

THE LIGHTFIGHTER

Monterey and San Benito County
Military & Veterans Affairs Office



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More at:

www.mvao.org

Cover Art- Haifa Street, Baghdad

Christopher Thiel https://history.army.mil/books/wot_artwork/wot_artbook.html



Director’s Message: Jason Cameron, County Military and Veterans Affairs Officer



Open for Business! In-person appointments and walk-ins have resumed. So far, it appears as though we have crested the COVID hill. We will continue our online virtual appointment options in addition to having our in-person services resumed.

As most everyone is aware our main office is in the Monterey Courthouse, with satellite offices in Salinas, the MG Gourley Clinic in Marina, and the Veterans Memorial Building in Hollister. I am excited to announce that we have secured a new location that will be the new home of the Military & Veterans Affairs Office. In addition, we intend to have other Veterans serving organizations co-located with us, creating a true Veterans Services Building. The Monterey County Board of Supervisors generously approved this move and even funded some renovations to the building. Currently, we are anticipating a move-in date to coincide with Veterans Day, 2021. The building is located about one mile South of the VA clinic in Marina at 2616 1st Ave.

This is a huge win for the Veteran community, and we are excited and honored to be a part of it. Thank you for your service to our great nation!

Our Mission Statement:

The Monterey County Military & Veterans Affairs Office (MVAO) provides advocacy, assistance, and services designed to enhance the lives of the County’s Veterans who served their country in the Armed Forces, their families, and their survivors. We assist in obtaining entitlements and services from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA), and local programs for eligible Veterans and their families.

Office Locations and Hours

Monterey	Salinas	Marina	Hollister
Monterey County Superior Courthouse	Life Foundation Bldg	VA Outpatient Clinic	San Benito County Veterans Memorial Bldg
1200 Aguajito Rd, Suite 003 Monterey, CA 93940	1000 S. Main St, Suite 209A Salinas, CA 93901	201 9 th St Marina, CA 93933	649 San Benito St Hollister, CA 95023
<u>(831) 647-7613</u>	<u>(831) 647-7613</u>	<u>(831) 647-7613</u>	<u>(831) 637-4846</u>
Monday – Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Appointments Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday	Appointments Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday	Appointments Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday	
Walk-In Services on <u>Tuesday</u>	Walk-In Services on <u>Wednesday</u>	Walk-In Services on <u>Thursday</u>	Please Call for an Appointment
Closed on Fridays	Closed on Fridays	Closed on Fridays	Closed on Fridays



VA plans expansion of benefits for disability claims for conditions related to certain toxic exposures

Agent Orange- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its plans [announced its plans](#) on May 27, 2021, to automatically review disability claims benefits for Veterans living with **Parkinsonism, bladder cancer, and hypothyroidism**—three new conditions were added to the list of [presumptive conditions](#) for which the Department of Veterans Affairs grants service connection to Vietnam War Veterans affected by exposure to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange.

These 3 additional conditions follow the [Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act](#) that guarantees Veterans who served off the shores of Vietnam can access VA health care and benefits related to their exposure from Agent Orange. This is a significant win for Vietnam-era Veterans- many of whom have waited a long time for these benefits. Vietnam-era Veterans and their survivors, who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions, will have their cases **automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim.** Veterans and survivors will receive letters from VA informing them of their claim’s review.

Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures- VA is initiating rulemaking to consider [adding respiratory conditions](#), which may include **asthma, sinusitis and rhinitis**, to the list of chronic disabilities associated with military service for Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War and/or after September 19, 2001, or in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War. Read more: [VA plans expansion of benefits for disability claims for conditions related to certain toxic exposures.](#)

If you are a Vietnam War Veteran who served boots-on-the-ground, or within 12-miles of the coast, or if you are a Post 9/11 Southwest Asia Veteran and believe you were exposed to airborne hazards, **please contact our office** (831) 647-7613 or www.mvao.org to discuss a claim for VA healthcare and benefits.

Enhanced or Special Monthly Pension for Aid and Attendance or Housebound Status

Aid and Attendance (A&A)

Aid and Attendance is an additional monthly pension amount paid to a Veteran or surviving spouse **to assist with the costs of providing daily care.** You may be eligible if **one (or more)** of the following is true:

- You require help to perform activities of daily living. These include bathing, feeding, dressing, toileting, adjusting prosthetic devices or protection from environmental hazards.
- You are bedridden. This means your disability requires you to stay in bed when you are not receiving treatment.
- You are a patient in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity.
- You have corrected visual acuity of 5/200 or less in both eyes.
- You have concentric contraction of the visual field to 5 degrees or less.

Housebound

Housebound is an increased monthly pension amount paid **to permanently disabled Veterans** who are greatly confined to their homes. Veterans may qualify for this increased amount if **one** of the following is true:

- You have a single permanent disability evaluated as 100-percent disabling. Because of this, you are permanently confined to your immediate location.
- You have a single permanent disability evaluated as 100-percent disabling and another disability (or disabilities) evaluated as 60-percent or more.

You may not receive enhanced or special monthly pension without first establishing eligibility for VA pension. However, enhanced pension is based on a higher income limit. For this reason, a claimant who is not eligible for basic pension may still qualify for increased pension benefits. You may not receive pension at the A&A and Housebound rate at the same time.

Special pension payment rates can be found at these links: [A&A](#) and [Housebound](#)



Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP)

The VA's Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) is a new program that offers education and training for **high-demand jobs** to Veterans who are unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VA launched VRRAP as part of its continued effort to support Veterans seeking retraining and economic opportunities in response to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. **VRRAP provides up to 12 months of tuition, fee, and monthly housing allowance payments**, based on Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, to qualifying Veterans seeking training for employment in a high-demand occupation.

To qualify, Veterans must meet the following criteria:

- ✓ At least 22 years old, but not older than 66, **and**
- ✓ Unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, **and**
- ✓ Not eligible for GI Bill or Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits (or, if eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, you've transferred all of your benefits to family members), **and**
- ✓ Not rated as totally disabled because you can't work, **and**
- ✓ Not enrolled in a federal or state jobs programs, **and**
- ✓ Not receiving unemployment benefits (including CARES Act benefits)



In partnership with the Department of Labor, the VA published a list of [high demand occupations](#) that includes health care, education, media, engineering, and high-tech opportunities. The list of VA [approved VRRAP Schools and programs](#) is regularly updated.

MVAO is proud to say we have already connected local Veterans to this great new retraining and employment program. To learn more about VRRAP, program eligibility, and how to apply, visit <https://www.va.gov/education> or contact our office at www.mvao.org or call us at **831-647-7613**

VA Helps Veterans Avoid Foreclosure

The Department of Veterans Affairs is offering a new COVID-19 Refund Modification option to assist Veterans who require a significant reduction in their monthly mortgage payments because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In some cases, Veterans can receive a 20% payment reduction — in others, the reduction can be even larger. This new option is part of the of [Biden-Harris administration's expanded, government-wide effort](#) to help homeowners retain their homes as they weather the economic challenges resulting from the ongoing pandemic.

Under the COVID-19 Refund Modification, VA can purchase a Veteran's past due payments and amounts of unpaid principal, depending on how much assistance is necessary, subject to certain limits. Loan servicers also modify the loan. These efforts help ensure that the Veteran can afford future mortgage payments.

Like with VA's [COVID-19 partial claim option](#), the Veteran's deferred indebtedness from a COVID-19 Refund Modification will be established as a junior lien. The junior lien will not accrue interest; will not require monthly payments; and will only become due when the property is sold, the guaranteed loan is paid off, or the guaranteed loan is refinanced.

Veterans can get a **COVID-related forbearance through Sept. 30, 2021**. To learn more about this new option visit [VA's Home Loan Program](#) or call **877-827-3702**.



Nation's Finest is Ready to Help!

Nation's Finest is a regional non-profit whose mission is to support Veterans and their families with a comprehensive approach to housing, health and employment that helps them achieve self-sufficiency and reach their full potential.

Monterey and San Benito County Services

Eligible low-income Veterans and their families can receive the following services

- Case Management
- Employment Assistance Services
- Homeless Services
- Housing Assistance
 - Temporary Financial Assistance for housing expenses such as rent, deposits, utilities, moving, transportation costs, and other eligible needs

Their office is located at 40 Bonifacio Plaza, Monterey

<https://www.nationsfinest.org/> or (831) 375-1184



NATION'S FINEST

Congratulations to the 2021 Monterey County Veterans of the Year!

The Monterey County Military and Veterans Affairs Advisory Commission (MVAAC) established the Veterans of the Year Program in 1991 to honor and recognize Veterans who distinguish themselves through dedicated volunteer service to the citizens of the Monterey County Supervisorial Districts.

The following Veterans were selected for 2021

❖ Adele Frese	District 1
❖ Joey Martinez	District 1
❖ Steve Fellows	District 3
❖ Tom Vaughan	District 3
❖ Pete Antonian	District 4
❖ Tom Jennings	District 4
❖ Betty Jean Stallings	District 5
❖ George Yellich	District 5
❖ Michael Schell	At-Large
❖ Jon Baker	At-Large
❖ James Munro	At-Large
❖ Terry Linbarser	At-Large

The awards dinner and ceremony will be at 6pm on **Friday, November 5th, 2021, at Bayonet & Blackhorse Golf Club in Seaside.** Tickets will be available for purchase at our Monterey office or through the United Veterans Council at www.uvc-mc.com

Meet our New Veteran Service Representative!

Many of you may recognize Cathy Chavez as MVAO's long-time Office Assistant. As the daughter of a Navy Veteran and sister of an Army Veteran, her profound dedication to Veterans is evident in all she does. Cathy has worked for Monterey County for 17 years, to include 4 years at MVAO. Her caring attitude, professionalism and attention to detail are well recognized, garnering her honors as a three-time recipient of the Dept. of Social Services' Annual Outstanding Customer Service Award. Cathy is a CalVet accredited Veteran Service Representative and she will work out of our main office in Monterey.



Congratulations, Cathy!



Our Staff and Veteran Service Representatives are proud to share last Quarter's Activity Report showing the number and value of claims, benefits, and services provided to Monterey and San Benito County Veterans and Families!



MONTEREY and SAN BENITO COUNTY

Quarterly Activity Report April – June

2,671

Incoming
Phone Calls



615

Vet Rep Appointments



**92 College
Fee Waivers**

Totaling

\$558,138

623 Unique Veterans Served

1,235 Claim Actions



445 Compensation Awards

**Disability Compensation Awards
Paid during 3rd Quarter FY21**



\$953,516

Retroactive Payments

\$159,198

Recurring Monthly Payments