



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



OCS COMPLETION CEREMONY

There were 116 U.S. Army National Guard officer candidates from 21 states, one U.S. territory, and the U.S. Army Reserves that received their certificates of completion at the Officer Candidate School (OCS) Class 24-001 graduation ceremony held at Mount Rushmore on July 26.

The ceremony represents the end of OCS, their first step in officer training and development, and the beginning of their careers as commissioned officers.

“Here you are, a community of the Army’s newest leaders. Your peers are an asset for learning and sharing experiences, as you will be exposed to different scenarios throughout your career. Lean on each other, share your experiences and keep in contact. It doesn’t end here,” said U.S. Army Col. Scott Linqvist, commander of the South Dakota National Guard’s 196th Regional Training Institute.

The OCS program in South Dakota is one of two programs throughout the U.S. that offers all three phases of OCS in one location, allowing National Guard Soldiers to pursue the accelerated eight-week or a traditional option, which consists of 14 months of drill weekends and two, two-week training periods to complete the course.

“The challenges to your individual skills do not stop, and officer candidate school raises the bar of what you are expected to achieve,” said guest speaker U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Smiley, commander of the California Army National Guard.

OCS is taught in a high-stress environment, where candidates are tested academically and physically, both in the classroom and in field environments.

Table of Contents

- Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications... 2-3
- VA Suicide Resources 4-5
- VA Burn Pit Registry 6
- Upcoming Events 7-8



SD TO DEDICATE TWO MORE BRIDGES

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting two State Bridge Dedication Ceremonies to honor U.S. Army Sergeant Dennis D. Lawver and U.S. Army Private First Class Gunnar D. Becker.

The Lawver ceremony will be Saturday, August 17, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. (CT) at the American Legion Post in Miller (402 S. Broadway Avenue). The SD45 bridge over Crow Creek, about 18 miles south of Miller, will be dedicated as the SGT Dennis D. Lawver Bridge.

Dennis was killed May 1, 1968, in hostile ground action in Hau Nghia province of South Vietnam.

The Becker ceremony will be Sunday, August 18, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. (CT) at the Sanborn County 4-H Building in Forestburg (23237 405th Avenue). The SD34 westbound bridge over the James River, just southeast of Forestburg, will be dedicated as the PFC Gunnar D. Becker Bridge.

Gunnar was the first casualty of his unit during Operation Iraqi Freedom and the only one lost from Sanborn County since the Vietnam Conflict. He died January 13, 2005, in Mosul when a .50-caliber machine gun round was accidentally discharged, ricocheted, and struck him.



Naming bridges in honor of our combat veterans who died while serving their country is an initiative of Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs.

“Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memories live on in the hearts of their loved ones,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota

Department of Veterans Affairs. “Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen gives us the opportunity for remembrance, reflection, and respect. It helps us to honor the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom so much, they were willing to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life.”

“We can never over appreciate the costs they bore for us,” said Whitlock. “We must never forget that our fallen sacrificed their future and their dreams. Their memories will live on for generations.”

SOUTH DAKOTA FALLEN HERO BRIDGE DEDICATION

**State of South Dakota to
dedicate state bridge honoring
U.S. Army SGT Dennis D Lawver**

**Saturday – August 17 at 2:00 pm (CT)
American Legion Post – Miller, SD
(402 S. Broadway Avenue)**



SOUTH DAKOTA FALLEN HERO BRIDGE DEDICATION

**State of South Dakota to
dedicate state bridge honoring
U.S. Army PFC Gunnar D. Becker**

**Sunday – August 18 at 2:00 pm (CT)
Sanborn County 4-H Building
Forestburg, SD
(23237 405th Avenue)**



Help for Veterans in Suicide Crisis

COMPACT Act (Section 201)

Veterans in suicide crisis may be eligible to receive emergency health care services at any VA or non-VA facility at no cost.

How it works

1. Eligible Veterans experiencing an acute suicidal crisis – whether enrolled in VA or not – can go to a VA or non-VA emergency room.
2. Veterans in suicide crisis should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room for expedited care. No enrollment in VA health care is required.
3. Notify the VA within 72-hours of receiving emergent suicidal care to start the claim for payment and care coordination.
 - Veterans, loved ones, or community providers can make the call to start the claim.

Only one notification is needed:

Online portal:

www.emergencycarereporting.communitycare.va.gov

Phone:

1(844) 724-7842

Who is eligible

COMPACT Act (Section 201) expands eligibility for coverage for suicidal care for Veterans who may not otherwise be eligible for or may not already be enrolled with VA health care.

Contact VA Eligibility and Enrollment to see if you qualify: 1(877) 222-8387.

Questions or need help

Contact the COMPACT Act Coordinator at your VA medical center location



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

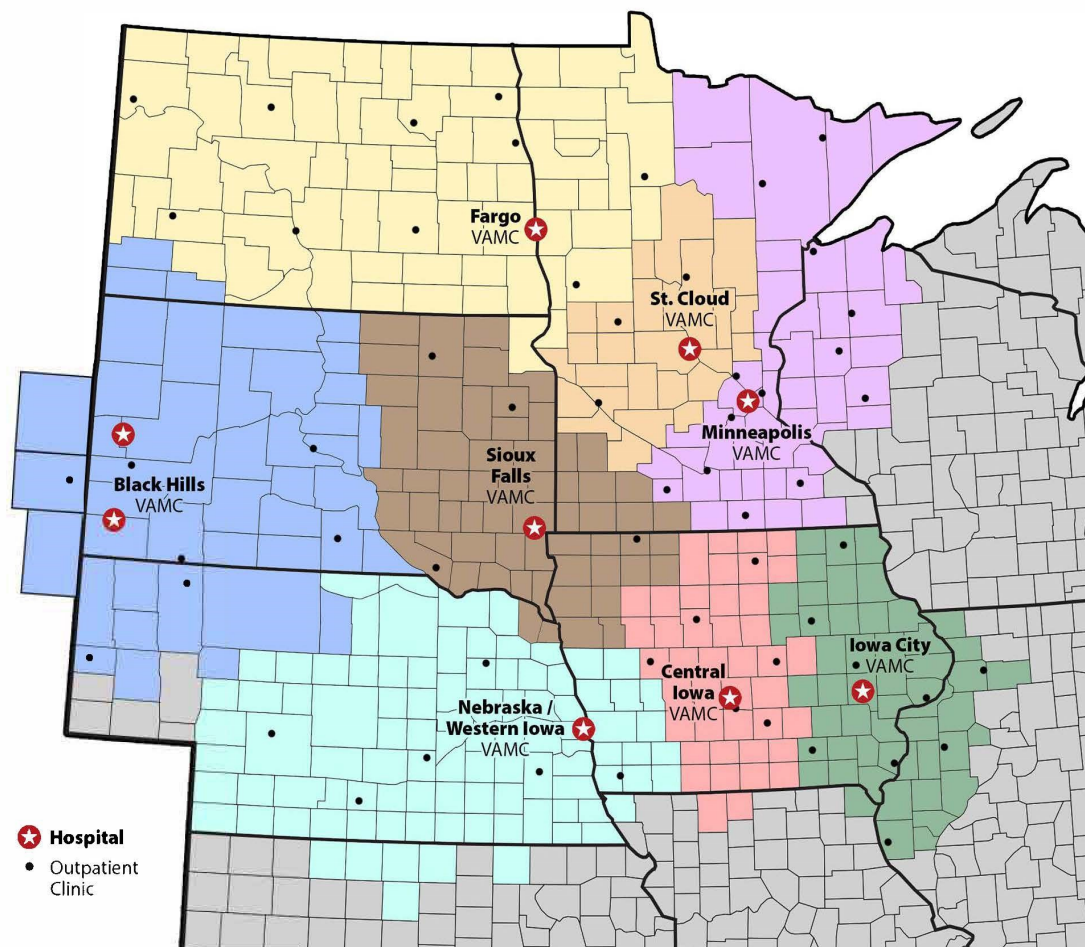


Veterans Crisis Line
DIAL 988 then **PRESS 1**



VA Midwest Health Care Network

Compact Act Coordination Team Contact Information



Facility Contacts

COMPACT Act Questions and inquiries should be directed to your corresponding VA facility's catchment area COMPACT Act Coordination Team:

Black Hills VA Health Care System:
VHABHHCS_COMPACTActCoordination568@va.gov

Central Iowa VA Health Care System:
VHACHVHACompactActCoordination_CI636@va.gov

Fargo VA Health Care System:
VHAFARCompactActCareCoordination_437@va.gov

Iowa City VA Health Care System:
COMPACTActCareCoordination_636A8@va.gov

Minneapolis VA Health Care System:
VHACOMPACTACTCARECOORDINATION_MPLS618@va.gov

Nebraska / Western Iowa VA Health Care System:
VHANWICOMPACTActCareCoordination_636@va.gov

Sioux Falls VA Health Care System:
VHASUXCOMPACTActCareCoordination_438@va.gov

St. Cloud VA Health Care System:
VHACOMPACTActCareCoordination_656@va.gov

VA LAUNCHES UPDATED BURN PIT REGISTRY

Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced the launch of the redesigned [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#) (Burn Pit Research Registry). The Burn Pit Registry is a database that combines veteran and service member data to help the VA better understand, research, and ultimately improve treatment for the health challenges facing veterans exposed to airborne hazards and burn pits during their military service.

The registry is an important research tool that enables the VA to identify and study health challenges spanning the veteran and service member population as a whole — providing veterans and service members an opportunity to help improve the care and benefits of veterans and service members in generations to come. The registry will now include more than 4.7 million veterans and service members who meet participation criteria based on Department of Defense records.

Importantly, participating in or opting out of the registry does not impact nor determine eligibility for veterans' individual VA health care or benefits. Those who do not wish to participate in the Registry can opt out by completing this [online form](#).

While this research database does not impact individual care and benefits, there are many avenues for veterans to reach VA for the services they deserve. This redesigned version of the registry incorporates extensive veteran feedback, expands participation criteria, automatically includes participants in the registry, and simplifies participation requirements.

Veterans and service members (living or deceased) who, according to DOD records, served in the military campaigns or theater of operations listed below during the designated time frame will be automatically included:

- Operations and Campaigns: Desert Shield and Desert Storm; Iraqi Freedom; Enduring Freedom; and New Dawn.
- Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Djibouti, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Syria, Uzbekistan, and Egypt between Aug. 2, 1990, and Aug. 31, 2021.
- Somalia since Aug. 2, 1990.
- The Southwest Asia theater of military operations and Egypt any time after Aug. 2, 1990
- Afghanistan, Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Uzbekistan, or Yemen any time after Sept. 11, 2001.
- Associated airspaces with the countries listed above as well as the waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, and the Red Sea.

This list is in addition to those who were based or stationed at a location on or after Sept. 11, 2001, where an open burn pit was used in Afghanistan, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Egypt, or Syria.

The data included in the registry includes deployment locations, military personnel information, and demographics to include gender, race, and ethnicity. No medical information will be stored in the registry. Veteran and service member data will be accessible only to select VA epidemiologists and researchers and institutional review board-approved researchers. It will be used to conduct research on the cohort over a period of time. The results will inform the policy decision-making efforts of VA executive leaders, including those related to presumptive conditions.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls
- Aug 2—PFC John Tuin Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—American Legion Post 184—(222 Main Street)—Estelline—1:30 pm (CT)
- Aug 5—RM2 Eugene L., RM2 Ordien F., and LT LeRoy M. Herr Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—High School Gym—(500 S. 3rd Street)—Bristol— 1:30 pm (CT)
- Aug 10—SGT Terry G. Rada Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Multi Purpose Center—(409 Michigan Avenue)—Geddes—12:00 noon (CT)
- Aug 10—CPL Bartlett Funeral Services—Little Methodist Church—Blunt—1:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 14—Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Grand River Resort—(27903 US 12)—Mobridge—10:00 am (CT)
- Aug 17—SGT Dennis D. Lawver Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—American Legion Post—(402 S. Broadway Avenue)—Miller—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 17—VCP 2nd Annual Poker Run—Indian Motorcycles—(4800 N. Westport Avenue)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
- Aug 17—Homecoming Celebration for American Legion State Commander Kevin Morello—Old Auditorium—16159 2nd Street—Piedmont—1:00 pm (MT)
- Aug 18—PFC Gunnar D. Becker Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Sanborn County 4-H Building—(23237 405th Avenue)—Forestburg—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 791—(209 S. Cedar)—Yankton—1:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 21—1LT Daniel J. Kirchgesler Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Security First Bank Court of Champions located in St Thomas More High School—(300 Fairmont Blvd)—Rapid City—2:00 pm (MT)
- Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 28—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron
- Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron
- Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls
- Sep 18—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post 22—(818 E. Saint Patrick Street)—Rapid City—9:00 am (MT)
- Sep 25—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 21—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- Oct 8—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 22—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- Oct 12—Midwest Honor Flight “Shake Rattle and Roll” fundraiser—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls

(Continued)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 23—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post 74—(1229 Western Ave)—Brookings—1:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We've Got Your Six—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- Nov 9—Third Annual Day County Veterans Banquet—Webster Armory—5:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 11—1LT Josef Thorne Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Beresford High School Gym—(301 W. Maple Street)—Beresford—1:30 pm (CT)
- Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV—(1519 W. 51st St)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
- Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls—12:00 noon (CT)
- Nov 21—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 17—Watertown
- Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 22—Rapid City
- Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 8—Pierre
- Dec 3—Governor's Budget Address—1:00 pm
- Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

2025 Events

- Jan 14—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm
- Jan 14—Legislative Session starts
- Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre
- Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
- Apr 27-30—VFW Proficiency Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- Jun 12—15—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
- Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
- Aug 9-13—National VFW Convention—Columbus, OH
- Sep 21-26—VFW National Skill Level and Basic Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
 South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>
 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
 Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
 Pierre, SD 57501
 Phone: 605-773-8242
 E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

