

## **DAV is leading the way in seeking to change the culture in VA**

Welcome to the women veteran's corner:

As I said in last month's newsletter, I would like to highlight one of our committee members. Our first committee member will be Connie Clayton. Her background is quite impressive, and she is a valuable member of the Women Veterans Committee. In her own words:

### Military fun facts

- I was the 151st woman to go through Army co-ed basic training at Fort Lost in the Woods, Missouri shortly after the Vietnam War.
- My MOS:98 G, Russian linguist, Electronic Warfare Interceptor.
- I served for 6 1/2 years in a tactical unit, deploying to Eastern European border sites.
- I was the only woman to be chosen to work directly with the Norwegian Army, above the Arctic Circle during a multinational military mission.
- I spent five years in Germany, stationed 30 kilometers from where my father served in World War Two.
- To show I was not weak, I used to carry around 2 full Jerry cans in each hand. (Roughly 40 pounds each).
- All five of my siblings are veterans: Air Force, Navy, Marines and Army.

I later worked for the Department of Workforce Development Office of Veterans Services as a DVOP (Disabled Veteran Outreach Program) for over 20 years. In that job, I assisted disabled veterans find employment. I also organized and conducted yearly job fairs.

I believe in lifelong learning and earned a master's degree in Social Work four years ago. I am currently working on writing a book about military siblings. I joined the DAV because a World War 2 veteran asked me to. I currently serve as the Adjutant and Service Officer for chapter 42. I am an alternate on and secretary for the Wisconsin DAV Women Veteran Committee. I love that the DAV is focused on veteran legislation, promoting resources for women veterans, and even helping veterans who are not members.

Thank you, Connie, for all you have done for the United States and your fellow veterans.

There are more than 2,000,000 women veterans in the United States today according to the VA. They comprise 10% of the veteran population and are on target to be 18% by 2040. More than half of women veterans using the VA are service connected.

In 2014, DAV released a report called *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*. A follow-up report was in 2018 entitled, *Woman Veterans: The Journey Ahead*.

The 2014 report looks at barriers' women veterans have returning from recent deployments, and the readjustment to the civilian world. In 2018, the study looks at the progress made and the needs of this diverse population.

Some VA's challenges have to do with the sheer numbers of the women returning. Since 2000, the numbers have increased from 160,000 to 500,000. For service-connected women, the numbers jumped from 48% in 2000, to 63% in 2015.

Women veterans have different needs, preferences, and perspectives than their male counterparts. Yet, they still do not get their basic needs met in parts of the VA, because the VA was originally set up for men, not women. The VA has been slow to change and implement health needs for women. Although there has been some improvement, there is still a long way to go.

Joy Ilem, DAV's National Legislature Director, has testified on numerous occasions before Congressional Committees on women veterans' issues and the VA's culture. She has helped them understand the dire need for cultural changes in the VA.

It is bad enough one third of VA employees are sexually and physical assaulted. But, to have one quarter of women veterans seeking health care subjected to the same treatment, is disheartening. Until the cultural attitude in the entire VA changes, women veterans will never receive the proper health care and respect their service merited. DAV's efforts in seeking to change the VA's culture towards women, says a lot about our Organization.

My big DAV shout out this month goes to no other than our own DAV. Thanks for having all the women veterans' six DAV!

As with all our prior newsletters, if you know of a woman veteran in Wisconsin that needs DAV's services please contact me at 920-915-8381. If I cannot give the answer, I have a wealth of resources to choose from to assist them. Also, if you have a topic you would like to see in the newsletter, drop me a line. Until next month, stay safe and enjoy the holidays anyway you can.

Respectfully submitted  
Sandy Pharis  
Chair, DAV Women Veterans Committee