

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

POST 9934 AND AUXILIARY 9934

DANA POINT, CALIFORNIA
FEBRUARY 2024



ALL STATE POST 2004-05, 2005-06, 2007-08,
2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13,
2013-14, 2014-2015, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-2018-
2019-2020, 2021-2022

ALL AMERICAN POST 2007-08
2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-2014,
2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2019-2020, 2021-2022

2018 NATIONAL OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD
2022 NATIONAL OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Greetings Comrades,

I hope that all of you are in good health and with spirits soaring. The first few months of the year are, for the most part, very quiet as Post activities go. But the business of the Post continues. I say this because a few of you are unaware of the continued assistance the Post gives to our Veterans and Still Serving Military, when the need arises for Emergency Assistance.

We continue to be the "go to" organization for emergency housing, financial assistance and support for South Orange County Veterans and their families. With the lack of funding, inflation and a shortage of volunteers, many non-profits are at a loss to provide help to those who need it.

We are very lucky to have our office staff of Bill Manes and Cindy Somerville who field so many calls and emails from those requesting help from our Post. Equally busy is Wayne Yost who answers his phone at all hours, day or night, to help arrange for emergency assistance.

All three of them deserve a "Well Done" from us all.

To those of you who have attended the last few Post meetings, you have become acquainted with our Voice of Democracy winner from Post 9934, Eliza Bourne. Eliza went on to win 1st Place from District 2.

Then on January 26th at the California Department VFW Mid-Winter Convention, our Eliza Bourne AGAIN took 1st Place for the State of California!!!

She now goes on to National...Best of Luck Eliza. You have our good wishes and full support!

Currently the plans are to recognize our Post 9934 First Responder Awards at the Dana Point City Council meeting on April 16th. Those awards will go to:

Deputy Sheriff Edward Aguilar

Firefighter Shelly Appleby

Reserve Firefighter Connor Macleod

Please try to attend and show our appreciation for these heroes who "Run Towards Danger."

Before I leave you, as always...remember those Comrades who may need a quick phone call, visit or a meal with a friend.

Please be safe and be kind to each other.

*Rick Jauregui, Commander
Post 9934, Dana Point*

VFW POST 9934 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FEBRUARY 2024

Tuesday, February 6th, 6:00 p.m. - Dana Point City Council Meeting

Wednesday, February 7th, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Veterans Disability Clinic - Dana Point Community Center
34052 Del Obispo St.

Tuesday, February 13th, 6:00 p.m. - VFW Post Meeting - South Shores Church, 32712 Crown Valley Pkwy, Dana Point. Feel free to invite a Veteran guest so they can see what our Post does.

Wednesday, February 14th - VALENTINES DAY ❤️

Saturday, February 17th, 9:15a.m. - 12:30 p.m - VFW District 2 meeting hosted by Post 9934 at South Shores Church, 32712 Crown Valley Parkway, Dana Point. All members of our Post and Auxiliary are encouraged to attend – see how your VFW District functions. Breakfast will be served.

Monday, February 19th - PRESIDENTS' DAY 🇺🇸

Tuesday, February 20th, 6:00 p.m. - Dana Point City Council Meeting

Wednesday, February 21st, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Veterans Disability Clinic - Dana Point Community Center
34052 Del Obispo St.



From left to right: Daniel Jennings, District 2 Commander, Eliza Bourne, Department Voice of Democracy Winner, Mary Lombard, District 2 Auxiliary President.

VFW Dept of California Mid-Winter Conference Holiday Inn - Sacramento, California

Voice of Democracy Banquet, January 26, 2024

The evening included a Lion Dance Group performance, remarks from State Commander Bryant, remarks from State Auxiliary President Diana Russell-Milton, remarks from Past Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland, a keynote address by California State Senator Caroline Menjivar, and more.

Post 9934's Voice of Democracy 1st place winner Eliza Bourne won first place at District 2 and went on to become VFW Department of California's winner. Congratulations to Eliza!!! We are so proud of her!

TO CONTACT YOUR POST

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/vfwpost9934

TO CONTACT U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

1-800-MyVA411

FEBRUARY 2024 MEETING

The next meeting of the Post and Auxiliary 9934 will be Tuesday, February 13, 2024. The Post meeting will be held at South Shores Church, 32712 Crown Valley Parkway, Dana Point starting at 6:00 p.m.

The Auxiliary will meet at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 33501 Stonehill, Dana Point starting at 6:30 p.m.

VA STAFF ARE COMPLETING MORE CLAIMS THAN EVER BUT STILL FALLING BEHIND

Veterans Affairs claims staff have processed 34% more claims this fiscal year than at the same point in 2023.

Veterans Affairs benefits processors are on pace to shatter last year's workload levels, but that still might not be enough to make significant progress on the overdue claims backlog until next year.

In fiscal 2023, department benefits officials completed nearly 2 million veteran and survivor claims, the most in agency history and up almost 16% from the previous year. During a press call Wednesday, VA Undersecretary for Benefits Joshua Jacobs said through the first three months of fiscal 2024, his staffers are 34% ahead of last year's pace. "A key goal for this year is to break last year's record, and we are on track to do just that for veterans," he said. "We're not letting up."

Total number of VA claims lost in online systems tops 120,000

The number of veterans discovered to be affected by the mistakes has grown in recent months.

Jacobs said that prior to Oct. 1, VA benefits employees had processed more than 9,000 claims in a day only three times. Since that date, they've surpassed that mark 37 times.

Much of the new success has to do with hiring. Jacobs said that the VA claims workforce is roughly 20% larger than it was in fall 2022, at about 32,000 employees. Officials have set a hiring goal of 4,000 more (12.5%) for the current fiscal year.

"We had a massive hiring effort last year that involved both our human resources functions and also our leadership teams across the country," he said. "We've learned a lot

and we are leveraging those lessons to continue improving the way that we do our vetting and our screening and hiring and onboarding and training."

Despite those successes, however, the total number of backlogged first-time benefits claims in the system — cases that have taken more than four months to complete — earlier this month topped 400,000, the highest that figure has been since June 2014.

That total had been down to around 70,000 cases for several years before the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring 2020.

Disruptions in office work during the pandemic, combined with hundreds of thousands of new cases filed in the wake of the PACT Act passage in 2022, have resulted in a steady rise over the last 16 months. The total caseload in fiscal 2023 was nearly 40% higher than the previous year, meaning the record processing work wasn't enough to keep up.

Jacobs said he expects the backlog to stabilize in coming months and fall back down to pre-pandemic levels in 2025. Officials expect to release specific projection targets in coming weeks.

The undersecretary also acknowledged that impressive performance statistics are little comfort to veterans who are frustrated waiting for their claims to be finalized.

"We cannot and we will not lose sight of the fact that behind each of these claims is an individual veteran, a family member or a survivor, not a number," he said. "We're very mindful that the Veterans Benefits Administration is the first VA touch point for many veterans, which is why we're also working to build an integrated customer experience for veterans and their families."

[By Leo Shane III Wednesday, Jan 17]

VETERANS CEMETARY WOULD COST \$123M

That's the figure state officials give just for the first phase of project in Anaheim Hills' Gypsum Canyon

Plans are coming into focus for Orange County's first veterans cemetery, with state officials releasing a feasibility report that says it would cost \$123 million to develop the first portion in Anaheim Hills' Gypsum Canyon.

Orange County is the largest county in the state without a veterans cemetery, and after years of planning for one in Irvine, the proposal has changed to using county property in the hills off the 91 Freeway. The Southern California Veterans Cemetery, which is proposed to be built on a 156-acre site, would end up having 216,676 total burials, with the majority of that for holding cremation remains, according to a final concept plan released Friday by the California Department of Veterans Affairs.

The proposed cemetery would be near the 91 and 241 freeways where currently there's just open space. The Orange County Cemetery district owns the 283-acre property and already was developing plans for a public cemetery when the decision was made to split the property with a veterans cemetery. The concept plan released Friday gives details on the first phase of developing the veterans cemetery. Phase one wouldn't have any crypts to bury caskets and instead would have 15,532 spaces for cremation remains. Adding crypts remains an option but it would cost an additional \$6.7 million.

[Continued on Page 4 **VETERANS CEMETERY**]

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we do our vetting and our screening and hiring and onboarding and training."

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[By [Leo Shane III](#) Wednesday, Jan 17]

[**VETERANS CEMETERY** Continued from Page 3]

Nick Berardino, president of the Veterans Alliance of Orange County, celebrated the report's finding saying it shows that it's feasible to build the cemetery and that it could be done quickly. The project currently has about \$45 million of support pledged from the county and the state. The state will apply for a grant with the Department of Veterans Affairs to help with construction, an announcement from Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva and state Sen. Tom Umberg said. Construction costs for the first phase are estimated at \$66 million. Berardino said he believes the savings from sharing costs with the civilian cemetery will help close the funding gap.

"Absolutely no question we will get past the funding gap," he said. "We are so close now with the first phase and the cost savings." Once built out, the cemetery would have 64,141 crypts and 151,908 spaces for cremation remains. Access to the cemetery would be via Gypsum Canyon Road and Santa Ana Canyon Road. The cemetery concept calls for a double Allée effect of trees at its entrance gate and winding roads offering "a peaceful journey through the

site." The build-out for the cemetery would be in 10 phases over 100 years. The cemetery is proposed to have a contemporary architectural style with views of the surrounding mountains, valley and city.

"In releasing the feasibility study for public analysis, the people of Orange County are able to see the progress we have made in securing a final resting place for the brave men and women who answered the call to serve our nation," Quirk-Silva said in a news release. Umberg said it was encouraging to see the project finally moving forward.

The Irvine Co. previously owned the land and transferred it to the county as open space. The Orange County Board of Supervisors then transferred it to the cemetery district. District leaders are now working with Anaheim officials to rezone and subdivide the property, which will need to be approved by city leaders. The public cemetery could begin construction work as soon as this summer, "which would be far earlier" than the state could develop the veterans portions, according to the report.

[*Michael Slaten, Orange County Register, January 27, 2024*]

BLUE RIBBON BEER RUN

Army Sgt. Rick Duggan was nervous. The 20-year-old infantryman from the 1st Air Cavalry Division had just set up an ambush zone close to the demilitarized zone near North Vietnam when he was called back to the perimeter by his superiors. No one got called back unless something was wrong.

But instead of receiving bad news, the Manhattan native was handed a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer by John “Chickie” Donohue, his neighbor from the working-class neighborhood of Inwood. Seeing Donohue dressed in his madras shirt and white jeans so far from home was shocking.

“I just froze,” Duggan said. “I couldn’t believe I was seeing what I was seeing. These kids in my neighborhood were dying left and right ... I had to do something.”

That surprise soon turned to a sense of fear. Duggan’s superiors told him Donohue was his responsibility, so the two had to return to the ambush zone as darkness approached. That evening, Donohue hunkered down with the rest of Duggan’s outfit, at one point hugging a grenade launcher as a brief firefight ensued during the course of the night. Luckily, there were no American casualties, but Duggan knew Donohue had to get out of the area since his unit was leaving.

“I had to hitch a ride on the helicopter, assuming it was going to a place from there that was good for me,” said Donohue, who was working as a merchant mariner at the time. “... The closest place from there was Quan Tri airfield. ... Anywhere south was good for me.”

MAKING GOOD ON HIS PROMISE

Donohue’s harrowing journey to Vietnam became known as “The Greatest Beer Run Ever,” and it has been captured in a book, documentary, and major motion picture. It all started after Donohue’s roommate, Bobby Pappas, had been shipped off to Vietnam. Donohue, who had served in the Marine Corps from 1958-64, was tossing back a few beers at Doc Fiddler’s pub one November night in 1967. When the conversation turned to the war protests in Central Park, bartender George Lynch told patrons somebody ought to go to Vietnam to buy the American boys some beers. So, Donohue announced that he would do it, made a list of friends to see, and a few



The story of John "Chickie" Donohue's trip to Vietnam is told in the 2022 movie "The Greatest Beer Run Ever," available on Apple TV+. Photo: Courtesy Apple

days later hopped aboard a merchant ship named Drake Victory carrying ammunition to Vietnam.

The boat needed an oiler, which Donohue was certified to do by the U.S. Coast Guard. He was confident he could make it to Vietnam, having traveled there before — ironically on a ship laden with American beer. But Donohue wasn’t so sure he could see all his friends he set out to see.

Tom Collins, the younger brother of one of Donohue’s friends, was serving as an Army police officer in Quy Nhon in the central highlands. Duggan was an infantryman stationed at the time in the Quang Tri province near North Vietnam, and Pappas was a radio operator at an ammunition depot just outside of Saigon.

“I didn’t think it was crazy,” Donohue said. “I thought it was possible — probably not probable, but possible. While these kids in my neighborhood were dying left and right and funeral masses were being held every few weeks, I had to do something. I was trained as a Marine, and a war was going on.”

FIRST ROUND

Collins was working as a bank teller in 1966 at age 20 when he was drafted.

After training at Fort Bragg, N.C., Collins, who was a specialist 4th class when he later got out of Vietnam, went to Quy Nhon, serving as a police officer in the 127th Military Police Company. He rotated his time between road and town patrols and assisting with convoys and POW camps. One day, he was on an ammunition boat on the Gulf of Tonkin when he saw on a tender a familiar face that he couldn’t believe was in Vietnam.

[Continued on Page 6 **BLUE RIBBON BEER RUN**]

[BLUE RIBBON BEER RUN Continued from Page 5]

“I am looking at this guy, and I said, ‘I know this guy. Where do I know this guy from?’” Collins said. “Let’s face it, you’re not expecting someone from your neighborhood to show up. He comes along the side of the ship and says, ‘Collins’ little brother?’ And I said, ‘Chickie Donohue? What the hell are you doing here?’ He said, ‘I came to bring you a beer,’ and I said, ‘Holy s---, you are out of your mind.’” Seeing a friend from the neighborhood in such an unexpected place was a pleasant surprise for Collins, who said that beer “went down like a glass of water.” After a few Pabsts and a night at a local bar, Donohue asked if he could take Collins to visit Duggan, an elementary and high school friend from the neighborhood who lived in the same building as Donohue’s family.

The story, which Donohue repeatedly used throughout the trip, was they had to go visit their brother and let him know about their recently deceased stepmother. Collins’ superiors weren’t having it, however. “The first sergeant looks at Chickie Donohue, and looks at me, and looks at Chickie Donohue, and says, ‘I don’t know what the hell you’re up to, but Collins is going nowhere,’” said Collins, laughing.

SECOND ROUND

Before Donohue could meet Duggan, he accidentally ran into Kevin McLoone, a friend from Long Beach, N.Y. Donohue was walking down the side of the road when he spotted his buddy driving a jeep toward An Khe, a town not far from where Donohue originally made port. A Marine who served in Vietnam from 1963-65, McLoone was helping the war effort as a civilian by installing scrambling systems in U.S. helicopters to make it difficult for the North Vietnamese to intercept radio frequencies the military was using. McLoone stopped his jeep when he heard Donohue yell his name. He pulled over, downed a few beers on the side of the road, and then drove Donohue to a nearby air strip where he made his way north to see Duggan.

“He has a very distinctive voice,” said McLoone, who left the Marine Corps as a lance corporal. “I stopped the jeep and said, ‘What are you doing here?’ And he told me he was bringing beers [to his friends] to boost their morale.”



Sunday February 11, 2024 @ 3:30 p.m. PST

LAST CALL

After his sleepless night with Duggan, Donohue eventually sweet-talked his way down to Saigon. Pappas was working for the Army Corps of Engineers as a civilian when he was drafted. He had received three draft deferments — the last one for his wedding day — before finally shipping off to Vietnam in the fall of 1967.

The newly married Pappas had just learned Donohue was in the country after getting a letter from Donohue’s girlfriend. However, he didn’t know all the hoops he had to jump through to see the rest of his buddies.

The two managed to share drinks on several occasions at the NCO club and officers’ club despite the start of the Tet Offensive, which was responsible for an explosion at Pappas’ ammunition depot. Luckily, Pappas survived, and Donohue eventually made it home safely in late March.

Ironically, Donohue had told Pappas during his going-away party that he would be over in Vietnam to have a drink with him at Christmastime. Turns out, he was off by only a month.

“I just thought, Yeah, sure,” said Pappas, who left the Army as a sergeant. “I didn’t know what he had done with the other guys, so I didn’t think it was any big deal.”

CURTAIN CALL

Today, the men are retired, living up and down the East Coast. In September 2022, they came together to relive their magical moment at the Toronto Film Festival screening of “The Greatest Beer Run Ever.” After the movie, the lights went out and the spotlight shone on them, eliciting a five-minute standing ovation from the crowd. It was a far different reception than many Vietnam veterans had received after the war.

“They were never appreciated or apologized to for the treatment they received when they came home,” Donohue said. “I hope, if anything, [moviegoers] get that [I] appreciated what they did.” Collins certainly did.

“There are not many Chickie Donohues around,” Collins said. “He could’ve stayed home, drank in the bar, and never put his foot in Vietnam, but he did. And that is something that I will always respect him for.”

[Kipp Hanley is a former Military Officers Association of American staff writer.]

Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center
 5901 E 7th St, Long Beach, CA 90822

VETERANS SOCIAL CONNECTION

0830-1030 | Canteen Patio | Bldg 165

JAN 26	JUL 26
FEB 23	AUG 30
MAR 29	SEP 27
APR 26	OCT 25
MAY 31	NOV 15
JUN 28	DEC 20

Proudly Sponsored by:
 Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center
 Veterans Connection Committee
 Food and coffee will be served



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
 Veterans Health Administration
 VA Long Beach Healthcare System

AMID COVID SURGE, VA HOSPITALS NOT REQUIRING MASKS FOR ALL PATIENTS

Veterans Affairs health officials are not currently planning to require all patients and visitors at department hospitals to wear masks despite several private health care systems making the move in response to rising COVID-19 numbers.

However, local officials can opt to reinstate mask mandates for patient and staff safety if regional conditions warrant it.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that COVID-19 hospitalizations were up more than 56% from the start of December to the start of January. As of Jan. 14, active COVID-19 cases within the VA health care system were up nearly 33% over the last month, matching their highest level since 12 months earlier.

VA rescinded its previous mandatory masking requirement for department medical sites in March 2023, just two months before the formal end of the national pandemic emergency. “At this time, VA has no recommendation for reinstating VA-wide masking requirements,” said VA spokesman Gary Kunich. “Our experts are continuously evaluating the national and international epidemiological conditions and providing

policy support.”

Department health researchers reported nearly 1,800 deaths related to COVID-19 among VA patients in 2023. Since March 2020, more than 25,600 patients connected to VA health care have died from complications related to the virus.

Health care officials have warned in recent years that veterans may be more susceptible to serious health problems stemming from coronavirus infection because of other existing medical complications.

Kunich said local health care leaders can opt to make masks mandatory regardless of the national policy if they see local surges in cases.

VA medical staff have provided more than 5.2 million COVID-19 vaccine doses over the last two years. Veterans or family members interested in receiving a booster can contact their closest VA health care location for information on availability.

[By Leo Shane III Wednesday, Jan 17]

POST OFFICERS FOR 2023-2024

Post Commander:	Ricardo Jauregui	Service Officer:	Aaron Pluff
Senior Vice Commander:	Richard Alonzo	Service Officers Team:	Jim Socks
Junior Vice Commander	Carlos Garcia		Don Ellis
Post Quartermaster	Bill Manes		Ben Valencia
Assistant Quartermaster	Wayne Yost		John Coon
Post Chaplain:	Ronald Egigian	Service Officer Advisor	Marty Hoffman
Post Surgeon	Gil Castro	Service Officer Support	Debbie Yost
Judge Advocate	Dolores Padgett		
Adjutant	David Vera	Trustee (3-year term)	Robert Pruitt
Women Veterans Coordinator	Marcia Kuehl	Trustee (2-year term)	Scott Roberts
Post Color Guard Captain	Carlos Garcia	Trustee (1-year term)	Richard Carr

AUXILIARY OFFICERS FOR 2023-2024

President	Lisa Mers	Trustee 3	Judy Brandmeier
Junior Vice President	Sharon Miller	Trustee 2	Sharon Miller
Treasurer	Cindy Somerville	Trustee 1	Mary Koebler
Secretary	Terry Marr	Chaplain	Yvonne English
Guard	Tory Boegeman	Conductor	Ralph Mariano



FEBRUARY 14



FEBRUARY 19

DANA POINT VFW POST AND AUXILIARY 9934
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