

MVA TODAY

The monthly newsletter for L.A. County Department of Military & Veterans Affairs

FROM THE HELM

Centralizing veteran care: First steps in merging VPAN with MVA

On May 21, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to approve a recommendation submitted by Supervisors Barger and Horvath instructing this department to take the lead on future collaboration and coordination with the state and federal Departments of Veterans Affairs.

This includes taking the lead with respect to other county departments and their veteran programs. The Board instructed MVA and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to develop a plan transferring the Southern California Grantmakers contract for Veteran Peer Access Network from to DMH to MVA by Oct. 1.

Furthermore, the motion states that the MVA call line will be integrated into the VPAN Support Line with staff from both departments serving on a new Veterans Service Triage Line to “centralize all calls related to veterans benefits and services.”

This Board motion—which continues a six-year trend of unanimous motions on behalf of veterans—represents a significant step forward in integrating the services offered by the county to veterans and their families by centralizing the mission.

There will be more than enough to discuss about this merger in the months ahead. This process will take time, patience, and a lot of work. But the goal in centering veterans’ programs under one department is that it will simplify the systems for thousands in our community.

This motion also includes some other critical elements advancing the work in which this department and our partners at the local, state and federal level are currently engaged:

- Pursuing equitable outcomes and increased access for underserved veteran populations



Jim Zenner

- Establishing partnerships with cities and other jurisdictions to increase access
- Identifying veterans and their families at-risk of becoming unhoused
- Instructing all county departments to add the question “Have you every served in the U.S. military” as a standard field in all their screening and intake questionnaires

The Board passed another motion extending the Veteran Suicide Review Team (VSRT) pilot by one year while the co-chairs develop a list of recommendations for the pilot to become permanent while adding MVA to DMH as the primary co-lead. This important development not only continues the integration of veterans services but also recognizes the progress the VSRT has made over the past year in establishing a protocol for identifying veterans who may be at risk of taking their own lives.

There's a lot to unpack in these Board [motions](#) and there's no way to cover all the details in the space provided here, but this progressive action unlocks a lot

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MVA By the Numbers

Number of veterans served at Patriotic Hall: 851

Number of claims filed: 3,100

Total sums awarded from all claims activity: \$792,156

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Bob Hope Patriotic Hall

1816 S Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90015
Phone: (877) 452-8387

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall is open five days/week!

Hours of Operation

Monday	8 am – 5 pm
Tuesday	8 am – 5 pm
Wednesday	8 am – 8 pm
Thursday	8 am – 5 pm
Friday	8 am – 5 pm

World War II vet shares his story of survival, success and service

The Bataan Death March left its mark on Harry Corre. “It’s something I still live with,” he says.

The 102-year-old West LA resident will accept recognition as a survivor of one of the worst atrocities of the Pacific War if doing so can educate people about the challenges faced by ex-POWs. That said, he has never let his wartime ordeals define him.

After a lifetime of service to the country, including a cutting-edge career in aerospace and a second career working for veterans, he’s glad to be known for more than Bataan.

In the spring of 1942 after defeat by the Japanese in the Battle of Bataan, 18-year-old U.S. Army Pvt. Harry Corre found himself among 75,000 Philippine and American prisoners of war being force-marched up the eastern side of the Bataan Peninsula toward a distant prison camp.

Many of the POWs were already injured or sick. Without food, water, shelter from the sun or medical care, prisoners began to falter and fall. When they did, their guards routinely tortured or killed them, often bayonetting or beheading them. Those who complained or displeased a guard were routinely killed. An estimated 18,000 POWs — perhaps 650 of them Americans — died, their corpses left strewn along the infamous route.

Corre remembers, “I saw so many men that were needlessly murdered, slaughtered, beaten, and bayoneted — uselessly — I promised myself if I ever lived through it, I would do everything I could to help American veterans.”

Two nights into the march, during a torrential rainstorm, Corre slipped unnoticed into the jungle. He made his way back southward to the peninsula’s southern shore. There he fashioned a makeshift raft and swam an entire night through unknown currents and shark-infested waters to Corregidor Island to rejoin active U.S. troops.

In little time they too were given orders to surrender, and so Corre spent the rest of the war imprisoned under terrible conditions, typically surviving on just a bowl of rice a day. Eventually he was shipped to Kyushu in Japan to provide forced labor, at one point mining coal.

During his captivity he suffered from various afflictions, including diphtheria and

injuries sustained from cave-ins while mining coal.

On August 9, 1945, just after exiting a warehouse near Nagasaki, he witnessed a sudden flash and thunderclap of the atomic bomb exploding over the city. The brick warehouse had shielded him from a direct blast of radiation. In the distance he saw the sky over the city engulfed in smoke and flames, and in the following days the rumored casualties grew to astonishing numbers.

The camp’s guards soon disappeared from their posts, and the POWs realized the war was over. After some weeks of uncertainty, Corre walked to a train station and hopped a passenger train heading for the capital. Several days later he arrived at Tokyo Station where he encountered U.S. Army troops.

Astonished by his weak and emaciated condition, they hospitalized him. After weeks of treatment and convalescence, he was shipped home and eventually discharged. The combat veteran was by then a corporal with three Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star.

Returning to his native Boston, he found work and started a family. He worked multiple jobs while earning an engineering degree, and in the early 1960s moved his family to California, where he joined the burgeoning aerospace industry. He spent the majority of his career as a quality engineer at TRW, working on groundbreaking defense and NASA contracts, including development of missile and rocket engines, satellites, and interplanetary space probes, such as the Pioneer program.

“I couldn’t get to work in the morning soon enough,” says Corre, “because every day was something new, a new twist in technology, a new invention, working with computers, et cetera — it was all new.”

After 26 years, Corre retired from TRW and eventually began working with the

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Harry Corre sits for a recent portrait as he did after his return to the U.S. in 1945 following his time as a prisoner of war in Japan (right).

MEET THE ARTIST

Panel discussion with Metro Art commissioned artist Eloy Torrez and veterans featured in his artwork for the future D Line Extension

Wednesday, May 29, 2024
at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall
6:00pm – 7:30pm

Free and open to the public
RSVP on Eventbrite

metro.net/art



Corre

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American Ex-Prisoners of War. He led the Los Angeles chapter for some years and eventually rose to head the organization statewide. He also manned the organization's service office at the West Los Angeles Veterans Administration hospital.

His work assisting former POWs navigate the complex and bureaucratic web of veteran service organizations and governmental agencies drew the attention of the hospital's CEO, Chuck Dorman, who asked if he'd be interested in working for the VA as a patient advocate. Corre accepted gladly and undertook a year of coursework to pass a state exam to qualify for the role.

"I took the job as a very good way to help all veterans — not just POWs — and represent them in any of their problems," he says.

Already in his early 80's, Corre found the work stimulating and rewarding, working

9 a.m. to 4 p.m., four days a week. "I'm a workaholic," he admits with a laugh.

"A patient advocate represents all patients that come in needing help of almost any kind that has to do with the Veterans Administration," he says. "We represent them with their problem, contact various organizations within the hospital, or even with the head of the Veterans Administration in the area."

He says his experiences during the war and the time spent recovering in military hospitals gave him insight and credibility with the patients he was serving.

"I did quite a bit of time in hospitals, seeing other patients with their problems," he says. "I could see what their problems were, and that's when I first recognized that there was something else going on, which turned out to be PTSD." Corre says he didn't understand he had PTSD until he started working with vets at the VA. The realization led him to seek treatment there himself.

"I could relate to a lot of the things that the veterans would come in and complain about," he says. "I could ask them questions about various things that I had personal experience with and find that they had the same problems. That way I would get them to relay their problems back to their primary care doctor so that they could be treated."

Corre retired from the VA in 2021 after 16 years using his expertise and life experience to help veterans like him with their problems. He's still working on his own problems, he says. On particularly hard days, he tells himself what he'd tell his fellow vets: "To sit down, and breath heavy."

Corre will be recognized for his lifetime of service at a ceremony at Patriotic Hall on Memorial Day at 1 p.m.



Family first: Marine vet prioritizes parents' needs over personal

Joel Luna joined the U.S. Marine Corps for many of the same reasons his peers did like service, camaraderie and adventure. But he also had a more personal motivation: his parents.

"They were here illegally and were able to apply for legal residency so now they're residents," he explains. "So, I joined for family and for country."

The Boyle Heights-native explains that by serving on active duty from 2013 to 2017, his immediate family received a pardon for their undocumented status. But joining the Marines introduced him to another family, as well.

"It was a family outside of a family, something you never forget," Luna recalls. "Everyone you come across recognizes it's a different nature; it's a brotherhood."

But after four years in the artillery and a spinal injury requiring cortisone shots every six months, he says his body was done. "Once I got out, I started hitting the ER because I couldn't get out of bed."

After leaving the service, Luna attended studies at East Los Angeles College (ELAC) in 2018-9 for an associate degree in sociology while working at the Veterans Center there. After graduation, he pursued a bachelor's degree in sociology at California State University at Long Beach but then Covid hit and his parents lost their home and needed a place to live.

Luna quit his studies and took a job riding with truckers, unloading the trucks and logging inventory.

"My family is everything to me," is his rationale when describing the sacrifice he made in supporting his parents during the pandemic.

While at the ELAC Vets Center, Luna met Reymundo Borjon, a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) with the L.A. County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA), who put in a claim for his back followed by one for mental health from all the time spent in the ER.



Private First Class Joel Luna in 2013.

"That's what steered me this way," he says. "The aid [Borjon] was able to get me motivated me to do that for someone else."

Luna subsequently started as a veteran intern at the county Department of Treasurer and Tax Collector where he served for a year before applying to MVA, which he joined as a Veterans Claims Assistant II in June of last year.

The job is not without its challenges, like getting veterans to confide in him as a VSO. "Because people have to trust in us, exposing themselves like that, which is draining to a person." He explains a lot of them have PTSD or other mental health challenges.

What's rewarding is the difference between when the veterans arrive for their appointment and when they leave. "What I tell them is I want them to come in with as many questions as they can and then leave with peace of mind because their questions are answered," as Luna describes it. "You break down that barrier of anxiety as you explain the process and as the appointment ends you can see their faces at ease."

"It's good to see that."



PFC Joel Luna is reunited with his family following Marine Corps boot camp in Sept. 2013.

Honoring the contributions of AAPI vets: During a May 20 event, Patriotic Hall unveiled an extensive exhibit featuring Asian American Pacific Islander veterans. The first-ever exhibit and event was the work of Montgomery Hom, a volunteer/consultant with Patriotic Hall historical archives and founder of the Chinese American G.I. Project in partnership with the Chinese Historical Society of San Francisco.





ONE TEAM: On May 7-10, Patriotic Hall hosted a VA-led conference about the One Team: What it is, how it works and how we can do our part to end veteran homelessness.



ON-SET WITH MVA: MVA has teamed with Canvas Entertainment to produce an informational video designed to educate veterans and their families about avoiding claims fraud and pay-for-play schemes. The video is scheduled to premier at next month's annual conference of the California County Veterans Service Officer Association. Michele Felix (pictured here) was one of the VSOs interviewed on May 2.



TOWN HALL: The El Monte Community Center hosted a Veteran Town Hall for Supervisorial District 1 on May 15. Presentations were made by MVA, VA, CalVet, VPAN, PsychArmor and U.S. Vets. SD1 District Director/Veterans Liaison Antonio Chapa (pictured) delivered some opening remarks.

L.A. COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE AWARDS FOR APRIL 2024

Veterans Service Officer: Ana Arias Alvarado (MVA)
MVA Support Service Staff: no nominees
Battle Buddy: Jannesa Fernandez (JVS-SD1)
Support Line Agent: No Nominees
VPAN Support Service Staff: No Nominees
Community Partner: Behkie Aguilar (JVS-SoCal SSVF)
Creative Solution: Joel Castellanos (MVA)
Volunteer: Wesley Frierson (MVA)

QUARTERLY AWARD WINNERS FOR 3RD QTR, FY 2024

Supervisory District: Goodwill-SD3 (VPAN)
Program Manager: Daniel Hermosillo (Goodwill-SD3)
**Veterans Service Officer: *Tie* Emby Gonzalez
 & Emmanuel Lopez**
MVA Support Service Staff: Custodial Team (MVA)
**Battle Buddy: *Tie* Simone Bent (DMH VPAN)
 & Angel Velasquez (JVS-SD1)**
Support Line Agent: Kathleen Jimenez (DMH VPAN)
VPAN Support Service Staff: Liza Rodriguez
Community Partner: Marco Diaz (JVS-SoCal)
Creative Solution: Phillip Chaidez (DMH VPAN)
Volunteer: Josue Batrez (MVA/VPAN)

Zenner

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of potential energy and growth as we continue to expand and serve the veteran community.

Speaking of serving the community, I can think of no better way to close as we celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Month than by highlighting an inaugural event we held at Patriotic Hall on May 20 where we formally unveiled an impressive exhibit covering the contributions of AAPI vets to our nation's defense.

This event and the exhibit it introduced was conceived and created by Montgomery Hom, a volunteer & consultant to the building as well as founder of the Chinese American G.I. Project. As the husband of an AAPI veteran myself, Monty's vision and what it produced means a lot to me and I think will to anyone else who tours the exhibit, which is free of charge and open to the public during normal business hours. You can see more of the exhibit on page 5.

As we move ahead with the merger and the other initiatives and programs we've undertaken, your support as well as your input is always welcome. Please drop me a line at director@mva.lacounty.gov.

Meet the Editorial Staff

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KEEP UP WITH MVA!
@LACMVA



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Kathryn
BARGER
5th District Supervisor • County of Los Angeles

Present

VETERAN TOWN HALL

June 12, 2024
5:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

College of the Canyons

26455 Rockwell Canyon Road
Santa Clarita, CA 91355
Hasley Hall, Room 101



Presentations from:

- Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs
- VA Los Angeles Regional Office
- VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System
- CA Dept. of Veterans Affairs
- Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN)
- PsychArmor

**Register today
via Eventbrite**

<https://bit.ly/3ym5Vcv>



Let Your Voice Be Heard: Join Our Veteran Town Hall Meeting



CAL VET

**Military ★
Veterans Affairs**
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES



You're invited to the Los Angeles Veterans Orientation

L.A. welcomes military service members!

Thurs, June 6, 2024

6 PM - 9 PM

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall
1816 S. Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90015

D-DAY

June 6, 1944



Remember & Honor

**LA
VO**

LOS ANGELES VETERANS
ORIENTATION

L.A. Loves Vets

Leaving military service?
Calling Los Angeles home?
This event will help set you on
the path toward successful
reintegration. Learn about all the
resources and services available to
you and your family and meet other
veterans on the same journey.
Network with potential employers
and service providers in a casual
environment... all designed to give
you a soft landing in southern
California!

Vet-er-an
/'vedərən, 'vetrən/
a person who has served
in the military, regardless
of discharge status or
duration of service.

Regardless of branch or
time in service, don't miss this
networking opportunity. If you
have a family, you can bring
them too!



Scan the QR code or utilize the
following link to register for this
event:

bit.ly/4acCqaw