



# MESSAGE FROM THE VEEP



## Weekend At The Stand Down

By Clarence M. Hatcherson

October 2012

**On Saturday and Sunday** September 22nd and 23rd I participated in the **9th Annual City of Compton Homeless Veterans Stand Down**. Stand Downs are typically one to three day events set up to provide services to homeless veterans. Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies and community agencies who serve the homeless.

In times of war, exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative security and safety. The Stand Down concept was used to help the nation's estimated 200,000 homeless veterans "combat" life on the streets.

Males account for 97-98% of the homeless veteran population; 56% are African American or Hispanic; 76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems including PTSD; 45% suffer from mental illness; 50% have substance abuse problems; more than 67% served our country for at least three years; 33% were stationed in a war zone; 47% of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam Era; 17% served after the Vietnam era; 15% served before Vietnam; an increasing percentage served in the wars in Iraq & Afghanistan.\*

Many homeless veterans served in WW II, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Desert Storm & the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America.

The first Stand Down was organized in 1988 by a group of Vietnam Veterans in San Diego and has been since held annually, usually in the month of July. About 12 years ago, then Compton Councilperson **Barbara Calhoun** was on a business trip in San Diego and saw some direction signs

indicating a Stand Down; being of curious nature she followed the signs and visited her first Stand Down. During this insightful visit, Ms. Calhoun thought; if this can happen in San Diego, why can't it happen in Compton? And through sheer will and determination, in 2004 Ms.

Calhoun organized and spearheaded the first City of Compton Homeless Veterans Stand Down.



**I began participating** in the City of Compton's Stand Down in its fifth year; I soon discovered that the statistical data bore out the demographic make-up of those who attended the Stand Down. But homeless veterans are not statistics; they are our fellow man; and woman. But even deeper, they are fellow veterans; a band of brothers and sisters; an extended kinship that, for whatever reason, were not as smart or lucky or blessed or just happened to be at the right place at the right time as we were.

Several years ago I was invited to participate on a **Veterans Advisory Board** that was formed by the late **Hon. Juanita Millender-McDonald**, Representative from the 37th U.S. Congressional District. Her successor was (and is currently serving) **Hon. Laura Richardson**. At the initial meeting of the Board, self-introductions were made. In my introduction I made it known that I worked for a State agency and that my job was to assist military veterans in obtaining employment. When I was done, I heard a gentleman say (aside, but loud enough to be heard) "*I don't see why the State pays someone to help veterans...they [veterans] should do what I did...just go out and look for a job.*"

My initial thought was to offer a response to his statement which may have grown into a debate; but I then wisely decided not to, as the adage penned by Mark Twain entered my mind, *“Never argue with a fool; onlookers may not be able to tell the difference.”*

I served in a Marine Corp Rifle Company as an Infantryman in Vietnam. Our mission was to “seek out, engage and destroy the enemy.” That enemy was element(s) of the 324<sup>th</sup> Division (Vietnam’s People Army); a well-trained NVA division that operated in northern South Vietnam. In our engagements we gave as good as we got. Sometimes we took casualties; when the battle permitted, we medevaced our wounded to the rear and transported our dead home for their final rest. In spite of our mission, it never occurred to any Marine on the battlefield to leave another Marine behind.

Last year at the Compton Stand Down I decided to walk around and see if any of the stations needed assistance. During my walk I noticed, sitting alone, outside of the area where legal council had set up office, a gentleman that I perceived, *“should not have been there”*. He was about my age, neat in appearance and basically not having the *“persona”* of one who’d been living on the fringes of society.

My curiosity got the better of me so I greeted him and began an exchange of small talk. I finally asked, *“Why are you here?”* His



response was frighteningly familiar. He was in the Army, in the Infantry, in Vietnam...very much like me. He separated from the military, got a job, began going to school on the GI Bill, earned a degree and consequently secured a position with a

major company...just like me. This gentleman’s life story was a near parallel of mine.

Then the narrative changed; the *“demons of war”* caught up with him and he began to self-medicate with drugs and alcohol; and then the family support was gone, the job was gone and there he was on the streets...a homeless veteran. And as I contemplated his story my only thought was *“...but for the Grace of God, there go I.”*

But that was not the reason that he was there. He went on to tell me that when he’d reached bottom, he gathered enough fortitude to go to the VA, get into a program and get himself rehabilitated. Now he’s ready to go to work and the work that he wants requires a driver’s license; but the courts are holding his driver’s license because he’s in arrears with child support payments; and the courts will not release his driver’s license until he makes up the back child support payments; and he can’t make up those payments until he can get a job; which he can’t get until he has his driver’s license. So you see the dilemma that he’s in. He was there to see an attorney; one of several who come to assist veterans, pro bono, who have the same or similar problem as this newfound friend.

Had I chosen to respond to the audibly hushed gentleman at the Veterans Advisory Board meeting as to why I have chosen to do what I do, I think that my response would have been, *“though I don’t wear the uniform anymore and we’re not in an Asian jungle or rice paddy anymore, a war still rages on; and the casualties of this war are those who wore the uniform and are having difficulties adjusting here at home. And just as unconscionable would it be to consider leaving a casualty on the battle abroad it is just as inconceivable for me to contemplate not helping a veteran in need at home.”*

\*FHLC, Inc. <http://www.standown.org/homeless.html>



Clarence Hatcherson is Vice-President of the Montford Point Marine Association L. A. Chapter 8

# Tuskegee Airmen Scholarship Foundation Gala

*L.A. Chapter 8 Montford Pointers Attend Prominent Event*

On Thursday evening October 4, 2012, The Tuskegee Airmen Scholarship Foundation held its Gold Medal Gala at the Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Thirteen-time Emmy Award winning KABC News Anchor **David Ono** served as Master of Ceremonies. Jazz Legend **Barbara Morrison** and the **Charles Owens Band** provided outstanding musical entertainment. National Aviation Hall of Fame pilot, **Clay Lacy**, Founder and CEO of Clay Lacy Aviation, serves as the Honorary Chair.

The event, hosted by “**The Ultimate**

**Mistress of Ceremonies”, Ms. Terry Scott-Mitchell** honored TASF’s three deserving honorees – SpaceX CEO **Elon Musk**, receiving the Distinguished Achievement Award, Caltech President **Dr. Jean-Lou Chameau**, receiving the Gold Medal Education Award, and NASA Administrator **Major General Charles F. Bolden, Jr.**, receiving the General James H. “Jimmie” Doolittle Memorial.

Also in attendance at this gala event was our own Chapter President and Western Region Vice-President **Mr. L.E. (Mike) Johnson** and Original Montford Pointer **Mr. Vaughan Whitworth**.



*L-R; Mr. L.E. (Mike) Johnson, MPMA LA8 President & MPMA Western Region Vice President., Ms. Terry E. Scott-Mitchell, Hostess of TASF Gala., Mr. Vaughan Whitworth, Original Montford Pointer*



*L-R; Mr. Farrell Chiles, Tuskegee Airmen Public Relations, Ms. La Trycee Fowler TASF National Spokesperson, Mr. L.E. (Mike) Johnson, MPMA LA8 President & MPMA Western Region Vice President*