



WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK

One Moment in Time

There & Back Again

navigating life
after war



16 January 1991, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia—I awoke to an explosion that shook my soul and my quarters causing objects to fall around me and the sirens to blare. Orders to “don our chemical gear” were shouted over a loud speaker.

I failed the 12-second test to don my mask. In fact, I couldn't move. I sat in a catatonic state.

I considered myself a strong woman then and now. But, nevertheless, strength had nothing to do with that moment in time. My body and mind shut down. I was terrified and traumatized. I felt helpless. I lost control. How could I lose control? Soldiers don't lose control. Thankfully, my “ranger buddy” was there. My mask was slid on and I was physically put into my chemical suit. I was led to the doorway where I sat for many hours until the “all clear” sounded. As humans, we are built with coping mechanisms—which is what kicked for all of us over the next few weeks—because scud missiles came in several times a night. We'd count the interception of the scuds by the patriot missiles; this game helped disconnect us from our fear of death.

That moment in time in the sands of Saudi Arabia has shaped my life. I sought many avenues to heal. I went to therapy, tried hypnosis, and exercised excessively. Moments in between the healing, I drank more than my share of alcohol and likely acted out more than I knew. My search for relief and healing led me to yoga. I noticed that while my “talk therapy” helped me understand my PTSD, I couldn't stop the emotional storm from arriving, taking hold, and sometimes taking me down. Therapy helped me see the storm. Yoga managed my symptoms and released trauma from my body.

There & Back Again was established by military veterans and yogis who have personal experiences with PTSD. This nonprofit offers reintegration services for veterans of Iraq and (*article continues top left of page 5*)

A Message from Heidi



Heidi Kruckenberg poses for a photo with the Outstanding Women Veterans on November 7, 2008. Kathleen M. Splinter of Fall River (on left) served a year during the Vietnam War (Army Nurse Corps 1966-69) and Phyllis Santangelo Galeaz of Lynn (on right) served three years in the jungles of New Guinea during World War II (Army Nurse Corps 1941-45).

This spring/summer will bring an array of women veterans' events to our part of the world. The Women Veterans' Network is a sponsor of the third annual **Female Faces of War Conference** to be held in Fall River, MA on **March 27-28** (see page 6 for more information). This year's program is looking like the best ever.

June 2-5 the **National Association of State Women Veterans' Coordinators** will hold its annual conference in Manchester, NH. The conference will provide national best practices regarding women veterans programming and services.

And most exciting of all is our very own statewide **Conference for Women Veterans**, which will take place on **Saturday, June 27** at Holyoke Community College (see page 6 for more information). The Network is working with a dedicated group of women veterans from western Mass to plan this event that promises to be useful and fun. I look forward to seeing you there!
Heidi Kruckenberg —Women's Coordinator

VA News & Updates

VA's Response to Military Sexual Trauma

Although both men and women may experience sexual assault or sexual harassment during military service, sexual victimization is of particular concern to women veterans given that they experience it at disproportionately higher rates. Like any kind of traumatic experience, sexual trauma can affect a person's mental and physical health, even many years later. In fact, although many people associate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with combat, sexual trauma is more likely to result in symptoms of PTSD than most other types of trauma, including combat. Depression and substance abuse, as well as physical health problems such as headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, sexual dysfunction, chronic pain, and chronic fatigue are also common.

For these and other reasons, sexual victimization is of great concern to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Operating under a definition that comes from section 1720D of Title 38 US Code, VA refers to experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurred while a veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training as "military sexual trauma" (MST). Although MST can affect veterans' mental health in a variety of overt and subtle ways, recovery is possible and VA has a number of initiatives to assist in this. For example, every VA facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a point of contact for veterans and staff. All veterans seen in VA are asked whether they experienced MST and all treatment for physical and mental health conditions related to MST is free, regardless of service-connection status. Specialized mental health treatment is available on an outpatient as well as a residential/inpatient basis. Beyond offering a range of MST-related treatment options, VA also recently established an MST Support Team that engages in national monitoring, education, outreach, and program development. This will ensure that VA's response to MST is continuously improving.

See the green box at right for MST Coordinators, who can help you find and access VA services and programs, and state and federal benefits.

by Margret Bell, Ph.D., Women's Health Sciences Division of the National Center for PTSD, VA Boston Healthcare System

New Program for Female Vets



If you are a woman who experienced pain due to pregnancy, postpartum aches and

pains, urinary incontinence, bowel problems, sexual pain or chronic pelvic pain you may be eligible to receive treatment at the newly developed Pelvic Floor Dysfunction Clinic at the Physical Therapy Clinic at the Northampton VA. Treatment includes manual therapy, therapeutic exercise, therapeutic ultrasound, and physical therapy.

Northampton VA is one of only seven VA Medical Centers nationwide selected for a pelvic floor demonstration project. A lead physical therapist will facilitate the program plan to include patient education, physician education, marketing, clinical set-up and documentation development. In the future, the sites will implement a multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of urinary incontinence and pelvic pain at all VA facilities across the country.

If you are a VA patient and interested in this service please discuss this with your primary care provider. The physical therapy clinic at the Northampton VA can be reached at 413-582-3034.

MST Coordinators at Massachusetts VA Facilities

Bedford VAMC: Lorae Phelan, APRN-CNS,
781-687-3592

VA Boston (Worcester): Lorraine Cavallaro, Ph.D.,
508-856-0104, Ext. 7040

VA Boston (Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury, Brockton): Erica Sharkansky, Ph.D., 857-364-4925;
Erin Daly, Ph.D., 857-364-2472

VA Boston (Lowell): Bill Barker, LICSW,
978-671-9155

VA Boston (Causeway St.): Melissa Wattenberg,
Ph.D., 617-248-1089

Northampton: Dana Weaver, Ph.D., 413-582-3031
Veterans interested in services can also speak with their existing VA healthcare provider or contact their local Vet Center. A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found online at www.va.gov and www.vetcenter.va.gov.

VA News & Updates

Dial-A-Lawyer for Veterans

The Massachusetts Bar Association in conjunction with the Department of Veterans' Services will be offering free legal advice to veterans on **Thursday, April 30, from 5:30-7:30 PM only**. Veterans who have legal questions involving access to benefits, family issues, employment concerns, and landlord/tenant matters can call **617-338-0610** for free legal advice.

The Benefits Bullet

If you believe that you have disabilities incurred during your military service that continue to be problematic for you today, you may file a claim through the VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) to seek compensation. After you file a claim, you will receive a letter requesting evidence, such as medical records and service treatment records. If these records are in your possession, you should provide them in order to expedite your claim. If you have had a claim denied, you have the option of appealing decisions less than a year old or reopening older cases. The rating decision explains why the claim was denied.

I often get questions about military sexual trauma. These are obviously sensitive claims that can be very painful for a veteran to pursue. Many individuals do not report the trauma while in the military nor do they tell anyone that the event happened. This creates a scenario where there is little or no evidence that the event occurred. Military personnel records are requested in hopes that they will provide some evidence. A current diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not sufficient to prove the event occurred. However, this does not mean that the claim should not be pursued. When thinking about any disability compensation it is useful to think about it in this way: an event happened in the military, a current problem exists because of the event, and a nexus exists that links the two together.

I am here to help women veterans navigate the VBA. Please contact me for an appointment 617-303-4980. I would be happy to talk to you about the benefits process. You can also apply online at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>.

*By Noreen B. Begley, Women's Coordinator,
VBA Regional Office, Boston*

Family Counseling at Vet Centers



Four new family counselors have been hired at Massachusetts Vet Centers! The Vet Center's mission is to welcome home our war veterans with honor by assisting veterans and their families to adjust from military to civilian life. While we specialize in readjustment and trauma counseling, we are also adept at getting veterans connected with their benefits.

With our new family counseling positions we now have dedicated family-focused personnel to assist with our mission. Vet Center services are part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and prepaid by veteran's military service and available to those who have served in a warzone, experienced military sexual trauma, or bereavement counseling for families who have lost a service member while on active duty. Please call 800-905-4675 to be connected to your local Vet Center. Massachusetts Vet Centers are located in Boston, Brockton, Hyannis, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester.

By Jenny D'Olympia, Family Counselor, Boston Vet Center

Research Participation Opportunity through the National Center for PTSD, Women's Health Sciences Division

We are seeking participants for a VA-funded study examining the relationships between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, startle reactivity, and learning in women at different stages of the menstrual cycle. Potential participants are women aged 18-55 who have experienced a traumatic event within the last five years. This study consists of five sessions. Participants will be asked to listen to tones and view images while physiological responses are monitored. Participants will also receive small shocks set at a level individually determined to be "highly annoying, but not painful." Blood, urine, and saliva samples will be collected and questionnaires will be completed. Up to \$360 compensation is offered for those who complete all aspects of the study. For more information, please call 857-364-2790.

*By Suzanne Pineles, Ph.D., Women's Health Sciences Division,
VA Boston Healthcare System*

Massachusetts Women in Uniform

Marie A. Knowles



My entrance into the Navy Nurse Corps took place in 1938, four years before WWII began. My first duty station was a hospital in Philadelphia where I was on a large ward with 20 sick men in bed, four male doctors, and four male corpsmen. I was the only woman there.

I remember returning from a

Sunday afternoon movie at my second duty station at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. We were met by a Marine standing outside the locked gate who announced in a firm voice, "We are at war. You may no longer enter here without an ID and a uniform." At the time we were not even aware that a war was imminent. Later, during a parade in Corpus Christi, TX we women in uniform received a tremendous ovation from the crowd.

I remained in the NNC for 25 years and was assigned to many stations including Hawaii and the Philippines. I retired as a LCdr. I am now 97 years old and in fairly good health.

--Marie A. Knowles, RN of Framingham, MA



J. Frances (Harmon) Wyckoff



I had no idea when I joined the WAVES in 1943 that I would be holding so many memories close to me some 60-odd years later. My assignment was with Naval Communications, Washington D.C. at OP-20-GZ (GZ). It was not until 1976 that President Jimmy Carter lifted the veil of secrecy, which began an outpouring of intriguing information. One of the first books released on the subject *And I Was There* by Rear Admiral Edwin T. Layton and Captain Roger Pineau was filled with officers I had worked with—cryptanalysts and crypto-linguists. A number of pages were devoted to information regarding Dorothy Edgers, a civilian codebreaker who occupied the desk right next to mine. In 1941, in this same office, Dorothy had broken the code that would have possibly stopped the attack on Pearl Harbor,

but no one paid any attention to her as she had worked in GZ only two weeks. And my job at the GZ? Well, they told me to forget and I mostly have forgotten the details of my work. I remember many books of code and messages that had to do with fleet movements in the Pacific. Of all things I was or ever could have become, having been a WAVE and playing a small part in great events will always be the most important accomplishment to me.

—J. Frances (Harmon) Wyckoff of Quincy, MA



Margaret M. Coyne



I joined the Women's Army Corps, Medical Corps during World War II. My fiancé Thomas Coyne was serving in the Army Air Corps in England while I was serving at the Lovell General Hospital, Fort Devens, MA. Even though it was a long time ago, I shall never forget the things I

saw at the Lovell Hospital. There were many amputees and even a Prisoner of War ward. Thomas and I kept in touch by letter. Then the letters stopped coming—he was shot and lost a leg—he wanted to see no one. Even though he was transferred to a hospital in Maine he didn't want to see me. His Army nurse called me two or three times a day to say he was in bad shape, but slowly improving. She was wonderful! He finally did come to Mass-Carney Hospital but still didn't want to see me. I called and again an Army nurse kept in touch with me. He finally said he'd see me. Well the rest is history. We were finally married after he felt better and got his leg.

—Margaret M. Coyne of Burlington, MA



One Moment in Time *(continued from first page)*

Afghanistan by taking a whole body approach to heal all parts of our “self”—mind/thoughts, physical body, emotions, and spirits. Because war is an extreme experience, often we disconnect from one or all aspects of our self. Yoga and meditation are the foundation of our program.

Our complimentary programs for OEF/OIF veterans are ongoing. We are currently taking enrollment for our next program, which starts on March 1, 2009. For more information, please contact Sue Lynch, slynch@thereandbackagainnlaw.org or call 800-311-0187 or visit www.thereandback-again.org.

By Susan J. Lynch, JD, RYT, Executive Director, There & Back Again

National Guard Kicks Off Operation Total Warrior Program

The Massachusetts National Guard has announced the kickoff of Operation Total Warrior (OTW), a Yellow Ribbon Support Services program directed by the Undersecretary of Defense. OTW’s mission is to serve as a linking agent for veterans’ outstanding needs and services while minimizing the stress of military service, deployments, and family separation. Ultimately, OTW is designed to build and protect the overall mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical strength of each Massachusetts servicemember, family member, or immediate support base. OTW conducts innovative seminars, briefings, and activities in various locations. The OTW staff and website also provide coordination nexus for all veteran support agencies in the state as well as for the veterans themselves. The program is led by Major David Hencke, Director of Deployment Cycle Support Operations based at the Service Member and Family Support Center located in Wellesley, MA. For more information, please call 800-772-1237 or visit www.operationtotalwarrior.us.

By Walter F. Rice, Senior Program Coordinator, Operation Total Warrior

Do You Miss Us between Newsletters?

If you would like to receive periodic email updates from the WVN between issues of the newsletter, send us your email address. The WVN sends email updates about events, benefits, and issues of interest on a monthly basis. Email dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us.

New Transition House for Women Veterans

The Women Veterans Transition House in New Bedford is home to ten women veterans who are dealing with homelessness and alcohol and drug abuse recovery. Each resident can live at the Transition House for up to two years. During that time she will partake in individual and group counseling to learn skills such as



anger management, life skills, art as therapy, and preventing domestic violence, with the goal of developing the tools needed for successful independent living. For more information, call Margaret Guzman, Program Director at 508-717-8710.

By Panayiota Bertzikis, Women Veterans' Network

Free Nicotine Patches Available for Massachusetts Veterans and Their Families

Massachusetts veterans smoke at a higher rate than the general adult population: 24 percent as opposed to 18 percent, when adjusted for age (based on figures from 2005-07). Studies show that using medications such as the nicotine patch combined with support triples your chances of quitting for good.

Massachusetts veterans and their family members who call the Massachusetts Smokers Helpline at 800-Try-To-Stop (800-879-867867) will receive a free four-week supply of nicotine patches valued at \$100 retail, along with informational resources on the benefits of quitting smoking, and tips on how to stop. Program participants will also receive free telephone support to help them quit.

“Smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the Commonwealth, and our veterans deserve support to help them live longer, healthier lives,” said DVS Secretary Tom Kelley.

The nicotine patch giveaway program will run through June 30, 2009. For more information visit www.makesmokinghistory.com/veterans.

Department of Veterans' Services
Attn: Women Veterans' Network
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Boston, MA 02111

FIRST CLASS

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Female Faces of War Conference

Join us in celebrating Women's History month with the third Female Faces of War Conference **Friday and Saturday, March 27-28, 2009**. A Friday night dinner and screening of *Lioness* with an exclusive introduction and discussion with filmmaker Daria Sommers will be followed by an overnight aboard the ship at **Battleship Cove in Fall River, MA**. Saturday's conference will consist of multiple speakers, including a keynote address by Brigadier General Wilma Vaught (Ret.), president of the Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA) Memorial in Washington, DC. Price for the full two-day program and overnight is \$80; price of the Friday evening movie only \$10; Friday evening movie, dinner, and reception \$45; and the Saturday program only \$35. For more information and to register, contact Paula Hague 508-678-1100, Ext. 101.



Massachusetts Conference for Women Veterans



Do you want to learn about state and federal benefits you may be eligible for? Are you interested in knowing how yoga can help with PTSD symptoms? Do you want to get involved with veterans organizations or make connections with other women veterans? Come learn the answers to all these questions plus more at the first annual Massachusetts Conference for Women Veterans on **Saturday, June 27, 2009 at Holyoke Community College**. With a choice of over 13 workshops to attend, lunch with a keynote speaker, exhibits, and a chance to meet fellow vet-sisters this is an event that can't be missed. Bring a friend and come spend the day with us. **Admission is free but registration is required.** Online registration is available at www.mass.gov/vets/womensconference or call Panayiota Bertzikis at 617-210-5778.