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1. **CONTACTS:** To help you obtain information about claims or other needs:

- **VETERANS CRISIS LINE:** Veterans and loved ones can call (800) 273-8255 24/7 and then press 1 with total anonymity to speak to a professional counselor. A Houston Vet Center counselor, **James Bailey**, is available in Don Montoya's office on Thursdays for veterans and their families. Call Don's office at (979) 532-1311 for an appointment to see James Bailey.
- **Don Montoya:** Wharton County Veterans Service Officer, 1017 N. Alabama Road, Wharton, TX 77488; (979) 532-1311 don.montoya@co.wharton.tx.us; **OFFICE HOURS:** M, TUES, THUR (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-12:00 noon & 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.; FRI (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-12:00 noon by appointment only & 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. (Administrative time); On WED (El Campo library), 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
- **Dwight Winkler:** 2254 CR 291, East Bernard, TX 77435; (979) 335-4464; lerwinkdd@aol.com.
- **Vanessa Hicks-Callaway:** (Congressman **Blake Farenthold's** Veteran Advocate), (361) 894-6446, Vanessa.Hicks-Callaway@mail.house.gov. **NOTE: Vanessa Hicks-Callaway will work with you on any other government agency.**
- **Matt Minor:** (Texas State Representative **Phil Stephenson's** Veteran Advocate), (281) 232-7900, Matt.Minor@house.state.tx.us
- **VA COMPLAINT HOTLINE:** New VA complaint hotline number is (855) 948-2311. Be courteous and be able to answer WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY about "wrong doing at the VA."
- **NEW VA PHONE NUMBER TO CALL 1-844-698-2311:** This new national toll-free number is a go to source for Veterans and their families who do not know what number to call at the VA. It is identified at the VA as **myVA311**.
- **Texas Veterans Commission (TVC):** To check on a claim when the TVC is your representative for the claim you have submitted call (713) 383-2756, prompt 1.

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- VVA 1069 WEBSITE SITEMAP:** Bob Supak, our Chapter web master, has created an extremely easy way for any Chapter member to access any information about our Chapter that has happened in the past five years! It is on the VVA 1069 Website's HOME page and is titled **SiteMap**. Bob has organized the Chapter news, information, forms, events, and benefit presentations in a very readable and understandable format. One "click" on any of the 27 "bullets" under the SiteMap heading and you are then sent to one of 189 web pages/docs that completes your search. THANK YOU BOB!
<http://www.vva1069.org/sitemap.html>
- WHY DOES THE VA ASK VETERANS FOR THEIR PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE?** When Veterans are being treated for a non-service connected condition, the VA asks for any health insurance information because it helps support and improve VA health care. The VA is required by law to supplement funds from Congress by billing Veterans' outside health insurance for non-service connected care. The money collected by the VA stays within and can be used to purchase supplies and equipment to improve care for veterans. (Source: John Steelman made me aware of this in 2013 and <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/date/2017/11/15>)
- VA PROPOSING NEW INITIATIVES TO EXPAND ITS TELEHEALTH SERVICES:** The VA is proposing new initiatives to expand its telehealth services in more than fifty specialties by overriding licensing restrictions and allowing VA providers to treat patients across state lines. Two VA web-enabled applications are set for a nationwide rollout this year: (1) VA Video Connect, which connects Veterans with providers via mobile phone or PC, and (2) Veteran Appointment Request (VAR), which simplifies the scheduling process for Veterans. (Source: Military.com, Week of January 1, 2018)
- VETERANS ONLINE SHOPPING BENEFIT:** On 7/12/2017, I informed the Chapter about the new Veterans Online Shopping that has been initiated for honorably discharged Veterans. I went to <https://www.vetverify.org> and submitted the information requested on 12/21/2017 at 10:00 a. m. and was notified that the results would be known in 2-3 business days. At 8:55 p. m. that night I was "verified" and was told I could go to a web site to create an account. I went to the Army website and created an account in less than 5 minutes and was able to start shopping immediately. (Source: 7/12/2017 VVA Benefits Presentation and [vetverify.org](http://www.vetverify.org))
- AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER:** I received my Agent Orange Newsletter in December 2017 with the following articles of interest to Vietnam Veterans: (1) Page 1 gives information about the four presumptive diseases being considered by VA Secretary Shulkin as well as a brief description of exposure to Agent Orange by C-123 personnel; Page 2 describes the Agent Orange Registry exam and that 756,620 registry exams have been conducted as of July 6, 2017; Page 3 describes the research being done by the National Academy of Sciences in exploring possible intergenerational effects of Agent Orange. I have copied page 8 (and placed it on my table) that is a subscription form to the Agent Orange Newsletter if you are not receiving it and wish to subscribe to the newsletter. You can read the newsletter at www.publichealth.va.gov.

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AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER CONTINUED: On the Public Health home page, "click" on Military Exposures-Agent Orange, in the center of the page, which will take you to a page titled Agent Orange and "click" on the left hand side menu "Publications and Reports" which takes you to the Newsletter. (Source: Agent Orange, Summer 2017, www.publichealth.va.gov).

6. VA BENEFITS REFORM: VA Secretary Shulkin is calling for an "overhaul and realignment" to the present VA benefits structure. He said "I call for a new way of thinking about benefits." He wants to create a Veterans Advisory Board that "could focus on what are the main goals of the Veterans Benefits Administrations programs: providing financial security for those who are severely disabled, providing mental and physical wellbeing to veterans, offering economic and professional opportunities and helping them reintegrate back into civilian life." He also said "We have to emphasize service-connection for disabilities so we aren't compensating Veterans for age-related issues." (Source: Retiree Activities Office Bulletin (RAO), 1 Dec 2017; raomo@sbcglobal.net, pgs 18-19)

7. FOUR NEW PRESUMPTIVE DISEASES FOLLOWUP: On November 8, 2017, I informed the Chapter that VA Secretary Shulkin was postponing his decision on whether or not four more diseases would be added to the presumptive disease list for Veterans exposed to Agent Orange. VVA President John Rowan stated in his President's Report, Nov/Dec 2017, Vietnam Veteran magazine, "we were told that it will take a while longer for them (additions to the AO presumptive list of diseases) to undergo administrative reviews, particularly by OMB, which has never been friendly to us." (Source: The Vietnam Veteran, Nov/Dec 2017, page 7.)

8. PARASITES FROM VN MAY BE KILLING VETS: The VA this spring commissioned a small pilot study to look into the link between liver flukes ingested through raw or undercooked fish and a rare bile duct cancer (cholangiocarcinoma). It can take decades for symptoms to appear. Of the 50 blood samples submitted, more than 20 percent came back positive or bordering for liver fluke antibodies. About 700 Veterans with this cancer have been seen by the VA in the past 15 years with less than half submitting claims and "the VA rejected 80 percent of the requests, but decisions often appeared to be haphazard or contradictory, depending on what desks they landed on, the Associated Press found." (Source: Military.com, November 27, 2017)

9. NEW VETERANS ID CARD: On 11/29/2017, the VA announced the application process for the national Veterans Identification Card (VIC) was available for Veterans. I had informed the Chapter at the 9/14/2016 meeting that the application process was in the works. However, the web site vets.gov is down "due to the volume of inquiries that were received." Go to the site and leave your e-mail address and it will be used "to contact you about continuing the Veterans ID CARD process." (Source: <https://www.vets.gov>)