State Army Aviation Officer, jointly announce the appointments and accessions of WO1 Matthew Lanese and WO1 Jonathan Sodomini to the Corps. Congratulations to both soldiers, who were pinned at Warrant Officer Candidate School graduation ceremonies in Fort Rucker, Alabama.

Mr. Lanese is a traditional drilling Guardsman, and was a Specialist in the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1/150th General Support Aviation Battalion.

Mr. Sodomini is a full-time technician at the Army Aviation Flight Facility in West Trenton, and a Sergeant with Company A of the 1/150th General Support Aviation Battalion. Jon was also selected as the NJ ARNG Outstanding NCO of the Year for 2003 earlier this year.

Both soldiers will remain at Fort Rucker while attending Initial Entry Rotary Wing school. They are both scheduled to become UH-60

helicopter pilots with Company A of the 1/150th GSAB. Chief Curving noted that there has never been a better time to become a Warrant Officer in the NJ Army National Guard than today.

Distinguished, Meritorious, and Vietnam Service Medal Presentation Ceremonies are scheduled.

19 December	Distinguished Service Medal	VFW Post 1616 1940 Black Horse Pike, Williamstown, NJ
11 a.m.	Meritorious Service Medal	

A little piece of history.

Representatives from the New Jersey Air National Guard Heritage Center met with retired Major Larry Guarino and his wife, Evelyn, and videotaped their interview. As part of the NJ Air National Guard’s ongoing efforts to capture and preserve the histories of the state’s units through the videotaping of oral histories, the Heritage Center volunteers learned an interesting tale about this retired Air National Guard aviator. On June 14, 1965, Maj Larry Guarino took off from Korat Airbase, Thailand, in his F-1095D Thunderchief on his way to a bombing mission in Viet Nam. His aircraft was hit by enemy ground fire, he was forced to eject the aircraft, and was captured shortly after landing. This was the beginning of 2,801 days of brutal captivity, during which time he was subjected to both physical and mental torture as a POW in North Vietnam. Mrs. Evelyn Guarino had to accept the responsibility of raising their four sons on her own. Throughout their ordeal, their unflinching faith and love for each other gave them the strength to endure even during the darkest moments. Both Larry and Evelyn have written books about their experiences during their nearly eight years of separation. They also tell of their joyful reunion after his release from North Vietnam, and how they dealt with the difficult aftermath of Larry’s imprisonment. Larry served in the US Army Air Force, the New Jersey Air National Guard, and the US Air Force, a career that has spanned over 30 years of dedicated military service to this nation. A copy of Larry and Evelyn’s videotaped interview will be added to the Colonel Lou Vocino NJANG Heritage Center’s oral history collection located at McGuire Air Force Base, NJ.

NJ Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial and Vietnam Era Education Center Announces its Calendar of Events.

For more information about any of these events, please call the NJ Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation office at (732) 335-0033.

24 Jan	1 p.m.	Vietnam Veteran Verse: “Earth Songs” by Jan Barry and “Tunnel Vision” by Charles Johnson.
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Today in History...

Today is Friday, December 12th, the 353rd day of 2003. There are 13 days left in the year. On this day...

- 1732 – Benjamin Franklin began publishing “Poor Richard’s Almanac.

- 1843 – Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” was first published in England.
- 1918 – Robert Ripley began his “Believe It or Not” column in “The New York Globe.”
- 1972 – Apollo 17 splashed down in the Pacific, ending the Apollo program of manned lunar landings.
- 1998 – U.S. President Bill Clinton was impeached on two charges of perjury and obstruction of justice by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Armory Happenings – Check to see what’s happening at an Armory near you.

26-28 December	Wrestling Tournament	Teaneck Armory
28 December	Sports Card & Comics Show	Bordentown Armory

Fun Facts –

- Leonardo DaVinci invented the scissors.
- Peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite.
- “Stewardesses” is the longest word typed with only the left hand, and “lollipop” with your right.
- The average person’s left hand does 56% of the typing.
- The cruise liner, QE2, moves only six inches for each gallon of diesel that it burns.

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