



from
Assemblyman

Robin Schimminger

November 2013

Dear Friend,

It's the time of the year when we remember what we are thankful for. We can never say thank you often enough to those who have served our country. Thank you!

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to meet with many of you and with the representatives of various veterans organizations to discuss issues affecting veterans and their families and I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on several issues that may be of interest.

Should you have any questions or want additional information on any of these matters, please feel free to contact my office at 873-2540.

Again, thank you!

Sincerely,

Robin Schimminger

Veterans Driver's License

Veterans are often asked to provide proof of their service when applying for benefits or trying to take advantage of discounts or other programs available to them. That usually means carrying around a copy of one's DD-214. Now, veterans can leave official military paperwork at home and still have proof of their service right in their wallet by obtaining a driver's license with a special veteran designation.

This driver's license designation came about as a result of legislation I co-sponsored that became law last year (Chapter 487 of the Laws of 2012). This statute authorizes the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to acknowledge military service on newly issued driver's licenses, learner permits and non-driver identification cards by printing the word "Veteran" on the upper left corner of the document.

Now that the law has been implemented by DMV, eligible veterans can apply for the veteran status designation in person at a DMV or county auto bureau office or by mail. To qualify, applicants will need to provide proof of their honorable discharge from military service or that they were

released from military service under honorable conditions. Veterans who apply in person will need to provide an original document, which will be returned; individuals who apply by mail can send a photocopy.

When renewing a license, fees in place for a regular or enhanced driver's license still apply. Individuals who want to update their license with the veteran designation but do not have an expiring license currently have to pay a \$12.50 license replacement fee. However, I am co-sponsoring legislation that would waive the replacement fee so that veterans can have the notation that they earned on their driver's license or non-driver ID card at no additional cost without having to wait for their current license to expire.

New York is now one of more than three dozen states that offer similar options for veterans.

Acceptable forms of verification include:

- A U.S. Department of Defense form DD-214 or DD-215 that indicates an honorable discharge.
- Honorable discharge forms WD AGO 53, WD AGO 55, WD AGO 53-55, NAVPERS 553, NAVMC 78PD or NAVCG 553



Assemblyman Robin Schimminger

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Focusing on Veterans' History and Health

More Ways to Tell Veterans' Stories

So many defining moments in our state and nation's history occurred during times of war. New York has always been keenly aware of the contributions made by its sons and daughters during times of conflict and peace and it has taken great strides to preserve the stories of those who served. These recollections not only provide a historical record of the time, but put into context the lives of ancestors, family, friends and neighbors who were ordinary individuals who did extraordinary things to preserve and protect our nation and its cherished freedoms.

Since 1863, New York State has assembled a remarkable and unique collection of personal military history that ranges from the Civil War to the current conflicts in the Middle East. It all began when Colonel Lockwood Doty developed a questionnaire to collect the personal military history of those who served during the Civil War. The questionnaire not only recorded military information – branch and place of service, general duties, battles participated in and hardships experienced, but asked about the culture of the time as remembered in songs, sayings and jokes of the day.

The modern day version of the Doty form was launched in 2000 with the state's Veteran Oral History Program. Using digital technology and a format developed by professional military historians, the story of New York's veterans is now recorded and preserved in their own words. Veterans who wish to participate in the program are asked to complete a questionnaire that is used to compile interview questions. That document then becomes part of the veteran's permanent record along with a recorded interview.

Another step to preserve and share veterans' histories was taken during the current legislative session. We enacted Chapter 183 of the Laws of 2013 creating a Veteran Speaker Education Program within the state Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). The DVA along with the New York State Military Museum are directed to reach out to schools to advise them of the program and speakers who are willing to discuss their experiences. This new resource will encourage a greater understanding of and appreciation for the contributions made by our veterans.

MARINE CORPS MONUMENT REDEDICATION

The United States Marines have left their mark from the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli. On the shores of the Niagara River at Raymond Klimek Veterans Park in North Tonawanda, the 15-year old Marine Corps Monument, which holds a prominent place in the park, was rededicated this July after it had been refurbished. The community came out in force to mark the occasion including past, present and future Marines. Pictured at the memorial are George Brock and William McGowan of the Marine Corps League, Assemblyman Schimminger, a Marine Corps representative from Buffalo's "I" Company, John Tuohy the National Commandant of the Marine Corps League and members of the Young Marines of Western New York – Kevin Bass, Jordan Burch, Abbigale Santo and Kyle Lyon.



Cold War Certificate Now Law

Our state and nation have paid tribute to veterans who served during times of war and other armed conflicts, and rightly so. Standing alongside and in the shadows were the Cold War veterans who stood watch and served under the threat of nuclear war and communist domination. These brave and dedicated veterans participated in hundreds of military exercises and operations in the cause of promoting stability and world peace.

Lest we forget, Cold Warriors airlifted supplies to Berlin in 1948, went on alert when Egypt claimed the Suez Canal in 1956, and blockaded Cuba during the 1962 missile crisis. When things turned hot in Korea and Vietnam and conflicts erupted from Lebanon to Grenada, Cold Warriors took up their battle stations. Between flare-ups they manned missile silos, piloted B-52s aimed at Soviet targets, crewed nuclear-armed submarines, some of which did eavesdropping activities at the bottom of the ocean floor, and many performed actions and duties still shrouded in the secrecy of that era.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the end of the Cold War, there were no parades, no monuments and no vic-

tory or campaign medals honoring these veterans. But proper recognition is due to them. Toward that end, the Assembly has passed legislation since 2006 to honor Cold War veterans. This year I am pleased to report that the legislation I co-sponsored to create a New York State Cold War Certificate has been passed by both houses of the State Legislature and has been signed into law by the Governor (Chapter 477 of the Laws of 2013).

To be eligible for the Cold War Certificate, an applicant must be a citizen of New York State who served in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps or Nurses Corps or have been a citizen of New York while serving in the armed forces, have been honorably discharged or discharged under honorable circumstances, and have served between September 2, 1945 and December 26, 1991.

The Cold War Certificate is now in the design stage. If you or someone you know is interested in receiving a Cold War Certificate, please e-mail me at schimmr@assembly.state.ny.us or call my office (873-2540) and we will provide you with an application as soon as they become available.

Children of Agent Orange

Generally people think of Agent Orange exposure as affecting the men and women who served in Vietnam. Certainly, they were affected, often seriously, by exposure to this dangerous herbicide. But they were not alone. Seamen who served on ships in Vietnam's waterways and conducted salvage operations, supply landings, amphibious beach landings and other duties were exposed as well. So too, were individuals who worked on stateside military installations—Fort Drum in New York, Elgin Air Force Base in Florida, Las Marias in Puerto Rico and other bases—where the herbicide was tested or stored or used as a defoliant to control vegetation around the base.

We have known for a long time that a significant number of Vietnam veterans are experiencing life-long health problems related to Agent Orange exposure. For some time there has been a strong belief and anecdotal evidence that the spouses, children and grandchildren of Vietnam veterans can be affected by Agent Orange, as well.

form to the state Division of Veterans' Affairs where a statistical summary of these reports would be compiled. This legislation was unanimously passed by both houses of the Legislature and was signed into law on July 24, 1989 (Chapter 718 of the Laws of 1989) by then-Governor Mario Cuomo. Implementation problems stemming from agency disputes on reporting procedures as well as the voluntary nature of parental participation proved to be too difficult obstacles for the bureaucracy to overcome. As a result, the statistical evidence that we had hoped to collect to establish a valid correlation between service in Vietnam and the incidence of Agent Orange-related health problems in the children of Vietnam veterans fell short of expectations.

In the intervening 24 years, the effects of intergenerational Agent Orange health problems continue to be understudied and under-reported. As a result, the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) has initiated a project to address this problem. Mokie

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One of the first publicized cases of the intergenerational effects of Agent Orange was that of the Zumwalt family. The commander of naval forces in Vietnam, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Jr., ordered the spraying of Agent Orange in Vietnam to kill vegetation and "drive the Viet Cong back 1,000 yards off the water's edge." His son, Elmo III, a lieutenant junior grade, commanded a patrol boat in Vietnam's waters and later died of Agent Orange related cancers at the age of 42. The Admiral's grandson, Elmo IV, suffers from a congenital dysfunction that confuses his physical senses and is believed to be related to his father's Agent Orange exposure.

When this story came to light a number of years ago, several of my legislative colleagues and I sought to help Vietnam veterans establish a link between disabilities in their children and their wartime exposure to Agent Orange. I, along with then-State Senator Anthony Masiello, joined in sponsoring legislation that gave parents of learning disabled children the option of reporting their child's disability through the use of a special

Pratt Porter, Director of Communications for the VVA, is spearheading a special project – the "Faces of Agent Orange" – to collect "real stories about real people" in regard to a family's second-and-third generation health struggles which may be associated with exposure to Agent Orange. Ms. Porter recently spoke at a VVA Chapter 77 town hall meeting about the importance of identifying children and grandchildren affected by Agent Orange. Currently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes one form of spina bifida as being related to the children of male veterans and about a dozen disabilities in the children of women veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. Children with recognized disabilities can apply for federal benefits under the Benefits for Certain Children with Disabilities Born of Vietnam and Certain Korea Service Veterans (VA form 21-0304). For more information or to share one's family's story, contact Mokie Pratt Porter by mail at Vietnam Veterans of America, 8719 Colesville Road, Suite 100, Silver Springs, MD 20910 or by e-mail at mporter@vva.org.

Military Sexual Trauma

During the past year, the Pentagon reported that the number of service members who experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact rose from 19,300 in 2011 to about 26,000 in 2012, with many more instances going unreported. Military sexual trauma (MST) appears to be a growing problem and a critical issue to those who currently serve and those who previously served.

Data from the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) universal screening program indicates that approximately 1 out of 5 women and 1 out of 100 men reported some form of MST. While rates of MST are higher among women, there are almost as many men seen in VHA facilities that have experienced MST as there are women. This is because there are many more men in the military than there are women.

Free confidential counseling and treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST are available. This

benefit is available to victims of MST whether or not they reported the incident(s). Individuals seeking help do not need to have a disability rating and may be able to access care even if they are not eligible for other VA services.

On a state level, the Assembly recognizes the need to assist veteran victims of MST. Legislation has been passed by the Assembly in 2012 and again this year that would require the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs to provide assistance to veterans who were subject to MST while they were on active duty. To date, this measure has not been acted on by the State Senate.

This legislation is a good step in helping the many survivors, both male and female, who are still suffering from the effects of MST years after their military service ended. It is our duty and responsibility to hear their voices and do what we can to help with the healing process.

Other items of interest...

Flags to Be Presented to Family

It has been an age-old tradition to honor fallen soldiers by lowering the flags at half-staff at the State Capitol and on public buildings throughout the state. We enacted legislation (Chapter 465 of the Laws of 2013) this year that ensures that the flags lowered to half-staff at the State Capitol in honor of a fallen serviceman or woman are presented to the loved ones of the deceased. This measure represents a small token of our state's appreciation for the service and sacrifices made by our military personnel and their families.

Hire a Vet

The nation's employers have said they seek employees who are good workers and demonstrate leadership, responsibility and loyalty. That sounds like a veteran. Beginning January 1, 2014, employers here in New York State will have an added incentive to seek out veterans for their job openings. A new state tax credit is available to businesses that hire veterans who entered the armed forces after 9/11. There are approximately 75,000 post-9/11 veterans in New York State, and unemployment rates among these veterans are noticeably higher than for their non-veteran counterparts.

Small Business Loans for Veterans

The New York Business Development Corporation (NYBDC) offers a Veterans Loan Program that provides term loans ranging from \$50,000-\$150,000 at a below market fixed interest rate for current or former members of the armed forces. Approximately \$4 million is available statewide for working capital, business acquisition, and the purchase of real estate, machinery and equipment. Eligible applicants must be a New York business where the majority owner is a state resident who is a member or honorably discharged veteran of the United States Armed Forces, including the Regular, Reserve and National Guard components. For more information contact the NYBDC's Buffalo region loan office at 626-3423.



IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD TIME TO THANK A VET

Earlier this year, Assemblyman Schimminger stopped by to visit with several area veterans and express his gratitude for their service. Here, he's pictured with Art Lee of North Tonawanda, Norm Hameister of the City of Tonawanda, Robert Rath of Kenmore and George Trautman of the Town of Tonawanda.



Veterans Update

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HONORING VETERANS

The Town of Tonawanda honored World War II veterans during this year's Fourth of July celebration at the Veterans Memorial at Walter J. Kenney Field in which 168 veterans from the "Greatest Generation" received Certificates of Dedication. The dark storm clouds held out long enough so that the presentations could be completed, which were then followed by a special performance by the award winning American Legion Band of the Tonawandas, Post 264. Meeting with veterans before the ceremony allowed Assemblyman Schimminger the opportunity to learn something of the service of Larry Fama, a World War II honoree who was accompanied at the ceremony by Florian Rzepka, a Vietnam vet. Both are members of the Disabled American Veterans Post 120.