

**ANNUAL REPORT OF JIM MARSZALEK
NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR
WRITTEN REPORT SUBMITTED FOR THE
93RD NATIONAL CONVENTION
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NATIONAL COMMANDER RON F. HOPE, NATIONAL OFFICERS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, AND DELEGATES TO THE 94TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS:

“Evolution”

Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done today.

~ Abraham Lincoln

As National Service Director, it is my sincere pleasure to present to the delegates my report on the endeavors and achievements of the National Service Department. This annual report provides details concerning the DAV National Service Programs during 2014 and our impact in bringing the promise of hope and success into the lives of countless veterans, service members and their families.

DAV is embracing new technologies and digital resources to deliver service and advocacy to injured and ill veterans and their families. With the VA undergoing its most aggressive transformation to date in how it receives and processes claims, we are evolving in ways which are unprecedented throughout DAV history.

Since 2010, the VA has been moving into a paperless, electronic environment with new procedures to improve processing of veterans' claims. DAV has been leading the way with the filing of electronic claims through the Stakeholders Enterprise Portal (SEP) and soon Digits 2 Digits (D2D). We've long recognized the need to afford our NSOs the resources to meet the demand of the electronic claims environment and have moved aggressively this year to ensure they have the best possible tools for the job. As a result, every NSO was provided new desktop scanners. With these new scanners, our NSOs, whether in their respective offices or performing outreach on the Mobile Service Office (MSO), have been on the leading edge of veteran's advocacy.

Furthermore, we are developing a new generation of DAV's Structured and Continued Training (SCT) Program, called iTRAK – interactive, Training, Research, Advocacy and Knowledge. iTRAK will incorporate the newest information technology available to us today and afford our NSOs an interactive training platform that will allow them to remain on the leading edge of veterans advocacy. Beyond its training functions, iTRAK will serve as an at-the-ready online resource for NSOs to use wherever they may be assisting veterans and their families.

Also, we are working to replace our current Case Management System (CMS), which is more than 8 years old. The new CMS will provide our NSOs and TSOs the very best resources, with more flexibility and integration, to make our claims work increasingly digital. It will also improve our services for veterans and provide up-to-the-second access to information for our hard working department and chapter service officers who augment and support DAV's service efforts.

During the course of DAV's history, we have continually adapted to the ever-changing needs of our nation's heroes, their dependents and survivors. As our business practices continue to evolve based upon the rapidly changing advancements in technology, we will do everything possible to ensure all of our country's injured and ill veterans, as well as their families, receive the rights and benefits they have earned.

NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM

Fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served is accomplished through DAV's flagship initiative. Service has always been the mainstay of DAV. Our largest endeavor in fulfilling DAV's mission is our National Service Program. In over 100 offices throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico, we employ a corps of approximately 270 NSOs and 32 Transition Service Officers (TSOs) who counsel and represent veterans and their families with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense and other government agencies.

Our heroes need not be members to take advantage of our assistance, which is provided free of charge. With outlays of \$45,607,940.88 in 2014, these direct services make up the largest item in our budget for program activities. Between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2014, our NSOs and TSOs, who themselves defended the American way of life by way of their military service, represented nearly a quarter million veterans and their families in their claims for VA benefits, obtaining for them more than \$3.7 billion in new and retroactive benefits.

NSOs function as attorneys in fact, assisting injured heroes and their families in filing claims for VA compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pensions, death benefits, employment and training programs. They provide free services such as information seminars and counseling, and community outreach activities such as the Mobile Service Office program. NSOs also represent veterans and active duty service men and women before Discharge Review Boards, Boards for Correction of Military Records, Physical Evaluation Boards, the Transition Goals Planning Service (GPS) and other official panels.

NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICER TRAINING PROGRAMS

DAV National Service Officers continually train throughout their careers so that they are cognizant of the changes in all laws and regulations affecting veterans' benefits. This constant training assures that all DAV NSOs are at the forefront of veterans' advocacy. Our NSOs are highly trained professionals and skilled experts in developing and prosecuting veterans' claims through in-depth reviews of medical histories, in conjunction with application of current law and regulations. They also review rating board decisions, informing veterans and their families of the appeals process and of their appellate rights.

The extensive preparation required for these essential services provided by NSOs begins with our 16-month On-the-Job Training Program, which provides the foundation for new trainees. Trainees are

instructed by tenured supervisory NSOs. The National Service staff at National Service and Legislative Headquarters administer and monitor the program and the instructors.

An NSO's training does not stop after completing 16 months of initial training. In fact training never stops because the laws, regulations and policies, which govern veterans' benefits, continue to change and grow in complexity. That's why equipping our NSOs with state-of-the-art computers and keeping their cutting-edge advocacy skills up to date is of paramount importance. DAV is the only veterans' service organization to have a training program certified for college credit by the American Council on Education.

In addition to these training programs, supervisory staff and selected NSOs from field offices across the country receive specialized instruction in management and leadership development. The goal is to produce the most highly trained representatives possible to serve veterans and their families.

NATIONAL APPEALS OFFICE

DAV employs 10 National Appeals Officers (NAOs) whose duty is to represent veterans; they're dependents and survivors in their appeals before the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA). In FY 2014, DAV NAOs represented 29.2 percent of all appeals decided by the BVA, a caseload of approximately 16,224 appeals. Almost 47 percent of the cases represented by the DAV resulted in remands. These remands resulted in additional consideration or development for 7,534 claimants who had cases that were not adequately developed and considered by the Regional Offices that initially decided them. In more than 29 percent of the cases, involving 4,810 appellants represented by DAV, the claimants' appeals were allowed and the denial of benefits overturned. These numbers indicate that approximately 76 percent of the appeals represented by DAV resulted in original decisions being overturned or remanded to the regional office for additional development and re-adjudication.

JUDICIAL APPEALS

DAV continues its *pro bono* representation program for clients seeking review in the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (Court). Through the DAV National Appeals Office, in 2014, these *pro bono* attorneys extended an offer of free representation before the veteran's court in 2,086 appeals which had been denied by the BVA, and provided personal representation at the Court in over 1,534 of those cases. Since the inception of DAV's *pro bono* program before the federal courts, *pro bono* attorneys have made offers of free representation in more than 5,165 cases and provided free representation before the court in approximately 4,890 cases.

The substantial growth of this program would not have been possible without the coordinated efforts of DAV and two top-notch law firms – Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner, LLP of Washington, D.C., and Chisholm, Chisholm & Kilpatrick of Providence, Rhode Island. Robert Chisholm (of the Chisholm firm) and Ron Smith (of Finnegan) are two of the nation's most accomplished members of the veterans bar, and DAV is pleased to have them in prominent roles in our enlarged program at the Court. By this time next year, we hope to be able to report still another substantial increase in the number of veterans, dependents and survivors served by DAV through this venue.

TRANSITION SERVICE PROGRAM

For the defenders of freedom making the all-important transition back into civilian life, DAV participates in Transition Assistance and Transition Goals Planning Success (GPS) programs.

Our TSOs provide benefits counseling and assistance to service members filing initial claims for VA benefits at nearly 100 military installations throughout the country. By filing compensation claims at separation centers where service medical records and examination facilities are readily available, we are able to provide prompt service to these future veterans. Over the last year, our TSOs conducted 908 formal presentations to 39,569 transitioning service members. During that same time they filed 17,126 claims for VA benefits. Counsel and representation for active duty service men and women during their transition was provided through the military's disability evaluation system. We devoted in excess of \$2 million to this program in 2014.

MOBILE SERVICE OFFICE PROGRAM

The Mobile Service Office (MSO) Program continues to seek new venues to bring DAV service to veterans and dependents in their own communities. DAV National Service Offices are not always easy for veterans to visit due to distance, transportation, health and other reasons. By putting our service offices on the road and assisting veterans where they live, DAV is increasing veterans' accessibility to benefits.

DAV has been focused on a new initiative for 2014, which is to conduct site visits at colleges and universities throughout the nation using our MSO Program. Some colleges and universities visited include the University of Texas, Arizona State University and Indiana State University.

With 10 specially equipped MSOs visiting communities across the country, this outreach effort generates a considerable amount of claims work from veterans who may not otherwise have the opportunity to seek assistance at our national service offices. During 2014, our MSOs traveled 101,104 miles to 922 cities and towns of which 118 were located at colleges and universities. Our NSOs interviewed 23,645 veterans and other potential claimants during these appearances. Nearly \$1.1 million was expended for the MSO Program in 2014.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The National Service Department has the cooperation, support and assistance of Department and Chapter Service Officers across the country. Each receives the training and information necessary to assist those we serve. Our Department and Chapter Service Officer Certification Training Program guarantees the vitality and growth of our local service programs. This provides an environment where our Hospital Service Coordinators, Department and Chapter Service Officers and volunteers work together for the common goal of service to our defenders of freedom. In 2014, DAV trained and certified 2,321 Department and Chapter Service Officers in 43 states.

During 2014, we conducted 33 Information Seminars at various Chapters across the country, with 2,827 individuals in attendance. These Information Seminars provide the opportunity for veterans to discuss VA benefits with our NSOs in their own community, giving Chapters an opportunity to recruit new members and encourage their involvement.

Since 2006, DAV NSOs have offered services at other community-based events, including participation with state and county fairs, air shows, Major League Baseball, the National Football League and NASCAR.

WOMEN VETERANS

Serving in record numbers, women make up about 14 percent of the active duty force and 18 percent of the Guard and reserve forces. Over 160 women service members have made the ultimate sacrifice in combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and over a thousand have been injured or wounded. Since 2000, the number of women veterans using VA health care has more than doubled and their enrollment in VA's health care system is increasing faster than their male counterparts. Although VA has made concerted efforts to ramp up services to meet the increasing demand, VA has struggled to meet the unique health care and support needs of women coming to VA for care.

VA acknowledges the need for internal cultural changes to ensure women feel welcome at VA facilities, and to improve, tailor and expand health care services to comprehensively care for women veteran's gender specific needs. DAV is helping foster greater awareness of the unique needs of women veterans and is working cooperatively with VA officials through our legislative, communications and Foundation resources; providing testimony before Congress; and conducting a variety of forums and discussion groups in Washington, D.C. and throughout the nation.

On September 24, 2014, DAV released a landmark study; *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*. The report provides a comprehensive assessment of existing federal services available for women veterans and found gaps in health care, specialized mental health and homeless services, transition assistance programs, housing options, community support services, employment and efforts to eradicate sexual assault. The report reveals that while the number of women who volunteer to defend our nation is increasing dramatically—they currently do not have the same opportunities for a successful transition in a system with policies and programs that have focused on and were designed primarily for men.

DAV continues our determined advocacy for all veterans, and is the leading veterans' service organization in promoting the needs of women veterans at the national, department and chapter levels. In addition, the DAV Interim Women's Veterans Committee, made up of veterans from across the country, meets bi-annually at our Mid-Winter Conference and National Convention to help set our agenda on the needs of women veterans. To ensure women's unique experiences and sacrifices in serving our nation in uniform are properly recognized, DAV actively seeks out and recruits women veterans to add to the 65 women now serving in our National and Transition Service Officer corps.

HOMELESS VETERANS

VA has made ending veteran homelessness a top priority, undertaking an unprecedented campaign to dramatically increase awareness of VA services available for homeless veterans and veterans at risk of becoming homeless. Homelessness has been an ongoing focus by DAV and remains one of America's most complicated and important social issues.

DAV maintains many ongoing efforts through our Homeless Veterans Initiative to share in the vision of ending homelessness for our nation's veterans. DAV continues to seek legislation and policies that enhance the programs and services to help homeless veterans move from the streets to self-sufficiency. National Service Officers as well as Department and Chapter members have participated in stand downs for homeless veterans nationwide, and on behalf of the National Service Staff, we thank you for all that is done and being planned in order to enhance the lives of homeless veterans and their families across the nation.

RETIREMENTS

DAV NSOs are service-connected disabled veterans from all walks of life. They uphold the great principles of this organization and work to ensure that veterans and their families have legal representation and a voice when filing claims to the VA for benefits. NSOs understand their role as veteran advocates and are dedicated to the DAV's mission of service and improving the lives of veterans disabled during military service.

Our experienced professional NSOs who have retired this past year leave a legacy of commitment and dedication of serving their comrades as advocates for fair and equitable benefits. These individuals served their country and then returned home to work on behalf of other injured and ill veterans as a result of their military service. From the National Service Staff, we wish each of these NSOs a long and healthy retirement. We appreciate their efforts in support of our cause. We had several retirements this year to include National Membership Director Tony Baskerville and NSO Greg Belak. Although Tony retired as the National Membership Director, he began his career as an NSO and will always be considered an NSO first by those who benefited from his advocacy and dedication. These individuals will certainly leave a void that is going to be difficult to fill but they are deserving of our thanks and gratitude. I wish them luck in their retirements and extend our appreciation for a life of service to DAV.

DEATHS

We call to remembrance our National Service Officers who we lost this year. As the nation's veteran population rapidly declines – the attrition takes its toll on our NSO ranks. These NSOs have provided services and aided in fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served for scores of injured and ill veterans, their dependents and survivors. We shall recall and preserve the legacy of the following departed NSOs: Marvin Varias, Floyd Herron, Harold LaPonsie, Alan McCroskey, Harvey Millikin and Larry Dawson.

CONCLUSION

At this time, I wish to recognize the leadership, professionalism and personal sacrifices made by our National Commander Ron Hope who I am proud to report served as a National Service Officer for more than 31 years and all of the National Line Officers; members of the National Executive Committee; the National Finance Committee; and the Officers and Board of Directors for both the National Service Foundation and Charitable Service Trust. I continue to be very grateful for the support and guidance of National Adjutant Marc Burgess. He is a true champion for veteran causes and has given overwhelming support to me and my team of service officers.

We are able to continue to tout our many successes due to their tireless efforts to ensure quality and professionalism in everything that we do. We are able to stay trained in our mission of service to injured and ill veterans and their families because they continue to ensure we have the tools to do so. My appreciation also goes to National Headquarters for their support of our goals and programs during the past year. I thank Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine and National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski for the resources they commit each and every day in support of the Service Departments mission. As a result of their continued support and contributions, the National Service Program time after time has added strength and resolve to everything we have done in 2014.

Appreciation is extended to the National Service Department staff members with whom I have the pleasure of working: Deputy National Service Director Chad Moos, Assistant National Service Directors Scott Trimarchi, John Maki, Justin Hart and Steven Wolf; and our staff of devoted Service Support Specialists, Amanda Evans, Angela D'Aguilar, Queen Blanks, Tyese McCall and the recently retired, Emily Hall.

We would not be able to enjoy this success without the support received through the dedicated assistance given by the DAV Auxiliary, Department and Chapter Service Officers, and Hospital Service Coordinators. Thank you all for your support.

The mission of the DAV would not be accomplished without the dedication and commitment made by those individuals who have made a career of service to veterans by making the full-time commitment as a National Service Officers, Transition Service Officers and support staff members. These individuals work each and every day as tireless advocates on behalf of America's injured and ill veterans, and their families. Please ensure you join me in recognizing the efforts of all those who work with the National Service Department to ensure our nation's heroes receive the professional services they so rightfully deserve.