



# WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK

## Returning Home from Deployment



*LTCOL Hank G. Birkdale at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar*

In December 2004, I returned from a four-month deployment that took me on missions to Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition to my personal experience returning home, I am the commander of an Air Force Reserve squadron at Hanscom AFB, where I have deployed units to various locations in the Middle East. I have talked to many returning veterans and found common feelings among them. Everyone reacts differently, but I believe most people experience at least one of the following: exhaustion, confusion, and job worries.

By exhaustion I not only mean physical exhaustion, but mental exhaustion as well. A returning veteran who has spent a year in life-threatening situations will be exhausted, regardless of the mission. Returning to family life can be confusing. New rules and routines might be in place to compensate for the fact that the military member was gone. Now that the military member is back, he or she may wonder "Where do I fit in here?" Job worries are prevalent, especially for Guard and Reserve members. Not only do they have to integrate back into family life, but they also have to devote energy toward returning to work very quickly after demobilization.

Mental and physical healthcare services are available to combat veterans through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Beth Brown (781-687-3428) is the point of contact for veterans seeking VA services in New England. VA Vet Centers offer readjustment counseling that may ease your transition. The VA's website contains additional resources for combat veterans, see [www.seamlesstransition.va.gov](http://www.seamlesstransition.va.gov). Finally, call 617-210-5784 to request a copy of the *Welcome Home Guide*, which covers state veterans' benefits for combat veterans (pg. 3).

Returning from a deployment is stressful. Be aware that there are resources to help ease the stress.

By *LTCOL Hank G. Birkdale, Air Force Reserve*

## A Message from Heidi



*Brigadier General Aisha Bint Al Hussein and Heidi Kruckenberg in Texas*

In June, I attended the National Association of State Women Veterans' Coordinators sixth annual conference in Corpus Christi, Texas. The conference was informative, with workshops and presentations on a range of women veterans' issues. One highlight was hearing from Her Royal Highness, Brigadier General Aisha Bint Al Hussein, Princess of Jordan. Her military training and career are filled with pioneering efforts, such as being the first woman in the Middle East to complete five military parachute jumps and receive her wings. BrigGen Aisha spoke about her role as Director of the Directorate of Women's Affairs in the Jordanian Armed Forces.

At the conference, my counterparts in other states shared ideas for reaching out to, assisting, and honoring women veterans. Many states host a statewide event honoring women veterans, something the Network used to do with its annual luncheon. In 2004, the luncheon was cancelled due to declining attendance and rising costs. With the **VA Women Veterans' Holiday Luncheon** (pg. 2) and the **Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans' Luncheon** (pg. 3), it seemed that adding another luncheon was unnecessary. I began to look for a chance to host another event to honor women veterans.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I announce that the Network will be co-sponsoring with the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, the "**Women Are Veterans Too**" event on Thursday, November 10 (pg. 4). I encourage you to attend this ceremony, which will honor the state's women veterans and recognize the efforts of a stellar veteran through the Outstanding Woman Veteran Award. There will be several events honoring women veterans this fall. I hope you'll join us to celebrate women's military service.

1 *Heidi Kruckenberg—Women's Coordinator*

## VA Updates

### Improving VHA Healthcare for Women Veterans



(Top, L-R) Amy Bergeron, Lynda King, Dawne Vogt, and Lynlee Tanner  
(Bottom, L-R) Rita Samper and Heidi La Bash

**Part I:** As the single largest provider of care in the United States, the VHA is making efforts to better accommodate the healthcare needs of the growing number of women veterans. Yet, VHA's historical orientation toward treating male patients may result in a less-than-optimal care environment for female patients. We conducted a study to examine VHA healthcare workers' attitudes toward women veterans and their healthcare use. Specifically, we studied stereotypes of female patients (*gender-role ideology*), empathy toward the needs of female patients (*gender sensitivity*), and knowledge about women veterans and their VHA care (*knowledge*). Findings indicated room for improvement in beliefs about women's use of healthcare services (e.g., beliefs about overuse of services), sensitivity toward privacy concerns (e.g., sensitivity to the need for private examination rooms), and knowledge regarding VA services (e.g., knowledge regarding the availability of a Women Veterans Program Manager at every VA).

**Part II:** Women have been essential to the U.S. military from the first battle cry of the Revolutionary War to the current conflict in the Middle East. Women are joining the military in record numbers, and many are expected to seek healthcare at VHA. The VHA has improved healthcare for women veterans, but there is more work to be done!

To address the three areas of interpersonal care previously identified as in need of improvement (gender-role ideology, gender sensitivity, and general knowledge of women veterans), we developed and then administered a brief, engaging, interactive program entitled *Caring for Women Veterans* to VHA employees from multiple Boston area facilities. The multi-media CD-formatted program includes, for example, clips of situations healthcare employees might encounter in their work with women and an interactive portion that prompts employees to provide judgments of how they would respond to particular situations. Four weeks after participating in the program, employees' responses indicated that *Caring for Women Vet-*

*erans* successfully improved their sensitivity to and knowledge of women veterans. With these encouraging results, our program is being reviewed for wider distribution to VHA employees to improve VHA healthcare for women veterans across the United States.

By Amy A. Bergeron, Heidi La Bash, Lynlee Tanner, Dawne Vogt, and Lynda King, Women's Health Sciences Division

### Stress Reduction Program at Northampton VA

The Women Veterans' Advisory Committee at the Northampton VA Medical Center is developing a program that will address the effect that stress has on our bodies. The Committee discussed various stress reduction techniques such as massage therapy, Reiki therapy, acupuncture, yoga, etc. This program will educate women veterans of the many ways in which they can reduce stress in their lives. This event is planned for **Saturday, October 15, 2005**, in the Learning Center. Call 413-584-4040.

### 6th Annual VA Women Veterans' Holiday Luncheon and Information Fair



Brigadier General Wilma Vaught

The Women Veterans' Healthcare Programs of the Boston VA Healthcare System will host its sixth annual Holiday Luncheon and Information Fair on **Saturday, December 3, 2005**, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the USS Jacob Jones VFW, Post 2017, Eastern Ave., Dedham, MA.

Back by popular demand, the keynote speaker will be Brigadier General Wilma Vaught, USAF (Ret.), one of the most highly decorated military women in U.S. History. BrigGen Vaught is President of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Captain Bonnie McIntosh, an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran who works for the VA Boston Healthcare System in Brockton, will be a guest speaker.

Holiday spirit will be the order of the day with special gifts for women presenting their VA cards. Reserve early, this event has been a sell-out luncheon the past four years. Contact Jeri Rumsis (774-826-3133), Pat Robinson (857-364-4120) or Diane Harness-DiGloria (774-826-1435) with questions. Tickets cost \$15 each. Please return the reservation form on the facing page before the November 11th deadline.

**\*VA HOLIDAY LUNCHEON RESERVATION FORM\***

**Luncheon date: December 3, 2005**

**Catered Lunch at \$15 per person:** Chicken soup, salad, turkey dinner with all the fixin's, rolls, coffee/tea, and dessert

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Vet:** Y N

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City/State/Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guests:** \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my check in the amount of:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ turkey dinners @ \$15 each.

**Make checks payable to:  
Women Veterans' Healthcare**

**Mail this form with your check to:**

Diane Harness-DiGloria, Women's Health Center  
Brockton VA Medical Center  
940 Belmont St.  
Brockton, MA 02301

**DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 11, 2005**

**Women Who Fly Exhibit**



***Kathleen Melihan flying an Army helicopter***

Since its October 2003 opening in Attleboro, Massachusetts, the Women at Work Museum has launched four major exhibits. While honoring the achievement of women throughout history and around the world, the

museum provides learning opportunities for people of all ages that promote leadership, economic independence, and expertise in math, science, engineering, and technology.

Opening on **October 30, 2005**, the exhibit *Women Who Fly* will feature women pilots and astronauts. The exhibit will celebrate the significant contributions women have made and continue to make to the progress of aviation and aerospace. Representatives of the following organizations are presently involved in the development of the museum—the 99ers, Air Classic Race, U.S. Army Reserves, Wings Across America, and the Whirly Girls. If you or someone you know would like to contribute to the *Women Who Fly* exhibit, contact Katherine Honey at khoney@comcast.net or at 508-222-4430.

**By Katherine Honey, Women at Work Museum**

**Welcome Home Guide for Combat Veterans**

Approximately 2,100 women from Massachusetts are currently serving active duty. This figure includes members of the U.S. Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Maine Corps, and Navy, as well as the Massachusetts Air and Army National Guard. Women make up roughly 15% of the active-duty population. Every day women return to Massachusetts from their deployment and begin to adjust to home life. The Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) compiled a 24-page guide summarizing veterans' benefits and rights, which is tailored to fit the needs and specific questions of Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom veterans. The *Welcome Home Guide* covers a range of topics. Call 617-210-5784 to request a copy of the guide.

**Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans to Host Luncheon in October**

The Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans will host its Annual Luncheon on **Sunday, October 16, 2005**, at a new location—the Hanscom Air Force Base Officer's Club. All women veterans and their guests are invited to attend this event, which will have a jewelry sale, raffle, and VA Health Fair. Advance registration only. Upon receipt of your payment, you will receive a postcard with directions and other information. With questions, please call Stephanie Landry at 781-925-4486.

**Governor's Advisory Committee  
Luncheon Registration Form  
Sunday, October 16, 2005, Noon  
Hanscom AFB Officer's Club**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City/State/Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Number of tickets: \_\_\_\_\_ x \$18 each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Choice of meal: grilled chicken breast \_\_\_\_\_  
baked scrod \_\_\_\_\_

(please indicate choices by number, not a check mark)

**Checks payable to: Women Veterans' Committee**

**Mail this form with your check to:**

**Stephanie Landry  
290 Newport Rd.  
Hull, MA 02045**

**DEADLINE: October 8, 2005**

Department of Veterans' Services  
Attn: Women Veterans' Network  
600 Washington Street, Suite 1100  
Boston, MA 02111

PRESORTED  
FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
BOSTON MA  
PERMIT NO. 56299

**If you don't wish to be on our mailing list or if your address is incorrect, please send your request for removal or address change in writing to the address in the upper-left corner of this page.**

### **Wanted: Outstanding Women Veterans**

The contributions of Massachusetts' women in the military will be honored this Veterans' Day week when the Women Veterans' Network and the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) join together to celebrate Massachusetts' women veterans.

The "Women Are Veterans Too" ceremony, which will be held on **November 10 at 10:30 a.m.** in the State House's Nurses Hall, will feature presentations by women veterans and their supporters, as well as special recognition of several outstanding women veterans.

Your assistance is requested in bringing these women to the attention of the Award Selection Committee. A Massachusetts woman is eligible for this award if she served active duty in the regular U.S. military, National Guard, or Reserves. Nominations must include an overview of military service and a description of any personal sacrifices or hardships the woman endured in order to serve. In addition, please cite specific examples of accomplishments regarding the enhancement of the lives of female veterans through community service. Most importantly, please specify why the nominee merits special recognition as an Outstanding Woman Veteran.

Nominations are due no later than September 30, 2005, and should be mailed to the Women Veterans' Network, 600 Washington St., Suite 1100, Boston, MA 02111. The nomination form is available for download at [www.mass.gov/women/calendar/upcoming.htm](http://www.mass.gov/women/calendar/upcoming.htm).

All veterans, nominees, and nominators are encouraged to attend the November ceremony.

*By Paula Daddona, Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women*

### **Call for Artifacts**



The Women's Memorial (Women in Military Service for America Memorial—WIMSA) in Washington, D.C., is developing a new exhibit to focus on women's service during Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom to be unveiled on Veterans' Day 2005. The Memorial's Foundation is looking for pictures, artifacts and memorabilia, uniforms, and oral histories of women who served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Items can be donated or loaned for the duration of the exhibit. Contact Lee Ann Ghajar, Curator of Exhibits at [exhibits@womensmemorial.org](mailto:exhibits@womensmemorial.org) or by calling 800-222-2294 for more information about how to participate.