

AUGUST 2018

VFW

M A G A Z I N E

**'NICE TRY
TALIBAN'**
SEVERELY WOUNDED
VET RETURNS TO
AFGHANISTAN

Fighting Hunger

ON THE FRONT LINES

**'I CAN'T JUST
LEAVE HER HERE'**

A VFW member searches
for a woman he saved
48 years ago
in Vietnam

**REBUILDING
MOTORCYCLES & VETS**





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YOU SERVED,** *thank you.*

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22 AFGHANISTAN VET RETURNS

After being blown up and losing parts of both legs in a 2011 IED explosion in Afghanistan, Justin Lane revisited the country earlier this year. The trip allowed the former combat engineer to fulfill a goal he had carried with him for seven years. **BY JIM SERVI**

REACHING FOR A REUNION

As a young cavalryman in Vietnam, Bob Martin saved a baby in a bombed-out bunker. Now, nearly 50 years later, the VFW Post commander hopes to reunite with her or at least learn her fate.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE



OPERATION COMBAT BIKESAVER

Mechanically minded veterans in Indiana use their passion for working on motorcycles to deal with the effects of PTSD and TBI, as well as helping them readjust to civilian life. They call it "hot rod therapy." **BY JOSEPH S. PETE**



WORLD WAR II 'THERAPY DOG'

Using tricks she learned as a war dog on South Pacific battlefields in WWII, a 4-pound Yorkshire terrier entertained wounded troops, worked in Hollywood and appeared on television in the 1940s and '50s. Smoky also could be the world's first "therapy dog." **BY KARI WILLIAMS**



PHOTO BY TOM M. JOHNSON

AUGUST 2018

Vol. 105 No. 10

COVER PHOTO: Rich Synek, a member of VFW's Department of New York, displays products available at his food pantry in Utica. Synek and his wife, Michele, created the nonprofit Feed Our Vets, providing free food to veterans and their families. It includes a pantry in Watertown, a mobile unit in Syracuse and a gift card program that helps hungry vets around the country.

ON THE COVER

- 16 Fighting Hunger
- 22 Nice Try Taliban
- 26 Vietnam Vet Saves Baby
- 28 Rebuilding Motorcycles and Vets

IN THIS ISSUE

- 32 Habitat for Humanity
- 34 Veterans in the Classroom
- 36 Married VFW Department Leaders
- 38 ADA Compliant Park
- 40 Arizona Post Renaming

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 7 Mail Call
- 8 Now Hear This
- 10 Issues Up Front
- 12 Washington Wire
- 44 Book Corner
- 46 Better Health
- 48 VFW in Action
- 50 Member Corner
- 52 Member Benefits
- 54 Reunions and Claims
- 60 Vets in Focus





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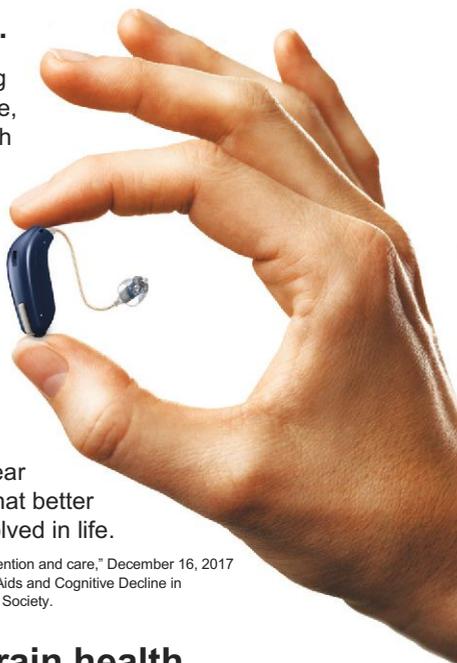
Hearing loss and cognitive decline: Is there a connection?

Research shows that regular use of a hearing aid can help **slow the effects of aging** on your brain.

A growing body of evidence links hearing loss with a higher risk of cognitive decline, which can lead to serious conditions such as dementia. Most recently, a study of dementia prevention, intervention and care in the *The Lancet* concluded that hearing loss is the biggest modifiable risk factor for later development of dementia.⁽¹⁾

Another study found that people with hearing loss who used hearing aids experienced cognitive decline at a rate similar to people without hearing loss.⁽²⁾ Scientists concluded that the ability to hear better played a role, but so did the fact that better hearing allowed the subjects to stay involved in life.

(1) Source: The Lancet Commissions, "Dementia prevention, intervention and care," December 16, 2017
(2) Source: Hélène Amieva, "Self-Reported Hearing Loss: Hearing Aids and Cognitive Decline in Elderly Adults: A 25-year Study," Journal of the American Geriatrics Society.



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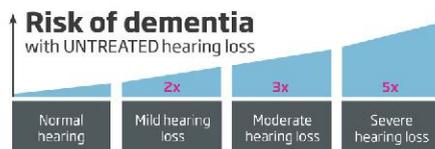
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- Research indicates that 80 percent of those with hearing loss don't seek help; usually because of denial, embarrassment, or simply lack of awareness.
- In addition to cognitive function, hearing loss has been shown to affect physical health, social skills, family relationships, self-esteem and more.
- Studies show that untreated hearing loss can result in depression, poorer job performance and diminished quality of life.

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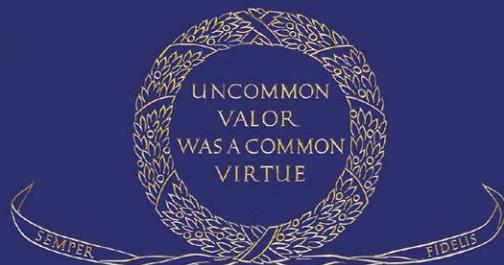
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– Former Combat Marine,
Korean War

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Moms in the War Zone

I received so many wonderful messages from friends who received their *VFW* magazine for May

and were surprised to see me in their mailbox. It was amazing to see the pictures and read the articles from the other moms.

SHERA TERRY, EMAIL

The article looks nice. Reading the other stories, I realize how blessed I was to have a strong family, work and church support. Thanks for doing this.

DONNA HERSHEY
ELIZABETHTOWN, PA.

The May issue is awesome. I love the recognition and honoring of some truly unsung heroes — moms, and especially moms in the war zone — really awesome.

ED SANDRICK, EMAIL

The words “mom” and “war” are not two words people like to see or say in the same sentence. Typically, women are not even recognized as veterans at all. I can tell you that 100 percent of the time, I have been mistaken as the veteran’s wife. Because women vets are an afterthought, the resources available to us are lacking nationwide. Just wanted to say that cover meant a lot to many for endless reasons. Thanks for putting women vets out there so boldly.

KIM PETTERS, EMAIL

My concern is there is a lot of articles about women in the service. Women chose to be in the service as well as men. Men are deployed leaving family behind. I don’t remember any articles telling the hardship for them or the return.

ABRAM RASBAND
BREMERTON, WASH.

Medics in the Boonies

Enjoyed the story. After 50 years in medicine, I retired as a physician’s assistant in 2016 and remember my service in Vietnam. We believed in the mission to bring medical service to the local population and to build bonds of trust with the Vietnamese people.

JOHN KEARNEY, EMAIL

In December 1968, Cpls. George Seli, Gaudencio Molina, Sgts. Ramon Gallegos, Ronald Robyn and I transported a 7- or 8-year-old Vietnamese girl to the Hoa Khanh Children’s Hospital. She had gotten her foot caught in the wheel of a motor scooter and broken her ankle. The children’s hospital was operated and maintained by Navy doctors and corpsmen. We Marines were very impressed with the dedication and professionalism of the Navy medical personnel.

JACK STUBBS, EMAIL

A wonderful article about the war to win the hearts and minds of the people. However, this was not the first time we had attempted to do so. When Vietnam was divided, a Navy doctor named Tom Dooley undertook the task of caring for thousands of Vietnamese who lived in the north and wanted to migrate to the non-communist south. Those were part of the MEDCAP missions that gallantly continued his legacy.

VERN MILLER
BROOKFIELD, WIS.

I was a medic with the 101st Avn. Grp. from 1970-71. I did MEDCAPs out at Vinh Hai and Vinh Loc. On a number of occasions, I had to medevac civilians to the Vietnamese hospital in Hue. It looked like it was so lacking in even basic resources that I felt I was taking these kids and women there to die. I’ve been back twice in six years. On my first return trip, I found the hospital and it was incredible. X-rays, MRIs, modern ambulances and computers.

JERRY ROSS
PERO, N.Y.

Post Bans Smoking

Post 2951 in Santa Fe, N.M., banned smoking, and it has been very positive. It was very bad with a lot of members who smoked, but now it seems like everyone enjoys coming to the club.

GILBERT ROMERO, EMAIL

My wife and I are both life members and live within miles of three VFW Posts in our area, but they are all smoking Posts. As much as we would love to drive 10 minutes from our house, it is worth the 30-45 minute drive to our Post, which voted to go smoke-free quite a few years ago. I hope more and more Posts vote to go smoke-free, as I believe it will bring in the younger veterans.

GEORGE WALLACE, EMAIL

I wish every Post would follow suit. I have not gone to a VFW Post for years because of the smoke. I would love to re-engage with a Post.

MARK KAMSTRA, EMAIL

I’ve tried for years, to no avail, to get the Posts near me to go non-smoking. The existing policy has kept me totally out. Additionally, it keeps many of the younger vets and their family and friends away. Time for a change or extinction.

BOB BOWERS, EMAIL

Battle of Dai Do

I was in Charlie Company 1/3. We went in as support. During my entire tour, I never saw anything like Dai Do. I came upon dead Marines that didn’t even have time to get their M60s off their shoulders. I will never forget that battle.

EDWARD LITTLE, EMAIL

Thank you for your outstanding article on the battle. I first learned to pray as a young 18-year-old “new guy” there with Golf Co., 2/4. Yet for many years after, no one I ever spoke to had heard of the Battle of Dai Do. Thanks again for bringing it to light.

GEORGE THEISS, EMAIL



“Mail Call” features letters from our readers in nine issues per year. If you have questions, comments or concerns about any subject or article from our most recent issue, letters can be emailed to magazine@vfw.org, with the subject line, “Mail Call,” or mailed to: *VFW magazine, Mail Call, 406 W. 34th Street, Suite 523, Kansas City, MO 64111*. Letters must be no more than 200 words, and *VFW magazine* reserves the right to edit letters for clarity, length and accuracy.

Former SEAL Receives Medal of Honor

President Donald Trump presented the nation's highest military honor to a retired Navy SEAL in May at the White House. Britt K. Slabinski, a former senior chief petty officer, earned the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Roberts Ridge in 2002 in Afghanistan.

Slabinski, a member of VFW Post 2014 in Brookville, Ind., was in charge of a seven-man recon unit that included SEAL Team Six members and other special operation troops. On March 4, 2002, they were airlifted to the top of the 10,000-foot, snow-covered Takur Ghar Mountain in southeastern Afghanistan. The team's mission was to direct air strikes on al Qaeda fighters battling U.S. troops in the valley below during *Operation Anaconda*.

The recon team's Chinook helicopter, piloted by a member of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, took fire as it attempted to land at the summit. One SEAL, Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts, fell out of the Chinook as it lifted off to avoid the ground fire. The helicopter managed a controlled crash landing a few miles away.

Slabinski, of Northampton, Mass., organized a return flight to the peak to rescue Roberts. Upon reinsertion, the team's helicopter again took fire from an estimated 40-100 al Qaeda fighters. One of the U.S. team members began moving toward an enemy stronghold.

"Without regard for his own safety, Slabinski charged directly toward enemy fire to join his teammate," according to his MOH citation.

The former Navy senior chief helped assault two bunkers, maneuvered his team to a more defensible position, directed air strikes near his own troops in the close-quarters battlefield, helped move casualties and continued fighting for more than 14 hours until they and reinforcements secured the peak.

A total of seven U.S. troops — from Army, Navy and Air Force units — were killed in the battle.

"There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about them," Slabinski said. "If I could give up this medal to have



AP PHOTO BY SUSAN WALSH

President Donald Trump places the Medal of Honor around the neck of retired Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Britt K. Slabinski on May 24 at the White House. Slabinski led a seven-man recon team against an al Qaeda force of between 40-100 fighters on March 4, 2002, atop Takur Ghar Mountain in Afghanistan during the Battle of Roberts Ridge.

them back, I would."

At press time, one of Slabinski's teammates — Air Force Tech. Sgt. John Chapman, who was killed in the battle — reportedly had been approved for the Medal of Honor, too.

VFW Member Awarded Soldier's Medal

A congressman hailed as a hero for his life-saving actions in 2017 received the Army's highest peacetime award in April. Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio) received the Soldier's Medal on April 26 in Washington, D.C. Wenstrup earned the award for his quick action following a shooting at a congressional baseball practice in June 2017.

Wenstrup, a life member of VFW Post 6979 in Cincinnati, provided life-saving first aid to Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.), the House of Representatives' majority whip, after Scalise was hit by a bullet. Wenstrup earned his VFW eligibility as the chief of surgery with the 344th Combat Support Hospital in Iraq from 2005-06.

According to the Department of the Army, the Soldier's Medal is awarded to those who, "while serving in any capacity with the Army of the United States, including Reserve Component ... distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving conflict with an enemy." Wenstrup has been a member of the Army Reserve since 1998.



Secretary of the Army Mark Esper watches as Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio) receives the Soldier's Medal from Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Mark A. Milley on April 26 at the U.S. Capitol. Wenstrup, an Army Reserve colonel and VFW life member, saved a fellow congressman's life after a shooting at a congressional baseball practice last year.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. PHILLIP VALENTINE

U.S. Embassies Bombed

Twenty years ago this month, Islamic terrorists bombed two U.S. embassies in Africa. On Aug. 7, 1998, the nearly simultaneous truck bombs exploded first at the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, and then, three minutes later, at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The blasts killed 224 people and wounded more than 4,000. A total of 12 Americans, including active-duty troops Marine Corps Sgt. Jesse Aliganga, a security guard; and Army Staff Sgt. Kenneth R. Hobson II, a defense attaché, died. Both men were based at the Nairobi facility.

The FBI linked the embassy attacks to Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden also would go on to plan and finance the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on U.S. soil. U.S. special operations troops killed bin Laden in a raid at his Abbottabad, Pakistan, compound on May 2, 2011.

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Post-9/11 Vet Population is History's Most Diverse

Veterans who served after Sept. 11, 2001, are more likely to be women or minorities than veterans of past wars. They're also better educated and more likely to have a service-connected disability.

BY DAVE SPIVA

The 3.3 million veterans who have served since Sept. 11, 2001, are now about half the size of the Vietnam War veterans population, according to information collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The data, taken in 2016 and published in April 2018, also revealed that post-9/11 veterans were the most diverse of any group of war-time veterans. About 17 percent of modern era veterans are women, 15.3 percent are black and 12.1 percent are Hispanic. Almost half, or 47.6 percent, of these veterans were younger than 35 years old.

These young veterans also have the highest percentage — 35.9 percent — of service-connected disabilities. That compares to 18.6 percent of all other veterans reporting a disability.

A higher percentage of post-9/11 veterans also lived in a household that received food stamps, had no health insurance coverage, lived in poverty or had no income compared to their counterparts, according to the 2016 VA profile of post-9/11 veterans that was released in March 2018.

Among other statistics from the Census Bureau of post-9/11 veterans:

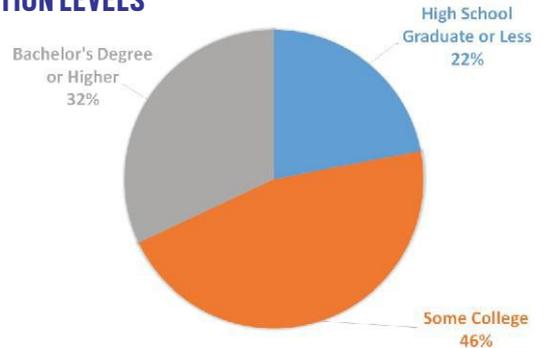
- Some 75 percent were employed, with common occupations being managers, truck drivers, police officers and security guards.
- About 7 percent worked in health care-related occupations.
- More than one-third were enrolled in VA health care.
- Less than 6 percent did not have health care insurance of any kind for themselves or family.
- Some 22.3 percent of these younger vets only use VA health care, compared to 9.4 percent of the rest of the veterans population. ✪

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

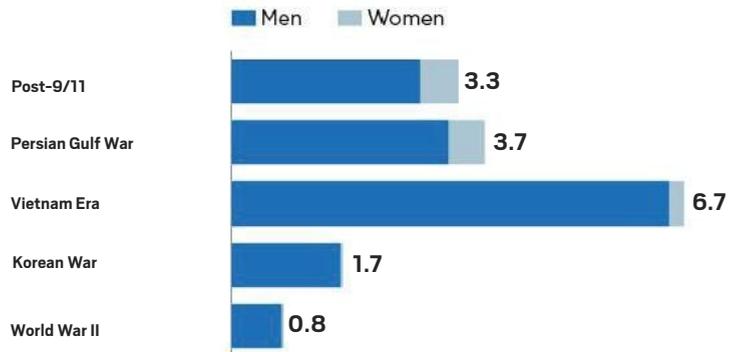
POST-9/11 VETERANS EDUCATION LEVELS

Post-9/11 veterans are educated. Of the group as of 2016:

- Some 32 percent had at least a bachelor's degree or higher.
- More than 46 percent had some college education.
- 612,000 were in college.

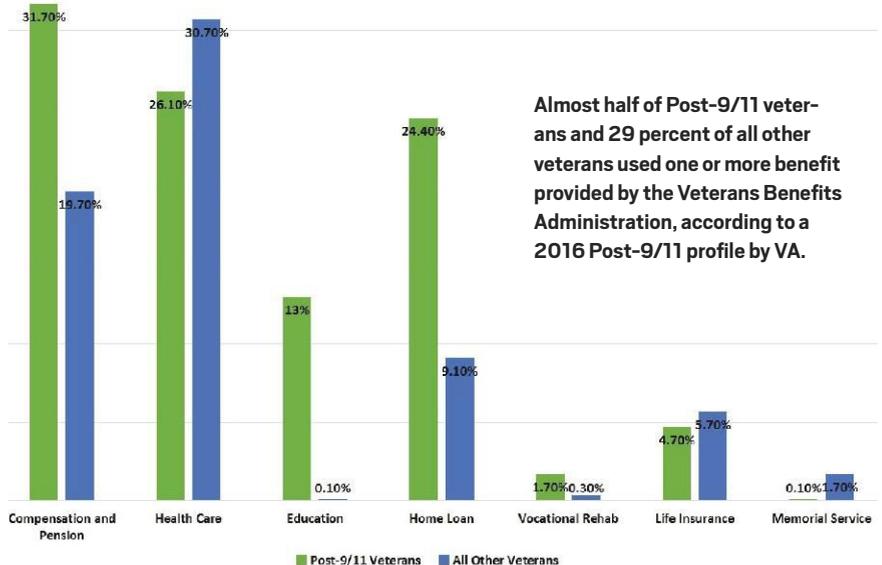


PERIOD OF SERVICE BY GENDER (IN MILLIONS)



Note: Veterans can serve in multiple periods. Categories shown here are not mutually exclusive. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016.

RATE OF VETERANS USING VA BENEFITS



Almost half of Post-9/11 veterans and 29 percent of all other veterans used one or more benefit provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration, according to a 2016 Post-9/11 profile by VA.

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'Blue Water Navy' Act Could Help 100,000 Vietnam War Sailors

Tens of thousands of the Vietnam War's "blue water" veterans soon might be eligible for VA disability compensation. If signed by President Donald Trump, *The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017, H.R. 299*, would extend the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange to Vietnam War blue water vet-

born with spina bifida due to a parent's exposure to Agent Orange in Thailand, according to a press release from Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-Tenn.).

This past June, then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman called the committee's approval of the bill "long overdue."

"The VFW salutes the bipartisan leadership of Phil Roe and ranking member Tim Walz for getting this bill through committee," said Harman, who served in the Vietnam War with the 101st Abn. Div.

H.R. 299 would give Agent Orange-veterans who served along the Korean DMZ an earlier start date to include the time period when various defoliants were tested. The current

start date of April 1, 1968, will be backed up seven months to Sept. 1, 1967. The new law also would require the VA to report on research being conducted on a broad range of conditions possibly related to service in Southwest Asia. This would be important for future legislative efforts to create a list of presumptive conditions for veterans seeking VA health care and benefits.

All impacted veterans should contact a VFW-accredited service officer for assistance filing a claim.

"Toxic exposure is toxic exposure, and denying benefits to any veteran just because of time or location denigrates their service and marginalizes their suffering," Harman said. "Agent Orange made Vietnam veterans sick. It made those stationed along the Korean DMZ and in Thailand sick — and many of their children, too. Toxic substances also are making many Southwest Asia veterans sick."

Student-Debt Forgiveness Offered to Disabled Vets

The VA and Education departments are teaming up to simplify the student loan forgiveness program for severely disabled veterans.

Veterans who have total and permanent disability can apply to have their federal student loans forgiven. Due to the lack of knowledge about the program, the departments now will work together to proactively identify and contact eligible veterans to make them aware of the program.

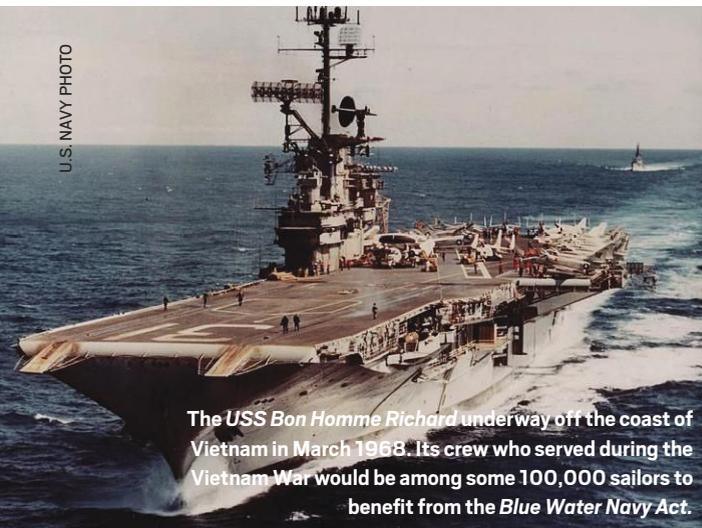
According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, tens of thousands of disabled veterans are eligible for the student loan protection.

"Simplifying the loan forgiveness process and proactively identifying veterans with federal student loans who may be eligible for a discharge is a small but critical way we can show our gratitude for veterans' service," Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said.

Due to the VA and Education departments' partnership, certain disabled veterans who have borrowed for school expenses will be notified by mail of their possible eligibility. They also will receive an application for a Total and Permanent Disability (TPD) Discharge. The Education Department is unable to automatically discharge these loans because proper documentation to prove disability is needed.

For more information about eligibility, visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/>, click on "How to Repay Your Loans," then "Forgiveness, Cancellation, and Discharge," and, finally, "Total and Permanent Disability Discharge."

U.S. NAVY PHOTO



The USS Bon Homme Richard underway off the coast of Vietnam in March 1968. Its crew who served during the Vietnam War would be among some 100,000 sailors to benefit from the Blue Water Navy Act.

erans — those who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam. Those who served in country and inland waters of Vietnam already are presumed to be exposed to Agent Orange. As of press time, VFW Legislative Director Carlos Fuentes said Trump would "likely" sign the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017* into law in July.

The Act would restore VA benefits to some 100,000 "blue water" veterans who had their disability eligibility taken away in 2002 after regulatory changes.

The bill would require VA to start making decisions on claims under the new rule starting in January. The bill does not require VA to auto adjudicate previously denied claims. However, veterans who submit new claims will receive retroactive benefits to the earliest possible effective date, as far as 1985.

The bill also would expand inclusive dates to those who served along the Korean DMZ and benefit children



FOR MORE INFORMATION about specific legislation or VA benefits, contact VFW's Washington Office at vfw@vfw.org. A member of VFW's National Veterans Service staff will respond as soon as possible.

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— J. Fitzgerald, VA



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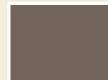
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VA Update

Senate Confirms Two VA Nominations

The Senate approved two nominees for VA positions in April.

The Senate confirmed Paul Lawrence as undersecretary for benefits and Joseph Falvey as a judge on the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Both positions are based in



Paul Lawrence

Washington, D.C. “We are pleased that the Senate has unanimously confirmed these nominees to serve at the VA and on the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims,” stated Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) in an April press release.

VA has been without a permanent benefits undersecretary since



Joseph Falvey

October 2015. Lawrence is a former vice president at Kaiser Associates, a strategy consulting firm in Washington, D.C. He will serve as a senior official overseeing benefits and services to troops, veterans and their families.

Falvey is a 30-year veteran of the Marine Corps and former district counsel for the Detroit District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. His approval gives the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims a full bench for the first time in almost three years.

Rural Vets Can Seek Telemedicine Across State Lines

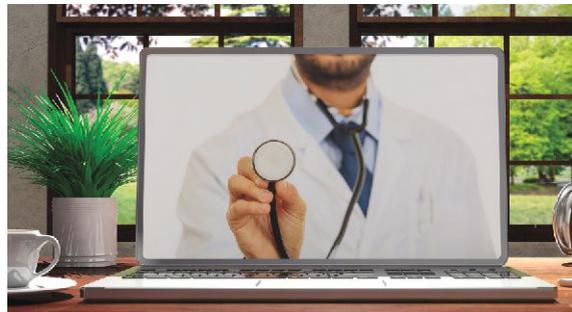
A new federal rule allows VA health care providers to use telemedicine as a means of treating and diagnosing patients in other states.

Prior to the rule and because of licensing restrictions and state telehealth laws, it was unclear whether VA doctors, nurses and other providers could provide health care to veterans in other states. The new federal rule, called the Authority of Health Care Providers to Practice Telehealth, gives VA health care providers the authority to virtually treat patients in other states.

According to a VA press release, the rule will mostly benefit veterans living in rural areas of the country who would need to travel long distances, even to other states, to see a doctor face-to-face. The rule also allows veterans to access services, such as mental health care and suicide prevention, in a “quicker and easier” manner through telehealth.

VA also announced that a video conferencing app, called VA Video Connect, will be able to supply the care for the patients anywhere in the country. VA Video Connect is available now.

For more information about VA telehealth care, visit <https://connectedcare.va.gov>.



Some Adoption Expenses Now Reimbursable

Veterans who have a service-connected disability resulting in infertility now might be eligible to receive a reimbursement of adoption expenses from VA. The amendment went into effect in March.

To qualify, adoptions must be arranged by an eligible adoption agency. Veterans can request reimbursement for qualifying adoption expenses incurred for adoptions completed after Sept. 29, 2016, according to VA.

An application for reimbursement must be submitted to VA no later than two years after a finalized adoption. For the adoption of a foreign child, veterans must submit a reimbursement for no later than two years after U.S. citizenship is issued to the child, according to VA.

Reimbursement is capped at \$2,000 per adoption for a covered veteran. No more than \$5,000 may be paid to a covered veteran’s adoption in any calendar year. Two married veterans may claim a reimbursement for any single adoption, according to VA.

Military Bases Have Contaminated Water

The Department of Defense (DoD) identified 401 active and inactive bases in the U.S. that have at least one area of exposure to perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), which are commonly used for extinguishing aircraft fires on military bases.

Of the 401 locations, the water at or near 126 of the reported bases contain “potentially harmful” levels of PFCs, according to *Military Times*. PFCs are linked to cancer and known to be harmful to fetuses and infants.

DoD found that 61 percent of the 2,668 tested water wells on or near base communities were above the Environmental Protection Agency’s recommended levels, according to *Military Times*.

“This is a situation that should have been investigated and resolved long ago,” said VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles. “We are doing everything in our power to get some answers from DoD leadership.”

A list of reported contaminated sites may be found at https://partner-mco-archive.s3.amazonaws.com/client_files/1524589484.pdf.

The Vietnam Veterans Tribute Thompson

HONORING ALL THOSE WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM

Our men and women came from all over the country, from all walks of life, to fight for freedom on the other side of the world. They served with honor, dignity, and courage. All gave some, some gave all, and many are still missing and unaccounted for. As a nation, we owe all of our Vietnam Veterans a debt that can never be repaid.

Nothing about the Vietnam War was easy. Those who were there remember the swampy grasslands, rice paddies, dense jungles, the heat and an elusive enemy; a war that took place halfway around the world in a country divided by decades of bitter history.

Few generations faced a more daunting challenge than those who fought in Southeast Asia. Few generations are more deserving of our gratitude and respect. To honor all those who served in Vietnam, America Remembers presents the **Vietnam Veterans Tribute Thompson**. Craftsmen commissioned specifically for this project by America Remembers decorate each Thompson in elegant 24-karat gold artwork on a mirror-polished nickel-decorated receiver. Issued in an exclusive limited edition of only 1,000 Tributes, this handsome firearm captures the courage and sacrifice of all those who fought for freedom in Vietnam.

The Tribute is a working semi-automatic Thompson submachine gun in caliber .45 ACP, one of the most memorable American infantry weapons of all time. Like many dedicated Americans, the Thompson served proudly in Vietnam. We've taken this combat-tested classic and transformed it into a work of art. The result is a stunning presentation firearm that will stand as a testament and lasting Tribute to all Vietnam veterans.

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Vietnam was considered the "last great war" for the Tommy Gun. Though it saw less use than in previous wars, it was a popular weapon for American and South Vietnamese soldiers. The Thompson was a "warhorse" which was relied on for its superior stopping power and dependability.

Like the dedicated American warriors who served in Vietnam, the Thompson served proudly in Vietnam, continuing a tradition of excellence first established during WWII, and later in Korea. This stunning presentation firearm is a lasting tribute to all of America's veterans and links them forever in time with their brothers-in-arms who fought earlier wars.

We know there will never be another American-made firearm like the Thompson submachine gun. And there will never be more dedicated men and women than those who bravely served their country in Vietnam.

Much like the generations of warriors who came before, those who served with valor in Vietnam deserve their place in American history.

They didn't hesitate to put their lives on the line and give up everything in defense of our liberty and freedom. Some made the ultimate sacrifice. Others returned home to a divided nation. All of them deserve our gratitude.

During the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, there has been a strong interest in firearm Tributes honoring those who served in Vietnam. Demand for this Tribute is expected to be strong. Order now to guarantee your place in the edition. We will arrange delivery through the licensed firearms dealer of your choice (not available in CA, CT, MD, NY). If for any reason you are not completely satisfied with your Tribute, you may return it in original, unfired condition within 30 days for a complete and courteous refund.

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If you are a veteran who answered the call to duty in Vietnam, or if you wish to honor your father, husband, brother, friend or other family member, the Vietnam Veterans Tribute Thompson is sure to become a cherished addition to your collection. Order today to secure your Tribute honoring those who proudly served our nation in Vietnam.

▼ Both sides of the receiver feature emblems that honor Vietnam War veterans. The banner reads: "A Grateful Nation Remembers," and inside the oval is a lone American soldier, the distinctive silhouette of Vietnam and a pair of U.S. military helicopters. The emblem on the right side is framed with a banner reading: "Vietnam Veterans Tribute Thompson".

▼ Left side of the receiver features a soldier with his M60 machine gun--nicknamed "The Pig" for its hefty size. The M60 unleashed a fury of firepower on the enemy. Also featured is a M48-A3 Patton tank providing cover as troops enter a village. The M48 was a workhorse during the Vietnam War.

▲ Right side also features a soldier scanning the distance for enemy movement. A pair of M48 tanks make their way on the ground while the sky is abuzz with helicopters, which played such an important role during the Vietnam War. On the far end of the receiver, you'll find a Marine and his M16. Along with the Huey, the legendary M16 has become a symbol of combat service in Vietnam. Introduced to the battlefield in 1964, the M16 was a lightweight assault rifle that proved invaluable in jungle firefights. Right side features an image of the iconic Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal presented by Republic of Vietnam to members of the United States military who completed at least six months of duty in the war, with a frame reading: "Vietnam War - All Gave Some, Some Gave All." Below it you'll find a banner that reads: "Lest We Forget."

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VFW MEMBER FEEDS HUNGRY VETERANS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Starting with just one hungry veteran years ago, Rich Synek launched an ambitious plan. Now he, his wife, Michele, and a team of volunteers provide nourishment to vets and families at New York food pantries and donate gift cards to those in other states.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE



Since 2008, a grassroots, VFW-member-led effort has fed more than 15,000 veterans nationwide, distributed more than 1 million pounds of food and donated more than \$80,000 in gift cards. And it all started with one postage stamp.

VFW Department of New York member Rich Synek was postmaster in Vernon Center, N.Y., when he noticed WWII vet Orley Baker purchasing one stamp at a time because that is all he could afford to buy.

Synek soon learned that Baker and his wife had only enough money to buy food for two weeks out of every month.

"I just couldn't get over how horrible it was that a WWII veteran was going hungry," said Synek, who earned the Navy Expeditionary Medal off the coast of Libya in 1986. "For that matter, anyone being hungry is unacceptable."

Soon after learning this about Baker, Synek and his wife, Michele, took food to the vet's home, only to find empty cupboards and an empty refrigerator, other than a few condiments.

That's when Synek knew what he had to do. He retired 11 years early and found his calling. And so was born Feed Our Vets, a New York-based nonprofit veterans-only food pantry.

With pantries in Utica and Watertown, Feed Our Vets also has a mobile unit that feeds veterans monthly in Syracuse. Additionally, the unit takes food to Binghamton, Buffalo and Albany. Numerous times, it has traveled as far away as Philadelphia.

To receive assistance at the pantries, vets only need to bring in a DD-214 and a photo ID or a VA card. No questions are asked. How vets end up at the pantry is not important to Synek and the teams of volunteers.

One such volunteer is Vietnam veteran Joe Ancona. He's been the director of the Utica pantry for eight years. He retired from the Army after 20 years before going to work for the state. After he retired, he thought he would do some volunteer work.

"Rich married my youngest sister and that's how I got roped into this," he said and laughed. "It's really like having another

Volunteers Joe Ancona and Michele Synek stock the shelves at the Feed Our Vets food pantry in Utica, N.Y. Feed Our Vets founder and VFW member Rich Synek, far right, talks with veteran Carl Davis about healthy food choices. Since 2008, Feed Our Vets has distributed more than 1 million pounds of food and donated more than \$80,000 in gift cards to veterans and their families in 38 states.





LEFT: Veterans Carl Davis, Steve Keblish, Lewis Smith, Rich Synek and Jesse Martin visit with one another at Character Coffee in Utica in May. Synek, founder of Feed Our Vets, said the group likes to meet at the coffee shop and listen to Smith's WWII stories. Davis, who utilizes the Feed Our Vets pantry, said the volunteers really relate to him.

BELOW LEFT: The promotional vehicle FOV 1 will be auctioned off in September to raise funds for Feed Our Vets, which receives no state or federal funding. The 1990 AM General Humvee was anonymously donated to the group and currently is on display at the Saratoga Auto Museum in New York.

FRESH VEGETABLES APLENTY

Army veteran Carl Davis is one of the veterans who regularly visits the Utica pantry, which he calls a "society within a society."

Davis, who was severely injured years ago while serving as an Army welder at Ft. Ord, Calif., is 100 percent disabled and has three children.

"I don't know what I would do without this," Davis said. "You know, they can shut off the cable and that's fine because you don't have to have that. But when you don't have food for your family, it really hits home."

While talking on the phone for this article, Davis noted that he was cooking a pork roast with fresh vegetables that he had received at the pantry. He added that he always gets milk, eggs, cheese, bread and fresh vegetables.

"It's not like you come in and they give you a box of macaroni and call it good," he said. "They really care for us vets because they are vets, too. I pray for them every day."

Davis added that he appreciates the camaraderie at the pantry. They know how to relate to one another and "speak the same language."

FEED OUR VETS IS A 'LIFESAVER'

Besides the pantries and mobile unit, Feed Our Vets sends gift cards to veterans in 38 states. As of May 20, more than \$80,000 in gift cards had been distributed around the country.

The family of Amber and Anthony Hockensmith, from Georgetown, Ky., is the recipient of a \$75 gift card each month.

Amber said the family, which includes four children, was doing pretty good

the volunteers will give a person enough food to get through the day and refer them to other places for assistance.

"We're never going to turn away a hungry person," Ancona said.

Selena Dewey also volunteers her time at the Utica food pantry. She's been there about a year. October will mark three years since her husband died just one month shy of retiring after 30 years in the Air Force.

"People always say that the best way to heal is by helping others," Dewey said. "I really wanted to get involved with something that would help veterans. This has truly helped my healing process."

Dewey is charged with weighing the food as it leaves the pantry. The IRS requires all food to be weighed both in and out.

She noted that veterans from WWII to Iraq utilize the pantry, adding that it's particularly sad to see WWII vets in a position of needing assistance finding food.

"It has been the most humbling and rewarding experience," Dewey said. "Each week, we, as volunteers, thank the veterans for their service. They always thank us. They are so appreciative of us. But it seems so wrong that they feel like they have to say thank you."



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICH SYNEK

er job, but that's OK."

Most weeks, Ancona puts in 25-40 hours a week. While the pantry is open every Wednesday from 3-6 p.m. and the third Saturday of every month from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., it takes a lot of work to stock it.

Each week sees about 50-60 veterans coming in for food, and the volunteer staff of 12 makes sure everyone receives a portion.

"Some vets cannot make it in during our regular hours, and I'll meet them after hours," Ancona said. "There are a lot of hungry people out there, so you do what you gotta do, you know?"

Ancona added that some people are hungry enough that they try to con him. They will say they were in the military but cannot prove it. In those situations,

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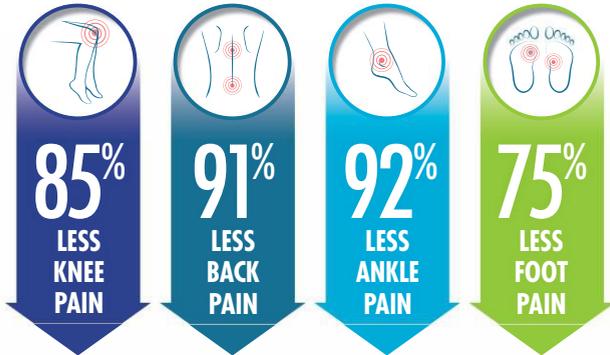
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on the couple's dual income. But after Anthony's two tours in Iraq with the Army, where he was wounded in multiple IED explosions, all of that changed.

Diagnosed with PTSD and traumatic brain injury — with side effects including short-term memory loss, seizures and night terrors — Anthony is no longer able to work.

Amber, who previously worked in the medical industry in an administrative role, now is his full-time caregiver. From her caregiver support group, she found out about Feed Our Vets.

"I learned to coupon, and that \$75 lasts us the entire month," Amber said. "No words really describe how great Rich and his wife are. They are amazing."

Amber noted that the application process for Feed Our Vets was "simple," easy and not invasive.

"There are no questions about why you need help or for how long," Amber said. "They just help, no questions asked."

Nikia Shelton agrees. Her husband, Dustin, was wounded in Iraq while serving in the Army. He was rated 90 percent disabled by the VA due to spinal cord complications.

Last November, while pregnant with two children at home, Nikia lost her source of income. She doesn't recall how she heard about Feed our Vets but said she's glad she did. The family in Georgia receives a \$75 gift card each month from the New York operation.

"Without this, we wouldn't make it through the last week of the month," Nikia said. "Even if it was \$20, it would help. Feed Our Vets has been a lifesaver on more than one occasion."

Synek recalled a woman he helped in Arkansas who wrote him a letter that nearly brought him to tears. She told him she hadn't had anything to eat in days and then received a \$75 Walmart gift card. She went out and bought a lot of food and came home and made a good dinner for her family.

"I just can't imagine," he said. "I mean, it is food. It's what the rest of us just take for granted."

'THE BEST FEELING IN THE WORLD'

Since Feed Our Vets does not receive any federal or state funding, Synek said the group relies on individuals, businesses and

community groups to help pay its bills.

"We have churches and other organizations that host food drives for us," he said. "And we do different fundraising programs as well."

The latest such fundraising endeavor is the auctioning off of a restored 1990 AM General Humvee. Synek began researching this idea a few years ago, hoping to find someone to donate one.

"I reached out to several donors with this idea and asked if they would like to be a part of this project," Synek said. "After several months of talk, one of them donated one from Robbins Air Force Base in Georgia."

In January 2017, Feed Our Vets received

"You know, they can shut off the cable and that's fine because you don't have to have that. But when you don't have food for your family, it really hits home."

Carl Davis, patron of Feed Our Vets food pantry in Utica, N.Y.



PHOTO BY TOM M. JOHNSON

the vehicle. The restoration was completed by Steve Hale from Steve's Restoration in Frankfort, N.Y. Synek said Dewey secured a lot of parts for the restoration, saving "tens of thousands of dollars."

FOV 1, as it's now called, is at the Saratoga Auto Museum in Saratoga, N.Y. At press time, a charity auction had been scheduled there for Sept. 22.

"All of this is more rewarding to me than anything else," Synek said. "When a vet leaves one our pantries with a week's worth of free food, it's the best feeling in the world."

Synek said Feed Our Vets has no plans on slowing down. He hopes it does well enough on the auction that in a year or so they can have an FOV 2 to auction. For now, Synek and his volunteers will continue feeding as many as they can with

Feed Our Vets founders Michele and Rich Synek with their truck they use to pull the nonprofit's mobile food pantry to New York cities, such as Syracuse, Binghamton, Buffalo and Albany. On occasion, the Syneks also have traveled as far away as Philadelphia with the mobile unit. In addition to the pantries in both Utica and Watertown, Feed Our Vets donates gift cards to veterans and their families all over the country.

what they have.

"If I only fed one veteran, it was all totally worth it," he said. "The people like Carl and Amber and all the 3,525 vets we fed last year are what keep me going."

For more information on Feed Our Vets and the vets they help, visit www.feedourvets.org or check out the Feed Our Vets Facebook page for updates. 📧

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Army Spc. Justin Lane prepares in 2011 for his duties as a .50 caliber turret gunner during a route clearance mission in Afghanistan with the Army Reserve 428th Combat Engineer Company. In July of that year, Lane lost both his legs when his vehicle hit an improvised explosive device.

‘Thank God I Was Blown Up’

After he was nearly killed in Afghanistan, Justin Lane returned to the country earlier this year. He was determined to leave the war zone this time on his own terms.

BY JIM SERVI

Two moments stand out for former Army Spc. Justin Lane when he recalls his deployment to Afghanistan — one he’ll never forget and one he’ll never remember.

Always happy-go-lucky with an air of optimism, Lane’s attitude became jaded and vengeful when on March 26, 2011, his brother in arms, and friend from his hometown, Army Cpl. Justin Ross, was killed in Afghanistan. Less than four months later, on July 2, 2011, Spc. Lane was in a vehicle that hit an improvised explosive device (IED). It nearly ended his life.

Lane vowed to return one day and leave Afghanistan on his terms. In April, he got that opportunity. Another wounded combat veteran introduced Lane to an organization called Feherty’s Troops First Foundation. The Laurel, Md.-based nonprofit supports “wellness, quality-of-life and event-based initiatives” for troops wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to its website.

Through its program, *Operation Proper Exit*, Troops First gives wounded veterans the opportunity to return to Afghanistan or Iraq and leave with “peace of mind and closure.” More than 100 service members have taken part in the program since it launched in June 2009.

“There were a lot of feelings inside when I found out I was going back to Afghanistan,” Lane began to explain, then hesitated, remembering the journey that brought him to this moment.

‘THE MOST DANGEROUS JOB’

Like many soldiers from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Lane was heavily influenced by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack.

“I remember my eighth-grade teacher brought in a TV, and we didn’t know what was going on,” Lane said. “We watched the towers fall, and I knew at that moment that I was going to join the military.”

His plan to join the military was put

on hold after high school graduation. Instead, he followed his high school sweetheart to Mexico, but the feeling to serve remained.

“[My brother and I] decided that we would both sign up together the following morning, but when my brother woke up, he had changed his mind,” Lane said with a chuckle. “I said, ‘Fine, but I’m going.’ My brother was the reminder I needed.”

Still living in Mexico, Lane joined the Army Reserve.

“I told the recruiter that I wanted the most dangerous job at the time so that I could serve in the best possible way,” he said. “The recruiter told me I’d be a 12B, combat engineer, doing route clearance, looking for IEDs.”

With his home of record in Green Bay, Wis., Lane was assigned to the 428th Engineer Company out of Wausau, Wis.

In August 2010, the 428th Engineer Company mobilized and shortly after deployed to Forward Operating Base

(FOB) Wilson, later renamed FOB Pasab, in Zhari District, Kandahar Province west of Kandahar City in Afghanistan. This area was the birthplace of the Taliban in the 1990s.

The Sangesar, a local landmark, is located in the heart of Zhari District and named after an abandoned British stone fort from the 1800s. It also is the infamous location where Mullah Mohammed Omar first armed 50 of his students, or Taliban, and fought local warlords.

Their cause grew, and before the end of 1994, Omar's Taliban controlled most of the country. Lane's route clearance patrols would go by these locations almost daily, and they still hosted a heavy Taliban presence.

QUIET AREA MEANS TROUBLE

The route Lane and his fellow soldiers took on the morning of July 2, 2011, was one they frequently traveled. It also is one of the same routes referenced in *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* by Lester W. Grau, discussing Soviet combat tactics in Afghanistan.

Leaving one of the only paved roads in the country, Highway 1, one side of the road consisted of farmland and plantations. On the other side, a large mud wall lined the road with mud huts beyond it. On the far eastern boundary, the Arghandab River flowed, creating the border of Zhari Province.

Irrigation wadis snaked their way from this river and its tributaries to the farmland dominated by opium poppies and cannabis. In between was a school, long since abandoned. Grape huts, some more than 50 feet tall, dotted the landscape with a small mountain range beyond. The temperature was sweltering, even in the early morning hours, as they departed. That day's mission was different.

The 428th Engineer Company would be clearing the route of IEDs not once, as usual, but twice, in support of a 3rd Bde., 10th Mtn. Div. operation to rid the battlefield of IED emplacements. Just as the patrol approached a designated danger area, one of the vehicles was engulfed in earth. An IED exploded beneath them. Moments passed before the rest of the patrol could conduct their assessment.

Everyone was all right with no serious injuries. They would CASEVAC (emergency casualty evacuation) back to base, deliver the wounded to medics, swap vehicles and continue the mission. Lane, who had been the gunner for one of the vehicles, now became the driver.

As he drove the RG-31, specifically designed as a mine-protected vehicle with its V-shaped hull, Lane remembered that the route was quiet that day. Afghans generally loved to watch as they drove through, but today he didn't see any watching from the fields. Approaching

the crater of the IED blast from only hours earlier, they were extra alert as they methodically searched for IEDs.

ALIVE THANKS TO QUICK ACTION

In an instant, Lane's vehicle was flipped in the air, ripped to pieces, and the cab penetrated with shrapnel. Lane remembers trying not to smash his squad leader, Staff Sgt. Daniel Kienow, then turning to find their gunner, Spc. Aaron Krueger, unresponsive. Moments later, Krueger snapped back to reality. Then, Lane looked down to check himself. Blood was everywhere; his body was snapped in half. Everything went blank.

"Waking up in Walter Reed was the next thing I remember," Lane said. "My whole family surrounded me."

Both legs required amputation, along with one of his fingers. His pelvis was shattered, femur broken, arm snapped, and front four teeth knocked out. Virtually all his internal organs had damage, and shrapnel destroyed his torso.

Lane suffered immense brain trauma and required a tracheotomy. It took multiple blood transfusions, more than 20 medications and the miracles of modern medicine to stabilize him.

Lane credits the expert battlefield first aid of the 428th Eng. Co.'s combat medic Jared Warren, the life-stabilizing expertise of the MEDEVAC crew and the skilled surgeons and medical professionals at

Justin Lane sits in the cab of an RG-31 mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicle in April 2018 in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Lane, who was severely wounded while on active duty in 2011 in Afghanistan, went back to the country to inspire active-duty troops and fulfill a goal he's had for the past seven years — walk out of Afghanistan using his "own two legs."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN LANE



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN LANE

Afghanistan War veteran Justin Lane performs in 2016 for students at Bookcliff Christian School in Grand Junction, Colo. Lane also has performed at the inaugurations of President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump, as well as alongside such famous country music artists as Lee Greenwood, Neal McCoy, Aaron Tippin and the Gatlin Brothers.

“That gave me freedom, and when I got that I found happiness and hope,” Lane said. “I vowed to get strong enough and healthy enough to pursue a music career.”

Six months after he nearly died in the IED blast, Lane found himself singing at the presidential inauguration for Barack Obama, and four years later, he returned for President Donald Trump’s inauguration. In between,

he had the opportunity to sing with country music stars Lee Greenwood, Neal McCoy, Aaron Tippin, the Gatlin Brothers and other artists around the United States.

Touring began with his first band aptly named JP Lane and the A-Team, and continued with his current band Company 6. After hearing that he’d have trouble talking for the rest of his life, and singing would be nearly impossible, Lane defied the odds and made it his career. But advocacy remains his passion.

“God gave me music, not just for therapy, but as a career to help inspire others,” Lane said. “I met with the victims from the Boston Marathon bombing and those who had their lives destroyed by hurricanes. I always try to inspire them and show them the positivity.”

‘NICE TRY TALIBAN’

Lane also has shown a knack for business and fundraising. His motto — “Nice Try Taliban” — is now his trademark. He owns a line of clothing that depicts the saying and has since expanded to “Nice Try Harvey” and “Nice Try Irma” to raise funds for recent hurricane relief efforts.

Living in his new house outside of San Antonio, Texas, built by Helping a Hero — a Houston-based nonprofit that serves severely disabled veterans — Lane is now on no medications and able to bench press 315 pounds during his daily exercise rou-

tine. While his recovery defied all odds, one regret lingered for Lane.

“I didn’t get to finish my mission, and I wanted to walk out of that country on my own two feet,” Lane said. “People say I conquered everything, but to me, this is the last step. Knowing that I overcame that, I know I can do anything.”

On April 1, that wish came true. Lane touched down in Afghanistan, set on overcoming that last obstacle.

“We toured all over Afghanistan, and I noticed how much it changed,” he said. “The Afghans are taking over their country, and I love to see that. That’s exactly what we were trying to [help them] do.”

Lane said that the groups involved in his trip — *Operation Proper Exit*, Troops First, and the military — were all “on point” and “everything was coordinated perfectly.”

He also sang for the troops and was able to “show them how we [the wounded] are still living life” regardless of their circumstances.

“Putting on a uniform again was awesome, and they made me an honorary command sergeant major while we were there,” Lane said. “But, sitting in an RG-31 again was incredible. I felt empowered, like nothing could stop me. And this time I left on my own two legs.”

The Afghanistan War vet added that the trip gave him a new perspective on his service.

“Looking back, I thank God I was blown up because I had such a negative mindset, filled with so much hate and revenge,” Lane said. “And I’m not sure I would have been able to get out of that. Now I want to help inspire others to do the same.”

Enjoying life with his new bride, Crystal, honorary Command Sgt. Maj. Justin Lane will no doubt keep singing and keep inspiring. ✪

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Jim Servi is a member of VFW Post 10203 in Hamburg, Wis. A veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Servi also authored the novel Forever Changed.

Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany for saving his life.

“When I finally came back to reality and saw myself, I saw a monster,” Lane said. “I thought that I didn’t have a future in this world. They told me I wouldn’t be able to walk again and that I’d have trouble talking for the rest of my life. I pushed everyone out and went into a hole.”

MUSIC AS INSPIRATION

Little by little, he made progress, but the depression remained. Lane was searching for a purpose to live. Support poured in not only from family, friends and fellow soldiers, but also from The Purple Heart Foundation, local VFW Posts and other veterans organizations. Still, he continued to fall into the figurative abyss.

Surgeries followed by therapy were his life in those initial days. To cope, Lane turned to music. Once his strength began to return, he was fitted with his first prosthetic leg. He craved the taste of freedom that it provided, but then instantly returned to disappointment when his left femur broke inside his new prosthetic. It was then he had a vision of returning to normalcy.

“I’m going to do this now, press on and I’m going to give it all to God,” Lane remembered promising himself. “And one day I heard God answer in a song.”

After several months of therapy, he was doing laps with his new prosthetics and received approval to get a driver’s license.



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Back in Black:
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I'LL TAKE MINE BLACK...NO SUGAR

In the early 1930s watch manufacturers took a clue from Henry Ford's favorite quote concerning his automobiles, "You can have any color as long as it is black." Black dialed watches became the rage especially with pilots and race drivers. Of course, since the black dial went well with a black tuxedo, the adventurer's black dial watch easily moved from the airplane hangar to dancing at the nightclub. Now, Stauer brings back the "Noire", a design based on an elegant timepiece built in 1936. Black dialed, complex automatics from the 1930s have recently hit new heights at auction. One was sold for in excess of \$600,000. We thought that you might like to have an affordable version that will be much more accurate than the original.



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Nearly 50 years ago, a U.S. soldier in Vietnam saved a baby's life. Now he hopes to reconnect with her.



BY JANIE DYHOUSE

SEARCHING FOR SUNDAY

Bob Martin recalls vivid details of the day he found Roberta Sunday 48 years ago this month. It was a typical, hot and humid August day in Vietnam's Quang Tri province. A sergeant with C Troop, 3rd Sqdn., 17th Air Cav, Martin was leading a platoon to search an enemy bunker complex that had just been pummeled with U.S. bombs.

"It was our job to provide a damage assessment after the strikes," said Martin, now commander of VFW Post 889 in Coeur d' Alene, Idaho. "There were a lot of dead bodies. In one bunker, I found two dead NVA men and one

woman dressed all in black. I imagine she had been supporting them."

As Martin turned to leave the bunker, he heard a faint sound, almost like a cough. He thought perhaps it was the sound of a rat because it wasn't coming from the people who were "obviously" dead. After hearing it again, he searched the bunker and discovered a naked baby girl under the woman's body.

"I thought, 'Oh my God, now what? I can't just leave her here,'" Martin recalled. "I wrapped her in one of the empty sandbags I always carried with me."

He had to haul the infant some 30 minutes back to the nearest landing

zone to a waiting chopper.

"I was so afraid of getting ambushed while getting her out of there," Martin said. "I don't know what I would have done if we would have encountered the enemy. I was grateful that she never cried once."

The baby was alert, but she was shivering and had a piece of shrapnel in one of her thighs. At the LZ, Martin radioed his commanding officer who diverted the chopper to the nearby Quang Tri Catholic Hospital.

Two nuns greeted Martin and asked him to fill out a card with the baby's name, location where she was found and



LEFT: Bob Martin, commander of VFW Post 889 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, sits in his kitchen earlier this year and looks at a photo of himself holding a baby girl taken nearly 50 years ago in Vietnam. Martin found the girl in an enemy bunker complex and took her to Quang Tri Catholic Hospital, where nuns asked him to name the baby. He dubbed her Roberta Sunday, since his first name is Robert, and he found her on a Sunday. Since that time, he has often thought of what happened to her. With the help of VFW Post 889 Auxiliary President Beverly Hanson, Martin is on a quest to find Roberta Sunday.

BELOW: Bob Martin in Vietnam's Quang Tri province in August 1970 with Roberta Sunday wrapped in an empty sandbag. Martin hopes to find out what happened to her and where the now 48-year-old woman lives.

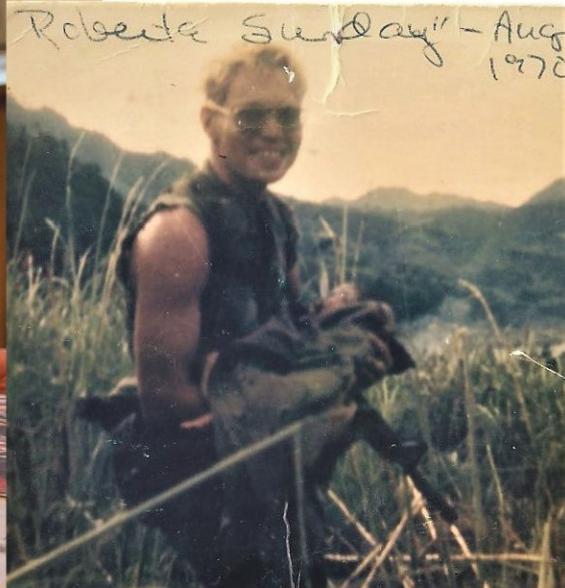


PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB MARTIN

said. "We are not even sure if Save the Children New Zealand had a presence in Vietnam at that time. It is possible that New Zealand nurses were there but they may have been sent by the government."

Wanting to help, Clelland tried the New Zealand Nurses Organization, but it doesn't hold records for individual nurses.

Hanson was not deterred. She emailed the New Zealand Parliament

"That would really be something to see her and know that something positive came out of that war."

Bob Martin,
VFW Post 889 commander

"I knew after hearing this story, that this is a story that had to be told," Hanson said. "I could see the emotion and the feeling that Bob had toward this child he knew only for a very short amount of time."

Hanson did a Google search for "Roberta Sunday and Vietnam." Her search revealed an article about a blind Asian woman in her 40s who was working in New Zealand.

Her name was Roberta Sunday. Hanson didn't print off the article because she didn't see how, at the time, this woman would be connected to Vietnam. Now her online search results cannot be duplicated.

"What are the odds there is another woman with that name who is about the same age?" Martin asked.

Hanson's further research uncovered that nurses were sent from New Zealand from 1968 to 1974 to rescue Vietnamese orphans from Vietnam, perhaps as part of the Save the Children organization.

According to Ally Clelland, communications specialist with Save the Children New Zealand, this is unlikely.

"Unfortunately, our archives do not go back to the Vietnam War," Clelland

and reached out to a nurse from New Zealand. She tried getting in touch with people involved with adoption agencies in Vietnam and reunion groups.

Her efforts, while noble, have not produced the whereabouts of Roberta Sunday. Hanson is determined and continues her search.

"We are going to find this woman," Hanson said. "I just feel it in my core."

Martin is not giving up hope either. He said if Roberta Sunday is found, he'll go to wherever she is, even if it does turn out to be New Zealand.

"If we find her, I'd go in a heartbeat to see her," Martin said. "That would really be something to see her and know that something positive came out of that war." ★

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

Martin's unit information. Of course, he did not know her name. He was encouraged by his fellow soldiers to name her "Roberta," since his first name is Robert. And since it was a Sunday, he decided on "Roberta Sunday" as her full name.

"I was only at the hospital for about five to 10 minutes and then I was gone," Martin said. "Over the years, though, I've wondered and wondered what happened to her after I left her there. Where is she now?"

That's a question being asked as far away as New Zealand. Beverly Hanson, Post 889 Auxiliary president, decided to help Martin track down Sunday.



A program supported by VFW Posts in northwestern Indiana gives gear-minded veterans a place to build their own custom motorcycles. Participants say the work and camaraderie with other vets has been life-saving.



BY JOSEPH S. PETE

'HOT ROD THERAPY'

Every Sunday, veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq report to a cinderblock garage flanked by metal and chrome motorcycles on a cluttered gravel lot in Cedar Lake, Ind., as rock music blares in the background.

The veterans — mostly from the post-9/11 era — gather to build custom motorcycles from spare and recycled parts at

nonprofit therapeutic club in August 2017. It was featured on the second episode of Mike Rowe's show, "Returning the Favor," on Facebook that same month, amassing more than 32 million views.

VFW Post 7760 in Portage, Ind., located in the northern part of the state on the shores of Lake Michigan, hosted a motorcycle ride to support the charity last year. The Post received a \$500 donation from VFW Post 717 in nearby St. John, Ind.

ALLEVIATING PTSD SYMPTOMS

Indiana's VFW District 1 Commander Timothy Houts said he hoped to raise funds for Operation Combat Bikesaver from other northwest Indiana Posts, and then from other VFW Posts throughout the Hoosier State. The membership at Post 717, to which Houts belongs, unanimously approved the contribution.

"It's outstanding what they're doing," Houts said. "The VFW is all about helping veterans who are coming home or who have been home. I'm impressed with the amount of work that seems to be getting done. They're all here working on stuff, working on bikes. The overall concept is to help veterans with PTSD, and I'm all for that. I would love to see this grow across the United States."

Communities across the world, as far away as Japan, have expressed interest in opening chapters of Operation Combat Bikesaver after the Rowe show aired. But that might not happen anytime soon because the volunteer-run nonprofit wants to first draw up franchising agreements to ensure quality control with its concept.

For now, the mission is squarely focused on helping vets at the original shop.

"It gets their mind off the war," Houts said. "It's unique. We support a lot of different charities, but I've never seen anything like it."

"Jason started it with his own time and money and tools, and finally got a



PHOTO BY JOSEPH S. PETE

Army veterans Drew Franks and Marlin Moseberry decide how to proceed on construction of a custom-built motorcycle last March in Cedar Lake, Ind. The two men were participating in the Operation Combat Bikesaver program, which offers vets a chance to pursue their hobby with other former military members.

Operation Combat Bikesaver. Chairman and President Jason Zaideman describes the activity as "hot rod therapy."

"The metaphor that I use is the old beaten-up motorcycle that's forgotten about, sitting in someone's shed," the Army vet said. "It's done its service back when it was younger. Then there's the veteran, who's the same way. He's served his country, and now he's back in society but he's a little beaten up."

"Put those two together and they resurrect each other. Now you're going to have an amazing, cool motorcycle and a veteran who rebuilt himself in a way."

Zaideman and his wife, Lindsey, a former VFW Post bartender, founded the

lot more attention when the Mike Rowe show came out. People have donated a lot of tools and stuff, and we'll support them by sending guys over here and helping them build bikes financially."

MIKE ROWE: 'HEY, CHECK THIS OUT'

Rowe helped Operation Combat Bikesaver on his show by painting the building's facade, providing more equipment so more veterans could participate, covering rent for one year and throwing a big community barbecue. He said on the show that the original plan was just to "paint the joint, but then things got out of hand."

"I feel proud and lucky to be in the position I'm in. Facebook is a big platform, and I feel like we're using it in a way that's making a difference," Rowe said. "My purpose (to the extent that I have one) is to tap the country on the shoulder every so often and say, 'Hey, check this out. Here's someone you should know about.' Honestly, it's a privilege."

The appearance on Rowe's latest series made national exposure possible for Operation Combat Bikesaver. Since the show aired last year, the bike-building project has received 30,000 new followers on social media, more than 1,000 orders for T-shirts and calls from around the country from people who want to donate parts, come out and work in the garage for a day or open chapters where they live.

Zaideman followed his father, who served as a Marine during the Vietnam War in 1968 and 1969, into the military. He put in eight years as an Army engineer at Fort Riley, Kan., and was discharged just before Sept. 11, 2001.

After Zaideman got out of the Army, he started building his own motorcycle.

"When I was working on my bike, I realized I was lost in my own little world," he said. "It's hot rod therapy, working in your garage, making something, creating something challenging, functional and creative, whatever it may be."

'YOU FORGET ABOUT EVERYTHING'

Zaideman realized it could benefit other veterans who returned home from the war since it was so absorbing.

"I worked for months on evenings and weekends, to where it became kind of an addiction," he said. "I lost sense of what



Army veteran Jeremy Hill works on his custom motorcycle in March at the Operation Combat Bikesaver garage in Cedar Lake, Ind. Hill, who served as a combat engineer in the Iraq War, says the work is meditative, helps him clear his thoughts and puts him in a positive state-of-mind for the upcoming week.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH S. PETE

time it was out in the garage to where my wife would have to text me that dinner's ready and I wouldn't see it for two hours. I was lost in what I was doing. It's a distraction. When you're wiring a motorcycle, you forget about bills, you forget about everything."

Zaideman also realized the idea was financially possible since his first bike, built mostly from recycled parts, cost him less than \$1,800. He believed that a nonprofit could afford such an expense. But the larger goal was just getting veterans back together to work on a mission.

"There's such a camaraderie in the military," Zaideman said. "It's not there when you return to civilian society, trying to reintegrate yourself into society or become a functional part of society."

After returning from Vietnam, Zaideman's father became an "old school" biker who loved "painting stripes on hot rods" and belonging to a motorcycle club.

"He was a miserable workaholic who always kept himself busy," Zaideman said. "But what really stuck with me was to see him interacting with other veterans. It was this huge life experience they had and they were all dumped into it. I would watch my dad and see relief whenever he was sharing stories with fellow veterans. He was a totally different guy."

Zaideman is convinced that building bikes offers vets much-needed escapism and self-worth, especially creating something that might draw compliments from strangers out in public. He hopes Operation Combat Bikesaver can help reduce veteran suicides. According to VA, 20 veterans kill themselves daily.

'I WAS THINKING ABOUT KILLING MYSELF'

Marty Gerber, an Army MP who logged two deployments to Iraq, has suffered from medical issues and struggled psychologically since returning home. He



VFW Department of Indiana District 1 Commander Timothy Houts and Operation Combat Bikesaver founder Jason Zaideman in March in Clear Lake, Ind., discuss a \$500 donation made by VFW Post 717 of St. John, Ind., to the nonprofit. Zaideman, an Army vet, and his wife founded Operation Combat Bikesaver in 2013, and it was featured on the Facebook series "Returning the Favor" in August 2017.

was sitting in a bathtub with a gun when he realized he couldn't leave his wife and children.

He was referred to Operation Combat Bikesaver by his aunt, but he didn't end up going until he saw the Mike Rowe show on Facebook.

Gerber didn't miss a single Sunday in the garage bay until he was stricken with a bout of depression.

"I was down in the dumps, thinking about killing myself," he said. "I was doing therapy, but it wasn't helping. I was really struggling. This is what got me through it, this and my wife and kids."

Gerber's comrades at Operation Combat Bikesaver reached out to him and bumped him ahead on the list to build his own bike to get him to come back. They since have frequently texted him to make sure he's doing OK, especially if he misses a Sunday.

"There's a true brotherhood," Gerber said. "I'll lay everything on the line for them. That's what everybody comes for. Whether it's a veteran, a civilian or a wife, we have to be here for everybody."

He's been helping fellow veterans construct their dream motorcycles during the "community build" where everyone is expected to put in time. When it's his turn to build his own bike, Gerber wants to turn a 1979 Kawasaki GS 1000 into a "sick chopper" by cutting off the back end and stretching it out 14 inches.

Gerber said that knowing he's next in line to build his own bike feels like "Christmas Eve." But he also said the motorcycle itself is less important than the time he spends in the garage, wiring electric lines and tightening bolts with his fellow veterans.

Every time I leave, I hear, 'I love you man,' when I walk out their door. This place saved my life."

'I FEEL GOOD FOR THE REST OF THE WEEK'

Jason Gootee knows what Gerber is talking about. Gootee, a Navy MA who served at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and now works as a VA service officer for Lake County, Ind., turns a wrench every Sunday. He's also a member of the garage's "Gearhead Committee," which chooses which veterans are next to build their own custom bikes.

"It's the best therapy outside the VA," Gootee said. "It's one of the most tight-knit groups out there. It's just a really good program. It's there for people falling through the cracks who might not be eligible for VA services. It's hard to put into words sometimes, but if I miss a Sunday, I feel in the dumps. After I come in here, I feel good for the rest of the week. I feel whole. I feel like I have a purpose again. Life isn't just going through the motions."

Gootee had only ridden dirt bikes and never worked in a shop before but enjoyed working with his hands and seeing a finished product.

At college, he listened to fellow students just "talk, talk, talk," and Gootee longed to surround himself with people who really understood what he had been through in the military.

"I liked being part of a group with like-minded people, men and women who were all veterans, who all signed on the dotted line, people who struggle with PTSD and know how it affects our relationships with society," he said.

"These guys are my true brothers," he said. "It's almost like being back in the barracks, joking, smoking and having a good time.

Another vet in the garage, Jeremy Hill, served a year in Baghdad during the Iraq War as an Army combat engineer. He has returned nearly every Sunday since he found out about the program a year ago from a fellow veteran who happened to be the Newton County (Ind.) Veterans Services officer. Hill said working in the Operation Combat Bikesaver garage is like a drug.

"I come here to get my fix on Sunday, and I'm good to deal with the rest of the population for the rest of the week," he said. "Every Sunday, I look at that bike, I feel I'm one step closer. It feels good to do — I don't want to say an honest day's worth of work — but a day's worth of work you're doing for yourself. I throw on my music and get lost. It clears your mind of everything. It's addictive."

The organization has had growing pains since appearing on Rowe's show, getting flooded with more calls than the small cadre of volunteers can handle. Operation Combat Bikesaver has a growing wait list and four storage units stuffed with motorcycle parts, so it's looking to expand to a larger location. And Zaideman has been juggling his responsibilities of running the garage and holding down a full-time job.

"We're willing to do larger speaking engagements like national conventions to push our organization," Zaideman said. "I don't mind speaking to get the educational component out there. Our program isn't the only program for these vets, and we've never portrayed it as such.

"Some veterans might find basket-weaving or woodworking more rewarding. But there are [too many] veteran suicides a day, and we want to help with a cure. We want to help get veterans back to civilian life." ❄️

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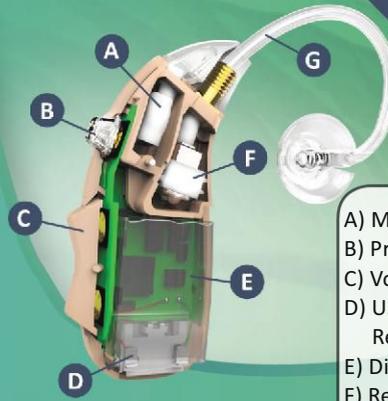
Joseph S. Pete is a member of the VFW Department of Indiana.

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VFW member Lynn Keller visits with a child in February during a Habitat for Humanity trip to the Dominican Republic. Keller, a member of VFW Post 3360 in Defiance, Ohio, connected with Habitat for Humanity when the organization worked with his Post to assist a local veteran in Ohio.

“[People can] forget that this is an extremely poor country,” Murphy said. “And the average person makes \$300 a month, and that it is a poverty-stricken country because we’re affluent Americans that go to the five-star hotels.”

Keller said his service in Vietnam helped him be “less impacted” by living conditions in the Dominican Republic.

“I feel I was better able to interact with the native Dominicans having been around people of another culture in Vietnam,” Keller said.

Another volunteer, David “Ziggy” Ziegler served in the Air Force in England in 1984 and in Germany in 1991. He got involved with Habitat for Humanity in 1999 through his church.

“Since this was not my first trip, I kind of expected to see a lot of poverty, which we did,” Ziegler said, “and especially when you get out in the rural areas. In the city, obviously, things look much better.”

It was rewarding, according to Keller, to see the changes in the homes after the volunteers completed their work.

“[Rosa] just got a totally different perspective of living in a home by having a different type of a floor rather than just a dirt floor,” Keller said.

What stood out to Ziegler about this trip compared to others was the building of concrete floors.

“One of [Rosa’s] comments was she said, ‘I have never lived in a house that had a concrete floor. I have never lived in a house that was painted, inside or out,’” Ziegler said.

The most challenging part of the trip, according to Keller, was simply helping the population improve their living conditions and quality of life.

“With limited resources, it is difficult to positively impact the lifestyles of those in need,” Keller said.

But Keller said between Habitat for Humanity’s infrastructure and finances and the work of volunteers, they accomplished “a great amount.”

“[We were able to help by] improving

‘ALMOST A WORLD AWAY’

Inspired by a service project in his hometown, a VFW member from Ohio participated in volunteer efforts in the Dominican Republic.

BY KARI WILLIAMS

Lynn Keller watched the reaction as Rosa, a woman in the Dominican Republic, swept a cement floor — that he helped build — in her home for the first time.

“We showed them that we cared about them even though we were almost a world away,” said Keller, a member of VFW Post 3360 in Defiance, Ohio.

Keller served in the Army in Vietnam from 1967-68 with the 3rd Bn., 16th FA, as an artillery ballistic meteorologist. He is one of three veterans who volunteered with Habitat for Humanity in February in the Dominican Republic.

The volunteers worked on four different houses, painting the interior and exterior of two homes and pouring cement for flooring. Keller said he was

interested in traveling with Habitat for Humanity because he wanted to benefit others.

While on the trip, Keller met Toni Murphy, who served with the Minnesota Air National Guard’s 133rd Medical Sqdn. based in St. Paul, Minn., from 1996 to 2003. She said the people in the communities they helped were excited to welcome the volunteers.

“It was so much fun,” Murphy said. “The kids gathered around. All the people just really were very welcoming and warm and nice.”

‘AN EXTREMELY POOR COUNTRY’

The biggest takeaway for Murphy was seeing how the population lives compared to the tourist areas of the country.



David "Ziggy" Ziegler, Toni Murphy and Lynn Keller spend time with Rosa (second from left) in the Dominican Republic. Rosa's home was one that volunteers updated with a cement floor. Ziegler, Murphy and Keller all are veterans who met on the Habitat for Humanity trip in February.

housing, sharing of ourselves and giving the Dominicans that we worked with a better hope for the future," Keller said.

Murphy said she was humbled by the experience in the Dominican Republic.

"I've been in a lot of different places in my life because of being in the military," Murphy said, "and this was the poorest community I've ever been in."

The most impactful moment of the trip, for Keller, was the closing ceremony attended by the families they helped.

"It was a really, really moving experience for me to be able to be part of that," Keller said, "just the joy that the people showed for the completion of that project."

Keller connected with Habitat for Humanity through his Post. Habitat for Humanity built a home in 2017 for a disabled veteran in the Defiance community.

"Our local Post got involved in supporting that build financially, and then we also helped by providing some manpower," Keller said.

'TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY'

Keller said veterans volunteering for humanitarian efforts after serving their country show that they are caring people who want to help.

"Being a veteran, a lot of times, people think that maybe we're only concerned about ourselves," Keller said, "but we

want to help people in our community, number one, [and] in our nation, but that also, we should be concerned about people worldwide."

To Murphy, most veterans are "venturesome" people. Once they have given time and energy to their country, continuing to serve others is "in their blood."

"This is an opportunity to travel and see the world in a different way," said Murphy, who has worked with Habitat for Humanity since her son volunteered with them while he was in high school.

The trip spurred in Keller a desire to help others, not only locally, but throughout the nation and the world.

"It's easy to sit back and enjoy what we have here at home, but it takes effort to share our resources and love with others everywhere," Keller said.

To his fellow veterans, Keller would say they only have "so many days" left to make a difference.

"They should take every opportunity to give of themselves to others around them, locally and elsewhere," Keller said. "I would like to tell all veterans, 'Above all, do something — no matter how great or small — to make a positive impact in the world.' Helping those in other parts of the world can make a life-changing impact on them." 🌱

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Toni Murphy, who served with the Minnesota Air National Guard from 1996 to 2003, spends time with a boy during a Habitat for Humanity trip in February to the Dominican Republic. Murphy said she was humbled by the experience.

"We showed them that we cared about them even though we were almost a world away."

Lynn Keller, member of VFW Post 3360 in Defiance, Ohio

Habitat for Humanity Rebuilds the Dominican Republic

Habitat for Humanity began its humanitarian relief efforts in the Dominican Republic in 1986 and served 18,820 people in Fiscal Year 2016. Nearly 43 percent of people in the Dominican Republic live below the poverty line, and there is a 15 percent unemployment rate, according to Habitat for Humanity. For more information about efforts in the area, or to volunteer, email info@habitatdominicana.org.

A Virginia educator, who VFW named one of America's top teachers this year, brings veterans into her classroom to speak. It's enlightening for her students and therapeutic for the veterans.

BY SEAN KORSGAARD

Three Vietnam War veterans — Armando Flores, James Pitts (sitting) and Linda Boone — visit Caroline Middle School in Milford, Va., last year. 2018 VFW Teacher of the Year Sara Gibson Coan invited the vets to give her students first-hand accounts of their time in the war zone.



'VETERANS ARE OUR NATIONAL TREASURE'

On the first Friday of the new school year last year, students lined the halls of Caroline Middle School in Milford, Va. They cheered as a group of local Vietnam veterans walked down the hall to their classroom, shook the vets' hands and thanked them for their service. After the veterans took their seats, the students filed in and stood next to the students' desks, which were labeled with the names of Virginians killed, or listed as still missing, in Vietnam.

Coffee and pastries in hand, the veterans shared their stories with the class. Army veteran Armando "Recon" Flores spoke of summers he spent stationed on Okinawa. Paul Pitts, an Air Force veteran, spoke about his time on the ground in Vietnam and of comrades lost during the war. Linda Boone shared photos from her time in the field hospitals of Vietnam

as an Army nurse.

With all of the students on the edge of their seats, it was clear that hearing these Vietnam veterans speak had moved them. It was just as clear that having the opportunity to speak to the students had touched the veterans as well.

"For a lot of Vietnam veterans, we didn't get the kind of homecoming we should have returning from the war," Boone said. "So even all these years later, it means so much to see these kids cheering for us, to have a chance to tell our stories, maybe to teach them a thing or two.

"We did what we did because it was our duty, and we only ask what every veteran asks of their fellow Americans: that they remember us, honor our sacrifices and that they never forget us."

It was an extraordinary morning for those Vietnam veterans and those schoolchildren. It was one of many such

efforts from Sara Gibson Coan, a 2018 recipient of the Smart/Maher VFW National Teacher Award.

'HISTORY ISN'T JUST IN BOOKS'

The work Coan has done to recognize veterans at Caroline Middle School is apparent as soon as visitors pull into the neighboring high school's parking lot. In front of the school is the Korean War Memorial Garden, the first project of the middle school history club co-founded by Coan in 2013.

Coan learned from soldiers at nearby Fort A.P. Hill that the 38th parallel — which formed the border between North and South Korea prior to the Korean War and intersects the present Korean Demilitarized Zone that separates the two countries — also crosses the front lawn of Caroline High School. She and members of the history club then built



the memorial garden between July 27, 2013 — the 60th anniversary of the signing of Korean War

armistice — and Veterans Day that year.

“When I started teaching, the first thing I wanted to show my students was that history isn’t just in books, it’s all around us,” Coan said. “One of the first things I did was start asking if there were any local veterans who would talk to my class about their experiences.”

That earned Coan the attention of VFW Post 10295 in nearby Bowling Green, specifically member Moody Pitts. Moody, who received the Purple Heart twice for his service in Vietnam, was one of the first veterans Coan approached about speaking to her history class.

“I never much talked about Vietnam, so when Sara invited me to talk to the kids, I was a bit uneasy at first,” Moody said. “Once I got there, and started talking with these kids, it just made me feel at ease, that I could talk about it, and I started trying to get other vets in there to talk, and it just grew from there.”

The impact it had on the veterans,

according to Moody, was immediate.

“Having a place to talk about Vietnam, having these kids listen, having them learn, getting a thank you, it’s like a weight off the chest,” Moody said after reflecting on his visit. “Some of these guys, you even see them walk straighter.”

According to Coan, the impact the veterans have on her students is just as apparent, from their studies to how they recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

“Even if they’re running late, they always stand up, and they’ve said the pledge louder and louder as the year has gone on,” Coan said. “It’s one thing to read about it in a book, [but] to hear history from the men and women who lived it, the impact on these kids can’t be measured.”

‘REALLY MAKES HISTORY COME ALIVE’

It was through Moody, that his brother James Pitts, commander of VFW Post 8529 in Sandston, Va., got involved with Coan’s classroom. He was immediately impressed with the program.

“I’d never seen a teacher like her,” James said. “The way she runs things, she just draws the kids in, makes sure they actually learn it, not just read about it. She has displays, she brings in speakers like us, she really makes history come

alive in her classroom.”

When the time came for Post 8529 to look for someone to nominate for VFW’s annual Teacher of the Year contest, James knew the Post had its nominee in Coan. Though he had never nominated a teacher before, James described the process as straightforward.

“We had to have a committee here to review the applications, and then the ones that we nominated and voted on we sent up to the District level,” James said.

He explained that Coan won the award for Virginia’s District 3 and eventually earned the award at the state — or Department — level, too.

Coan received the awards in quick succession. She won the Post and District awards in November and the Department award in December.

Then, in January of this year, James called to tell her that she had won the national award, and Coan finally allowed herself to celebrate. It also gave her the chance to express her gratitude that she had touched the veterans whose stories had such an impact on her students.

“Our veterans are our national treasures, I truly believe that,” Coan said. “That I can do something for them and for my students at the same time, you know what I call that? A really good day at the office.”

Coan received \$1,000 at this year’s VFW national convention for professional development purposes, while Caroline Middle School received another \$1,000. Coan said she wants to use a portion of that for arranging a field trip to the Vietnam War Foundation and Museum in Ruckersville, Va. Both Moody and James Pitts hope to join her.

“What she has done in her classroom, it’s remarkable, it’s commendable, and I hope it’s imitated,” James said. “That you can heal some of these veterans, teach these kids, have the impact on your community that Sarah has, she’s the model of what a great teacher should be.”

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Sean Korsgaard is an Army veteran and freelance writer based in Richmond, Va. His work has appeared in such publications as the Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch and the (Petersburg, Va.) Progress-Index.



Air Force veteran James Pitts, a member of VFW Post 8529, tells students about his service in Vietnam during a visit last year to Caroline Middle School in Milford, Va. During the visit, students and their teacher, Sara Gibson Coan, adorned the desks with placards bearing the names of Virginians who died during the war or are still listed as missing in Vietnam.

PHOTO BY SEAN KORSGAARD



ARE THE PATTERSONS THE FIRST?

Do you know of other married couples heading a VFW Post or Department? Do you know of any in the past? Let VFW magazine know. Send a note to magazine@vfw.org.

A married couple is currently leading the Department of Michigan. The Iraq War veteran duo offer young vets advice on how to be active with VFW and have a family.

BY DAVE SPIVA

‘This is a Family Organization’

VFW officers in the “Great Lakes State” are demonstrating that young members with families can be active in all levels of the organization.

Phil and Lynn Patterson, who were married more than 10 years ago, are leading the Department of Michigan this year — Phil as commander and Lynn as quartermaster/adjutant. Phil said he believes this is the first time in VFW history that a married couple has served in those positions at the same time.

“It’s great working with my wife,” Phil said. “Our lives are consumed by the VFW every hour of the day. We are always talking about the VFW.”

Before both were officers with the Department, they led at the Post and District levels of VFW, too. Both joined VFW in 2009 as charter members of Post 12082 in Ionia, Mich. Lynn was the quartermaster for the Post from 2009 to 2014, and Phil became the commander in 2010.

Phil later served as commander of Michigan’s District 9 in 2011–12, quartermaster in 2012–13, and chief of staff in 2012–13. Lynn was the District quartermaster from 2011 to 2012. Both have

served on national VFW committees, too.

Phil said he is a member of VFW because he wants to help veterans and enjoys the “camaraderie” VFW members have with each other.

“All of us have something in common,” Phil said. “And, not everyone has been through what we have been through.”

The couple — now life members of Post 6695 in Plymouth — met while in the Michigan Army National Guard. Both were deployed to Iraq in 2004 with the 1073rd Support Maintenance Company. Lynn enlisted in the Army in 1996 and served 12 years, with more than nine years as an active-duty soldier. Phil joined the National Guard in 1987 and retired as a master sergeant in 2010.

On top of heading the Department of Michigan, the couple has four children — 22-year-old Bailey, 18-year-old Madelyn, 9-year-old Emma and 4-year-old Luke — and two grandchildren — 2-year-old Kaiden and 1-year-old Ivy.

“We definitely keep very busy,” Phil said.

He added that young parents sometimes can’t find or afford a babysitter, and advised that if they want to attend a VFW Post meeting, they should bring

their children along.

“I’ve run Post meetings with my daughter in my arms,” Phil said. “We stress to everybody that this is a family organization. If you want the family there, that includes children.”

For new, young members who want to get involved with VFW, Phil said having family support also is needed.

“Young couples need a strong family base, as well,” Phil said. “We have done a lot of VFW functions, and we couldn’t have done it without sending our kids to their grandma’s and grandpa’s or their aunt’s houses.”

As for staying involved in VFW, Lynn said she recommends becoming a committee chairman at the Post level in order to learn about the organization and become involved with activities. Lynn also said that young members should get to know the members of a Post.

“Ask as many questions as you can think of,” Lynn said. “There are so many things members can be involved with in VFW. You don’t have to be an officer, but you can have mentors that teach you how to do things.”

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ABOVE: VFW’s 2017-18 Department of Michigan Commander Phil Patterson and Adjutant/ Quartermaster Lynn Patterson with daughter, Madelyn (18); daughter, Bailey (22); son-in-law, Adam McKendry (23); daughter, Emma (9); son, Luke (4); and grandson, Kaiden (2). Not shown is 1-year-old granddaughter, Ivy. The Pattersons said they have been able to maintain a family life and participate in all levels of VFW for almost a decade.

BUILDING A DISABLED VETS PARK BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER

VFW and American Legion members in Virginia worked together to build a lakeside park that is fully accessible for those in wheelchairs. They also take disabled veterans on fishing trips multiple times every year.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

Known as “Virginia’s Only Lakeside Town,” Clarksville is situated on Kerr Lake. Dubbed Buggs Island Lake by the locals, the 50,000-acre lake on the Virginia-North Carolina border is popular for boating, as well as fishing for catfish, bass and crappie.

Located in Clarksville, VFW Post 8163 and American Legion Post 45 decided to construct an *American with Disabilities Act* (ADA) compliant recreational park on the lake for disabled veterans.

In 1992, Post 8163 members began working to assist disabled vets with recreational therapy. Post members took four paralyzed veterans from the Richmond (Va.) VA Medical Center fishing on pontoon boats on Buggs Island Lake. Three were in wheelchairs and one was on a stretcher. All had to be lifted onto the boats. It’s an endeavor they continue to this day in cooperation with the American Legion.

Over the years, however, it became evident to the veterans that a park on the lake was needed. They first needed to get the approval of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. After a meeting, the three



A disabled veteran enjoys fishing on Kerr Lake in Clarksville, Va., earlier this year. VFW Post 8163 and American Legion Post 45 built an *Americans with Disabilities Act* compliant recreational park for veterans to enjoy lake life. The park opened in 2015.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHNNY MOYE

entities signed a formal agreement in 2010 and work was scheduled to begin.

“Before the first yard of concrete was poured, there had to be funding,” Post 8163 member Johnny Moyer said. “Members worked feverishly to advertise the project and asked for donations toward the project. There were people who contributed \$50 and at least one person who contributed nearly \$75,000. Not only was the Island Creek Veterans Park project working towards creating an ADA-compliant recreation park, it also was bringing a community together for a good cause.”

When a portion of the \$175,000 needed to build the park was raised, work began. Volunteers constructed a wheelchair-accessible pavilion, ramp and dock. This made it possible for those in wheelchairs to access boats, picnic tables and grills. An accessible bathroom also was built.

Moyer said the dock at the park has gates that allow pontoon boats to pull alongside and wheelchairs are rolled directly onto the boats.

On July 15, 2015, the park opened with a celebration of dignitaries, military personnel and people who worked for years on the project. Perhaps most importantly, according to Moyer, disabled vets came to see what had been built for them.

“It was a place where they could go to enjoy time on the lake,” he said. “It was a perfect time for celebration and emotion. Many of the people who worked on this project had tears in their eyes — even the ‘old, crusty’ ones.”

While the Corps of Engineers maintains the park, VFW and American Legion volunteers often clean it up after picnics or fishing events. A solar light that automatically illuminates at night is the only item that has had to be added in three years since the park opened.

“We continue to have up to five fishing trips a year with disabled vets,” Moyer said. “VFW and American Legion members from other Virginia and North Carolina areas sometimes participate and assist in the trips, too.”

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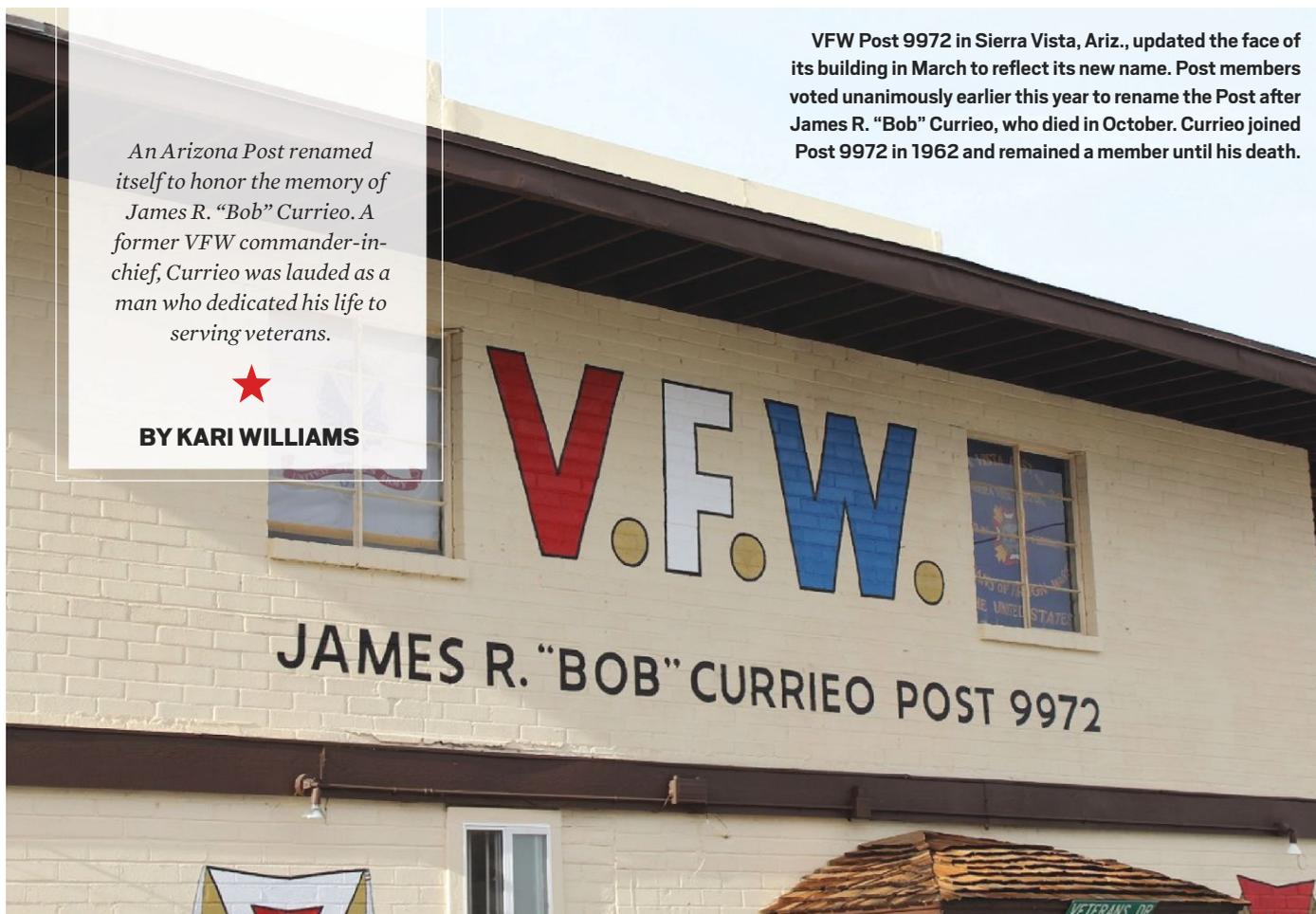
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An Arizona Post renamed itself to honor the memory of James R. "Bob" Currieo. A former VFW commander-in-chief, Currieo was lauded as a man who dedicated his life to serving veterans.



BY KARI WILLIAMS

VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Ariz., updated the face of its building in March to reflect its new name. Post members voted unanimously earlier this year to rename the Post after James R. "Bob" Currieo, who died in October. Currieo joined Post 9972 in 1962 and remained a member until his death.



'DEFINING LEGACY'



Watch the Rededication Ceremony

VFW Post 9972 produced a live recording of the renaming ceremony on its Facebook page. It can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/VFW9972/videos/1663445313692957/>.

James R. "Bob" Currieo was a man who never forgot where he came from.

And to honor his 50-year commitment to VFW, members of VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Ariz., voted unanimously to rename their Post after him. Currieo joined the Post in 1962 and remained a member until his death last October. During that time, he would become VFW commander-in-chief (1982-83) and later work on behalf of veterans on Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) staff.

The Post held a renaming ceremony in March. Shay Saucedo, southern Arizona outreach coordinator for McCain, and Currieo's daughter, Denita, were in attendance.

Post 9972 Commander Glenn Hohman said that naming the Post after Currieo is a "look forward" and gives members an

example of someone who is committed to "the ideas and beliefs of VFW." The rededication was as much a celebration of the Post as it was a way to give current members "something to aspire to," according to Hohman.

"Quite frankly, in 20 years, there won't be a lot of people who remember who Bob was, but they'll still know that he did enough to go on the front of the building," Hohman said.

Currieo died Oct. 17, 2017, at 83 years old. Hohman said Currieo was the closest to a charter member that the Post has had "in a long time."

"[He joined] four years after we started the Post," Hohman said. "But even beyond [his work at the Post], Bob has a lot of accomplishments and did a lot of things both for the VFW and his work with Sen. McCain's office."

“To him, I don’t think the significance was in positions he might have held. I think the significance was as a veteran, he was able to return service to our veterans and our military through his work.”

B.J. Lawrence, VFW Commander-in-Chief

PHOTOS BY KARI WILLIAMS/VFW



ABOVE: Photos of James R. “Bob” Currieo’s life and career are displayed at a March renaming ceremony for VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Ariz. Currieo who died last year, served as Arizona’s District 7 and Department commander, as well as VFW’s commander-in-chief.

BOTTOM LEFT: Then-VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence speaks about James R. “Bob” Currieo at the March renaming ceremony for VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Ariz. Lawrence, now serving as VFW’s commander-in-chief, said Currieo worked tirelessly as a veteran’s advocate.

Then-National Senior Vice Commander B.J. Lawrence said in March the Post renaming defines Currieo’s legacy as a man, a VFW member and a past commander-in-chief.

“He dedicated over 50 years of his life to serving veterans,” Lawrence said. “I think the Post renaming itself in honor of Bob Currieo will forever memorialize him and what he stood for.”

Currieo earned his VFW eligibility serving as a gunner with the 3rd AAA (Automatic Weapons) Battalion of the 3rd Infantry Division from February 1952 to April 1953 during the Korean War. He also served with the 91st AAA Battalion in Germany from 1955 to 1958.

After joining VFW, he served as Arizona’s District 7 and Department commander (1972-73), before leading the

organization at the national level from 1982-83. Currieo also was appointed special assistant to VA Administrator Harry Walters and served on McCain’s staff from 1987-89 and from 1996-2013.

Post 9972 Quartermaster Gunner Kent, who served as VFW commander-in-chief from 1994-95 and VFW adjutant general from 2005-2013, said Currieo was a “mainstay” at the Post.

“Back in the ’70s and early ’80s, he was here quite a bit,” Kent said. “He was Post commander twice.”

Currieo’s philosophy, according to Lawrence, was taking care of veterans.

“To him, I don’t think the significance was in positions he might have held,” said Lawrence, who was elected VFW’s commander-in-chief in July. “I think the significance was as a veteran, he was able

James R. “Bob” Currieo’s Legacy of Service

- Earned a bachelor’s degree in education from the University of Arizona in 1977.
- Joined the Army in 1951.
- Served during the Korean War (February 1952 – April 1953).
- Served in Germany (1955-1958).
- Named one of Arizona’s outstanding young men by the National Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1966.
- Spent 10 years as a chief instructor at the U.S. Combat Surveillance School in Fort Huachuca, Ariz.
- Served as chief instructor at the U.S. Army Signal Center & School in Monmouth, N.J. from 1968-71.
- Retired from the U.S. Army Combat Surveillance and Target Acquisition School at the rank of sergeant major in 1973.
- Served on the Arizona Governor’s Veterans Advisory Council from 1974 to 1976.
- Appointed special assistant to the VA Administrator Harry Walters in 1993.
- Served on Sen. John McCain’s (R-Ariz.) staff from 1987-89 and from 1996-2013.
- Appointed director of the VFW Political Action Committee in August 1989.
- Appointed executive director of VFW’s Washington Office in 1994.

to return service to our veterans and our military through his work, and that was evident in the way he conducted himself on a daily basis.”

The renaming process, according to Hohman, was “seamless.” The final vote took place Jan. 20, Department commanders signed off Jan. 21 and a letter with the Post’s new charter was dated Jan. 24. ★

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CHAMPION MASCOT, FEARLESS WAR DOG

A little dog found in the New Guinea jungle during World War II accompanied service members on combat patrols on South Pacific islands. She also might be the first known “therapy dog.”

BY KARI WILLIAMS

A Yorkshire Terrier, Smoky accompanied VFW life member William Wynne during his overseas WWII service and after he returned home. She also became the 1944 *YANK* magazine champion mascot in the Southwest Pacific.

For a four-pound Yorkie, accompanying her owner on a 22-hour combat mission was a tall order. But as William A. Wynne told her, “It’s war, honey. You just have to stay there.”

This was one of 12 combat missions for Smoky, who was found by U.S. troops in the New Guinea jungle during World War II. She would go on to earn three war-related medals and become an inspiration for GIs and wounded vets.

GETTING SMOKY

Wynne, 96 and an at-large VFW life member with the Department of Ohio, served with the 5212th Photographic Wing from Nov. 27, 1943, to Nov. 1, 1945, during World War II. His friend, Ed Downey, discovered Smoky when he stopped to investigate the cause of his stalled jeep and heard “yapping” at the side of the road.

“[He] saw this little gold head trying to jump out of a foxhole,” Wynne said.

Downey initially gave the dog to another member of their unit, a sergeant by the name of Dare, because, according to Wynne, Downey didn’t want a dog in the tent he shared with Wynne. But when Dare wanted to get back in a poker game, he sold Smoky to Wynne for two Australian pounds, or \$6.44.

When Smoky became Wynne’s responsibility, he began teaching her tricks. In two days, she learned to sing and play dead. Her most popular trick, however, was walking a tight wire blindfolded.

Wynne said he trained her on Biak, an island northwest of

New Guinea, by driving metal stakes in the ground, making a metal platform about three feet high and stretching lines of aircraft cable for her to walk across. Once she mastered that, Wynne said he added the blindfold.

THE INVASION AT LINGAYEN GULF

Wynne started bringing Smoky on combat missions after his unit mates asked to keep her if he got “knocked off.” On missions, she stayed in a musette bag — essentially a backpack — that hung near cots in the aircrafts.

Smoky also was involved in the invasion at Lingayen Gulf. Wynne’s unit was with the 26th Photo Recon Sqdn. in April 1944. From December 1943 to August 1944, he was stationed on New Guinea, and from August to January 1945, he served on Biak. The squadron was temporarily detached from the 5th Army Air Forces to the 6th Army under Gen. Walter Krueger, stationed in the Philippines on Luzon, to prepare an airfield.

A couple days after arriving, Communications Section Sgt. Bob Gapp started eyeing Smoky, according to Wynne, and asked if she could fit through an eight-inch pipe under the taxiway to attach phone lines.

“If she could do it, [Gapp] knew it would save days of work removing the steel matting, digging up the culvert, putting in the wire and then reversing the whole process,” Wynne wrote in *Yorkie Doodle Dandy: A Memoir*. “Meanwhile, during the operation, all aircraft parking traffic would have to be diverted to a distant field.”

Did you know?

Smoky earned the following military honors: the Australian Purple Cross, U.S. Dog Handlers Association War Service and the Defense Force Tracker and War Dog Handler Association Combat Medal.

Smoky also was featured on two *Animal Planet* shows, one of which claimed she was the first known therapy dog.

William Wynne hopes to have a movie produced about Smoky's life. For more information, visit https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/angel-in-a-foxhole-smoky-the-wwii-therapy-dog-dogs-love#.

Wynne allowed her to go through the pipe under the condition that if she got stuck, they would dig her up.

He coaxed and called Smoky the whole way through as Gapp fed the phone line into the pipe.

"About 10 feet out, the dust was all around, and I saw these amber eyes, and she ran into my arms," Wynne said, "Boy, we praised her."

Smoky's actions, according to Wynne's book, took her from mascot to "war dog."

"This was not a gimmick, because telephone poles with wires could be not erected near the small combat air field," Wynne wrote. "The only way to get wires laid was by placing them in a drainage ditch over a mile long to the other side of the 60-foot long, 8-inch diameter culvert under the steel matted taxi strip-road then following the ditch to the maintenance buildings."

Wynne said he allowed Smoky to go through the pipe because it was "essential."

"It was a sweat because I didn't know what was in the pipe," Wynne said. "Would there be snakes in there? Would there be scorpions? All I know is that it was essential, and I'm going to do it if the guys would agree to dig her up if she got stuck. It was just a gamble we [took], and it worked."

FIRST KNOWN THERAPY DOG

Around the same time Smoky was named *YANK* magazine's 1944 champion mascot in the Southwest Pacific, Wynne was diagnosed with dengue fever and sent to the 3rd Field Hospital at Nadzab on New Guinea. His unit mates brought Smoky and the issue of *YANK* that announced Smoky as the winner to the hospital. When the nurses saw Smoky, and her

photo in *YANK*, they asked to take her on rounds. For five days, nurses picked her up at 7:30 a.m. and brought her back in the evening.

After Wynne was released from the hospital, he went on furlough to Brisbane, Australia, with Smoky in tow. She performed her tricks, going from ward to ward in various hospitals in the country.

Wynne also took her to hospitals in the Philippines.

Wynne said he "didn't have too much of a clue" how Smoky affected patients at hospitals until he returned stateside, and she visited Crile Army Hospital (now Crile VA Hospital) in 1945 in Cleveland, Ohio.

After visiting patients, Wynne said, he and Smoky and he returned to the day room. A man in a wheelchair "started throwing his hands around and gurgling" as Wynne started to speak, prompting a nurse to tell Wynne to give Smoky to the patient.

"I looked around, and all the nurses were crying," Wynne said.

When Wynne asked why they were crying, he said he was told that that was the first movement the man had made in two years.

"He had been catatonic all that time," Wynne said. "That's when I knew what we were doing."

Once returning stateside, Wynne and Smoky performed their act — the tricks he taught her while deployed — at hospitals and fairs, worked in Hollywood, and also appeared on a children's television show called "Castles in the Air." She died on Feb. 21, 1957.

For more information on Smoky, visit <http://smokywardog.com/>. ★

EMAIL kwilliams@vfw.org

Memorials to Smoky

Ohio Veterinary Medicine Association Animal Hall of Fame: "#1 Dog Hero," Columbus, Ohio

AKC Museum of the Dog, St. Louis, Mo.

Hickham Air Force Base, Hawaii

University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, Knoxville, Tenn.

Doggy Park, Eastlake, Ohio

Cleveland Metroparks, Lakewood, Ohio

The Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital, Brisbane, Australia

Norco, Calif., Veterans Park (Animals of War section of the memorial)

Stoney Creek Veterinary Hospital (A therapy dog memorial, featuring stones for about 100 dogs)

Turkey Brook Park, Mount Olive, N.J.

War Animals Memorial, Sydney, Australia (Wall plaque)

Pozieres Memorial, Pozieres, France

(paver memorial next to the main memorial)

LEFT: VFW life member William Wynne became the owner of Smoky, a Yorkshire Terrier who was found in the New Guinea jungle during World War II. Wynne taught Smoky tricks, which she performed at military hospitals.

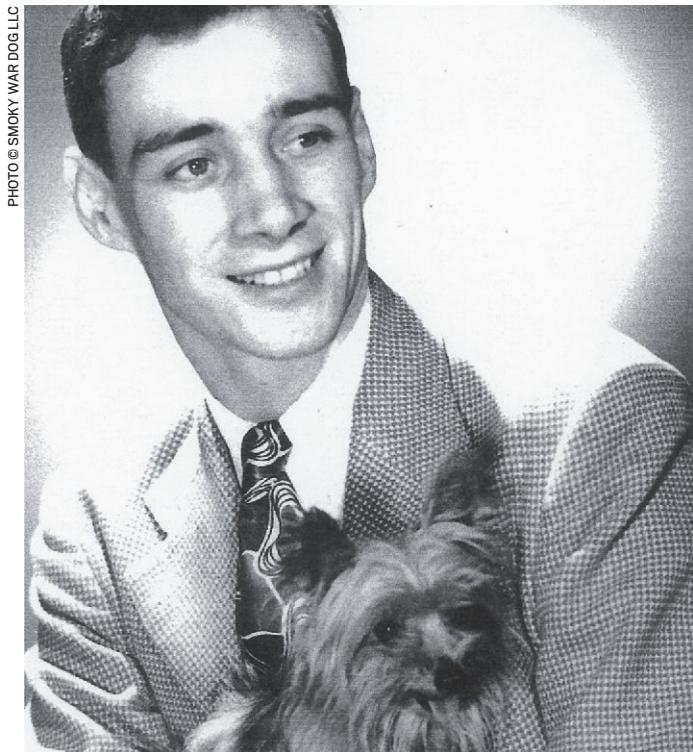
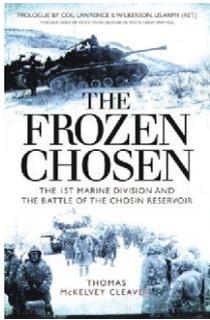


PHOTO © SMOKY WAR DOG, LLC

STAFF PICK



The Frozen Chosen: The 1st Marine Division and the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir

By Thomas McKelvey Cleaver

This book is an account of the breakout from the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea by the 1st Marine Division from November to December 1950, following the intervention of Red China in the Korean War. Based on first-person interviews from surviving veterans who came to be known as the “Frozen Chosen,” this is the story of heroism and bravery in the face of overwhelming odds. *Osprey*

ing events at an evacuation hospital that received casualties and the release of the *USS Pueblo* crew. *CreateSpace*

A Soldier's Story: Forever Changed: An Infantryman's Saga of Life and Death in Vietnam

By Richard F. Hogue, VFW Post 4704, Schaller, Iowa

This memoir details the author's transition from life in a small Midwestern town to facing firefights and booby traps in Vietnam. Hogue shares his combat experiences and the emotions he encountered as his platoon members were killed in action, as well as his experience being seriously wounded and his recovery. *Richlyn*

Over and Out

By James F. Jordan, VFW Post 6253, Berlin, N.J.

This memoir is about James Jordan, who grew up in Philadelphia in the 1950s and '60s and enlisted in the Marine Corps. He writes about his experiences from the day he landed in Vietnam until 13 months later when he left. *CreateSpace*

Vietnam 1971: Remembering the "101st" Then and Now

By Jim Cheskawich, VFW Post 1927, Woodland, Wash.

This book offers insight into what it is like to be in a war zone — and to come home changed, but a survivor. *Vietnam 1971* spans 46 years, culminating in the author's newfound ability to live life fully — with memories of Vietnam alongside, but not impeding, it. *Rex the Blizzard King Stories*

The Long Way Home

By Edward Duffy, VFW Department of Florida

Duffy overcame poverty in the Arkansas Delta and institutional racism in the military to have a successful career as an educator and counselor. Despite a traumatic experience on the frontlines in Vietnam and what he calls “false accusations” that landed him in the brig, Duffy overcame his experiences and set an example for generations to come. *bookmybio.com*

Further Adventures of the Desert Sailor 1950-1951

By James W. Fitch, VFW Post 1263, Renton, Wash.

This book is the sequel to James Fitch's first memoir, *Desert Sailor: Growing Up in the Pacific Fleet 1941-1946*. In *Further Adventures of the Desert Sailor*, the author details his travels to South America, where he and his wife covered 13,000 miles across the continent. *CreateSpace*

Don't Bury Us

By J.S. Bradford, VFW Post 3586, Salt Lake City, Utah

This action and thriller novel is the first book in the *Blood & Treasure* series. *Don't Bury Us* focuses on the investigation of a burial scam that entices military veterans to invest in a grandiose cemetery that allegedly honors and commemorates their service. *SynergEbooks*

What Price Retribution: The Wilson Reves Story

By Phil Nichols, VFW Post 5525, Stockton, Mo.

This historical fiction novel is based on the lives of Union Maj. James S. Wilson and Confederate Col. Timothy Reves as they are inexorably drawn into a brutal Civil War struggle that occurred in southwest Missouri's rugged hill country. *Self-Published*

91 Bravo Medic: A Memoir of the Second Korean War

By George Strejcek, VFW Post 1578, Woodridge, Ill.

This memoir is a blunt, personal account of the author's service in the Army as a medic in Korea in 1968. *91 Bravo Medic* contains unvarnished descriptions of several incidents, includ-

VFW magazine's “Book Corner” features select books written by VFW members. If you have written a book or an e-book bearing an ISBN or ASIN, contact the magazine for guidelines at magazine@vfw.org or by mail at: VFW magazine, Book Corner, 406 W. 34th Street, Suite 523, Kansas City, MO, 64111. The subject of the book must relate to the military or veterans.

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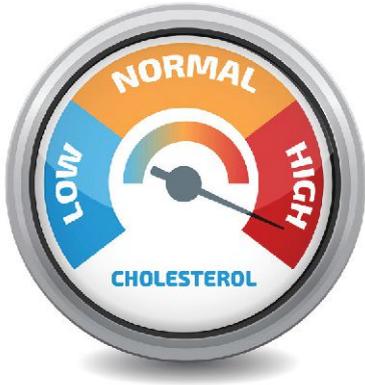
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High Cholesterol has Many Causes



VA OFFERS DIET ADVICE TO LOWER CHOLESTEROL

Here are 10 tips from VA to help lower your cholesterol through healthier eating habits:

1. Start small by making gradual changes in eating habits.
2. Center meals on foods that contain fiber, such as whole wheat bread, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, beans or vegetables.
3. Treat meat as a small part of the whole meal. Have only three ounces of meat (about the size of a deck of cards) for a meal.
4. Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
5. Use fruit or sugar-free gelatin as desserts and snacks.
6. Limit alcohol consumption to one serving per day for women and two servings per day for men to keep blood pressure from rising.
7. Use products that have low sodium or no added salt.
8. Buy fresh or frozen vegetables, and use canned vegetables with no salt added.
9. Use lemon, lime, vinegar or salt-free seasoning blends to add flavor to food.
10. Choose convenience foods less often, or focus on choices that are low in sodium.

Many Americans might be at risk for cardiovascular disease and not know it. Here are tips on how to bring down cholesterol levels and maintain a healthy circulatory system.

BY DAVE SPIVA

Having high cholesterol could be a deadly problem for some, because it increases the risk of heart attack or stroke.

More than one in three American adults have high cholesterol, according to a 2017 report from the American Heart Association. Keeping an eye on low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol — bad cholesterol — levels (see chart) can help lower cholesterol and improve overall cardiovascular health.

Former Navy physician Dr. Elizabeth Dang recommends that adults see a doctor and regularly obtain a test for cholesterol. Dang is an invasive cardiologist with Hospital Corporation of America Healthcare Midwest Health at Menorah Medical Center in Overland Park, Kan.

“It’s really important to know your numbers, because when you have high cholesterol, there are absolutely zero symptoms,” said Dang, who served more than 12 years in the Navy. “The only way you would know is by getting an annual physical or exam.”

Dang said developing high cholesterol is multifaceted. It can come from metabolic conditions, such as diabetes and thyroid disease.

“Those medical conditions need to be treated in order to improve cholesterol,” Dang said. “Making sure to go in for an annual exam to look for those secondary causes is important.”

Other elements that might cause high cholesterol numbers are:

1. Being overweight. (See sidebar for tips on healthy eating.)
2. Living a sedentary lifestyle, or having little to no physical activity.

3. Being a smoker.
4. Having high blood pressure.
5. Aging, which causes a lowering of metabolism.

Dang said she also treats many veterans who are amputees, as well as veterans who are oxygen-dependent because of exposures in the field.

“It’s difficult for them to do traditional exercise, but they can still do things at home,” Dang said.

“For my older patients who have back pain or balance issues, I recommend that they do chair exercises, sitting in a hard-back chair at home. They can get a couple of soup cans from the kitchen and do exercises in a chair watching TV.”

While the prevalence of high cholesterol is higher in the older population, Dang said a large amount of people with high cholesterol levels are at risk for cardiovascular disease.

“We are talking millions of Americans who are at risk and should be on medication,” Dang said. “A lot of patients in their 40s and 50s who are at high risk and should be on medication don’t realize it. Because they feel well, they don’t go in for an annual checkup.”

Another factor that could play a role in people having high cholesterol is genetics.

“If your family — mom, dad, brother or sister — has a history of very high cholesterol numbers, you need to get checked out as well,” Dang said.

For more information about preventing high cholesterol, visit https://www.prevention.va.gov/Preventing_Diseases/High_Cholsterol.asp. ★

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

LDL CHOLESTEROL NUMBER GUIDELINES*

*For those in the U.S.

Source: Mayo Clinic, mayoclinic.org

Below 70 mg/dL

Below 100 mg/dL

100-129 mg/dL

130-159 mg/dL

160-189 mg/dL

190 mg/dL and above

Best for people who have heart disease or diabetes.

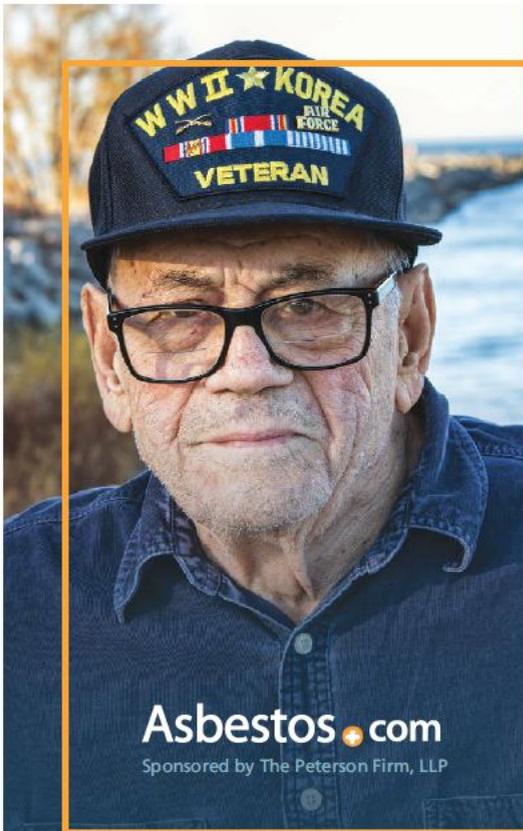
Optimal for people at risk for heart disease.

Near optimal if there is no heart disease. High if there is heart disease.

Borderline high if there is no heart disease. High if there is heart disease.

High if there is no heart disease. Very high if there is heart disease.

Very high.



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‘A Very Worthy Cause’

A Virginia Post and several Scout groups helped Puerto Rico police officers after hurricanes ravaged the island last year. Post members collected money, clothing and other basic items for those left homeless.

BY DAVE SPIVA

After hearing about police officers in Puerto Rico needing assistance due to the September hurricanes in Puerto Rico, members of VFW Post 7916 in Occoquan, Va., were ready to help. The All-American Post located 25 miles southwest of Washington, D.C., held a drive in February to raise money and gather clothing and personal items for the officers.

“We believe that this event was for a very worthy cause,” Post 7916 Commander Jeff Lett said. “A lot of these officers don’t have a home. They still have families, and they need everything everyone else does.”

Lett, an Army veteran who served from 1982-2004, said that Post 7916 members and members of local Scout groups raised \$655 and packed about 14 large boxes of clothing and other personal items for hurricane victims in the central region of Puerto Rico.

“We had a lot of volunteers come, and we had more than what we knew what to do with,” Lett said. “It was a very successful event. Almost all the leg work was done by our Scouts.”

Lett said Post 7916 charters five Scout organizations — two Boy Scout Troops, a Girl Scout Troop, a Cub Scout Pack and a Sea Scout Ship.

In September, hurricanes *Irma* and



PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 7916

(From left to right) VFW Post 7916 Commander Jeff Lett, U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) and District 10 Commander Chuck Wilson participate in a February Post-hosted hurricane-relief drive. Post members and Scouts collected funds, clothing and other personal items for police officers in central Puerto Rico who were victims of hurricanes *Irma* and *Maria* in September 2017.



Scouts from Post-chartered groups pack supplies for Puerto Rico police officers in February. Scouts and volunteers gathered about 40 boxes of clothing and personal items for Puerto Rican police officers and their families in need after hurricanes hit the Caribbean island — a U.S. territory — last year.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 7916

Maria devastated Puerto Rico, causing almost \$100 billion in damage and leaving much of the island without electricity. *Maria* is regarded as the worst natural disaster in Puerto Rico’s history. VFW’s Unmet Needs program has provided \$684,000 in disaster assistance grants to help more than 2,050 military and veteran families recovering from 2017’s hurricanes in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico. 🌟

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

PROTECT YOURSELF THIS HURRICANE SEASON

Prepare a kit: Ensure a disaster kit is ready to go in case of an emergency. Make sure these kits are assembled well in advance.

Get to know your surroundings: Know the elevation of your house and property. Know how you would evacuate and get to higher ground.

Check the weather: If you’re a boater, make sure you check the weather every time you head out. Continue to monitor it throughout your time on the water.

Secure your boats: Review the hurricane plan with your local marina, and ensure you have a plan to secure the craft.

Listen to local officials: If told to evacuate, do so immediately. Consider evacuating if you live in a mobile home, high-rise building or near bodies of water. Community organizations such as the American Red Cross will often set up shelters for evacuees.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard

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‘We Saved It’

Inactive just two years ago, a North Carolina Post is now revitalized. Hard work and a focus on recruiting young vets was the method.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

About 20 years ago, VFW counted nearly 10,000 VFW Posts worldwide. Today, that number has dwindled to about 6,300. Posts go defunct for many reasons, but according to Membership Director Rick Butler, it’s usually because the members who keep the Post operating eventually wear down.

“If the core of the Post dies off or are in poor health, it probably seems easiest to just shut the doors,” Butler said. “But it doesn’t have to be that way.”

He cited Post 6651 in Wilson, N.C. It mustered on April 8, 1946, and thrived in its community for years. Recently, however, it has suffered. The Post commander had to have his leg amputated, and no one else stepped in to fill the role.

POST 6651 FAST FACTS

LOCATION:
WILSON, N.C.

MEETINGS:
11 A.M. ON THE THIRD WEDNESDAY
OF EACH MONTH

OFFICERS:
COMMANDER JAMES ISBELL AND
QUARTERMASTER WALTER PRIDGEN

MEMBERSHIP:
81 AS OF MAY 11

Do you know of a Post that underwent revitalization or is in the process? If so, we’d love to hear from you. Email jdyhouse@vfw.org.



VFW North Carolina District 3 Commander Walter Pridgen, North Carolina District 7 past commander Willie Robertson, Department of North Carolina Membership Chairman Enrico Dalimonte and North Carolina District 4 Commander Tom Toler gather at a membership recruiting drive in October 2017 at Post 6651 in Wilson, N.C. Along with Elree Smith, past Department commander in North Carolina, this group has revitalized the fledgling Post. Pridgen also serves as Post 6651 quartermaster.

According to Elree Smith, past Department of North Carolina commander, the Post’s downfall accelerated after that. In 2016, it became inactive.

“Wilson has a big veterans’ population,” said Smith, of Post 10999 in Raleigh, N.C. “We made a decision to keep it going. We made the effort, and we saved it.”

The “we” refers to Smith, North Carolina District 3 Commander Walter Pridgen, District 4 Commander Tom Toler, past District 7 Commander Willie Robertson and Department Membership Chairman Enrico Dalimonte.

The group spent more than 10 days purging the Post home of trash and unnecessary items. They discovered that records and financial documents were catalogued as far back as the late ‘50s.

“If the commander had stayed healthy, I’m confident the Post wouldn’t have gone inactive,” Smith said.

The canteen was permanently closed and a decision was made for the Post to ban smoking and firearms. The Post’s 81 members (as of press time) were recruited from the DAV and American Legion.

“We’ve got a really good group of members,” Pridgen said. “They seem to be willing to try and do more. And they seem concerned with who needs help.”

Pridgen, who is serving as the Post quartermaster, said the members’ military service ranges from Afghanistan to Korean War vets.

“We are really making an effort to get the younger ones to join,” he said. “They usually don’t want to join because they aren’t able to come to meetings. I tell them that just because they can’t come to a meeting, doesn’t mean they can’t do other things when their time permits.”

Time is something Post 6651 Service Officer Rita Glass is providing. She keeps hours at the Post from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Wednesday. Furthermore, meetings are held at 11 a.m. on the third Wednesday of every month.

Pridgen said having cars parked at the Post and people stirring about is a hopeful sight.

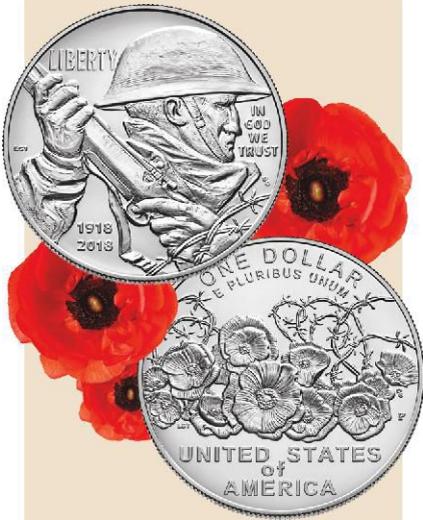
“I’ve never been in a situation quite like this before,” Pridgen said. “It was quite challenging, but we are still working on it.”

Smith said the revitalization efforts of Pridgen, Tyree, Robertson and Dalimonte went beyond initial expectations and are paying off.

“This used to be a dynamic Post,” Smith said. “I know it’s going to be dynamic again.”

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Uninsured Veterans Fall Between the Cracks of Care



While a majority of veterans can and do take advantage of their health and prescription benefits, a substantial number of veterans and their families do not have access to health insurance coverage or adequate care due to eligibility and/or costs.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that this population of vets has a higher incidence of chronic disease than the general population, which makes the lack of access to medical care and drug treatments particularly concerning.

While not a replacement for the comprehensive coverage veterans need, prescription savings programs are an important stop-gap measure for uninsured or underinsured veterans. It might provide them with access to both brand and generic medications that they otherwise might not be able to afford.

GAPS IN NEEDED CARE

For chronic health conditions, prescription drug therapy can be a critical part of treatment. But many veterans and their family members do without because of the cost.

According to a report by the Harvard/Cambridge Hospital Study Group, nearly 30 percent of uninsured veterans and 26 percent of their uninsured family members delayed care due to cost. One-in-four uninsured veterans and 16 percent of their family members were not able to afford medications.

Lack of access to these drugs often leads to worsening health and adverse clinical events that generate even higher costs for the patient. According

to a review in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, people who do not take necessary prescription medication represent at least 10 percent of hospitalizations, approximately 125,000 deaths and cost the American health care system between \$100 billion and \$289 billion a year.

BETTER ACCESS TO MEDICATIONS

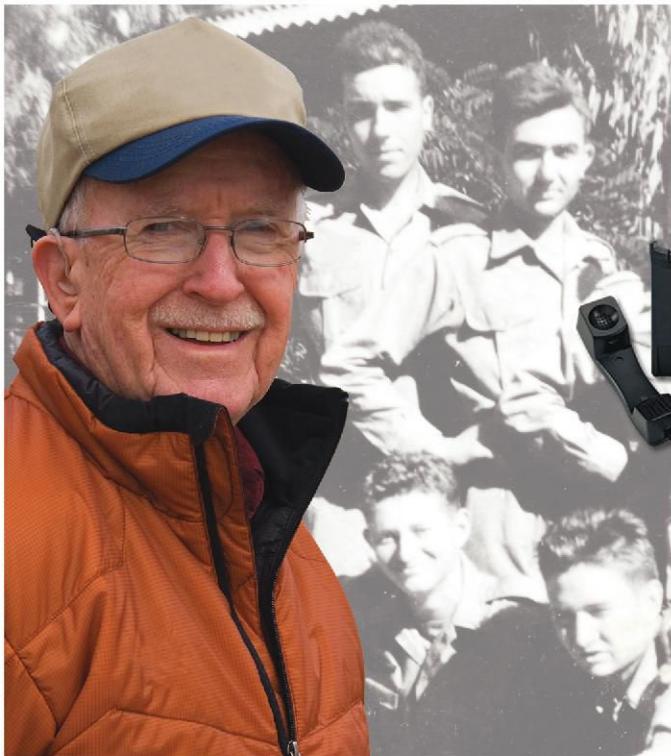
While not the comprehensive insurance coverage that veterans need, there are programs that help make prescription drugs more affordable. Veterans, reservists and their family members who are not eligible for VA or TRICARE benefits might be able to utilize one of a number of no-cost prescription savings cards that offer substantially discounted prescription drug prices.

They also can be utilized by enrollees in high-deductible, employer-sponsored or ACA health exchange plans who face high out-of-pocket costs. These programs typically include a long list of generic drugs and sometimes a robust selection of brand-name drugs.

In addition, these prescription savings cards can be used at thousands of retail pharmacies throughout the United States.

Prescription savings-card programs should not be confused with a drug coupon program, which provides a discount on a single brand-name drug for a limited period of time. While drug coupons can reduce the cost of medication, prescription savings programs can help with acute medications, as well as ongoing medication treatments for chronic conditions.

For more information, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-800-821-2606, *option 1*.



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 USS Garcia Precom Detail: GMG2 Walter Brogdon (865) 577-2668; walterbrogdon2007@comcast.net

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196th 4/31 Americal Div. Oct/1970
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cannot receive the Purple Heart because a doctor did not treat me.-
 Deano Vandernoot (352) 441-1888 d_vandernoot@hotmail.com

C Company 122nd Maint. 3rd Armored Div. Germany Dec 1970
 Seeking anyone that remembers the incident involving the injury to my left ear from excessive noise from a tank engine I was inspecting to substantiate a VA claim.-Paul Rusch (262) 658-8780 p5491musarv@hotmail.com

5/7th 1st Cavalry Division, Airmobile South, Southwest of Ben Hoa Jan 1970-Feb 1970
 Seeking anyone (Medics) to confirm a firefight between these dates to request a Purple Heart due to a wound to my right arm.- Robert M. Dellanini (510) 487-3133 bdellanini@yahoo.com

Marines:
Fox Co. 2/24 1st Platoon, 3rd Squad 2004-2005
 Seeking anyone, specifically Dan Sutyak and Bill Miller who can recall some things I'm working on to substantiate service-connection while we were overseas in support of OIF II-2.-Tom Newell (262) 993-4503 lyndz_say@yahoo.com

Lima Co. 3rd 4th Marines Dec/1966 I Corps North Cam Lo
 Seeking anyone from the unit who remembers when I fell off a tank into a booby trap, injuring my left leg, to help with a Purple Heart claim.-Don Mathews (609) 915-5514 mathews617@aol.com

Navy:
USS Windham County LST-1170 1962-1963 & USS Cook APD-130 1963-1964 in Vietnam
 Seeking anyone who can substantiate a claim for two cases of skin cancer (carcinoma) removed from my right arm and a diagnoses of multiple myeloma, possibly Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia.- Marshall L. Camp (210) 698-1516 lloydandhelen@hotmail.com

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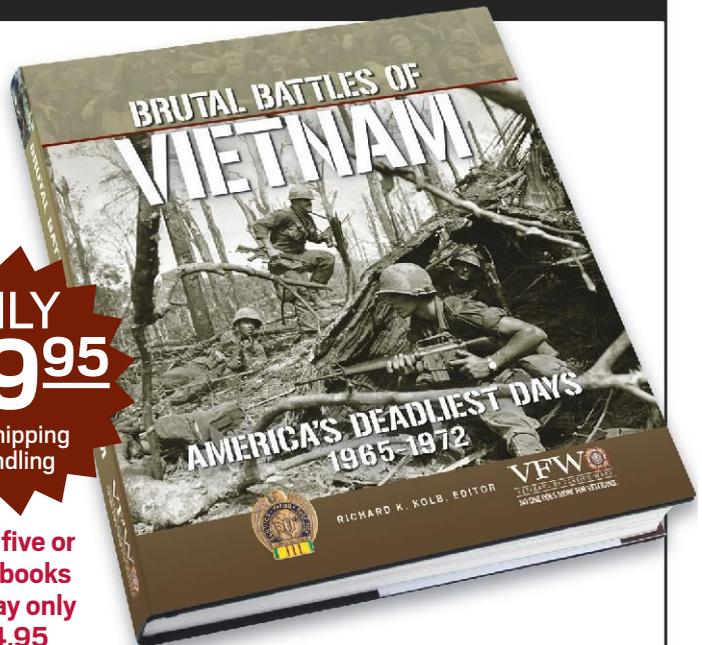
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Tillman Award Winner Embarks on VA Career

Danielle Green Byrd lost her left arm in 2004 while serving in Baghdad. A basketball player in high school and college, she used sports during her recovery and began serving fellow veterans at the VA.

BY KARI WILLIAMS

Coming under attack while patrolling on a rooftop in Baghdad, Iraq, Danielle Green Byrd knelt down to grab her M-4 and return fire. That's when a rocket-propelled grenade hit her.

On that day in May 2004, atop a two-story police building, she thought she was going to die. She heard ringing in her ears as she looked up at the dusty, sandy sky. She stopped feeling pain.

Then she realized she might survive.

"I remember dialing up God," Green Byrd said.

She prayed for the strength to survive and tell her story.

"At that point, I literally felt a surge of energy where I could get up... [but the] only thing I could move was my neck," Green Byrd said.

SPORTS BECAME A 'GREAT MOTIVATOR'

Green Byrd, who served in the Army in Iraq in 2004 with the 571st Military Police Company, underwent rehabilitation at Walter Reed Army Medical Center from May 2004 to Jan. 13, 2005.

"I had to learn how to write again," Green Byrd said. "I was left-hand dominant, so I had to figure out how to operate in a two-handed person world with one hand — and my opposite hand at that."

During her recovery period, she used sports as a "great motivator," getting involved in running and disabled sports.

Green Byrd, who played guard on Notre Dame's women's basketball team from 1995 to 2000, learned about the Wounded Warriors Amputee Softball Team while watching "Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel" on HBO. She joined the team in 2015.

"Playing for [the softball team] has been a rewarding experience in terms of connecting with other veterans who are once again serving [or] playing for a common purpose, and that is to inspire and educate communities and people about thriving in the face of adversity through the sport of softball and giving," Green Byrd said.

"The pinnacle of the program is of course hosting and sponsoring two [disabled] childrens camps to teach them the game, show them that they have a future beyond their imaginations and that their missing

limbs do not define who they are. What counts is what's inside the heart."

Also in 2015, Green Byrd received ESPN's second annual Pat Tillman Award for Service. The award honors members of the military with a "strong connection" to athletics, according to

the Pat Tillman Foundation.

Tillman played football for the NFL's Arizona Cardinals and enlisted in the Army after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He was killed in action on April 22, 2004.

"I remember when I was at Walter Reed, I was actually in my hospital bed when I heard what happened," Green Byrd said. "My heart really went out. I never thought 10 years later, I would be connected with that award."

NEW LIFE AND CAREER

Green Byrd left a teaching job to serve her country in 2004, but it was always her plan to be part of the "helping profession." Between her school counselor, Linda Kaplan, and sports psychologist, Dr. Miguel Franco, at Notre Dame, she knew it was what she wanted to do.

"I was just so inspired by him [Franco]," Green Byrd said. "That's why I majored in psychology at Notre Dame."

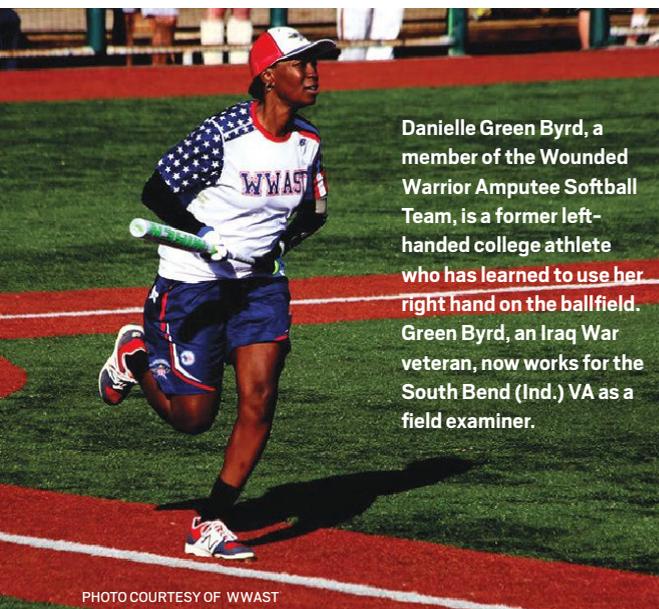
She earned a master's degree in school counseling in 2008 from Saint Xavier University in Chicago. In 2010, she began working for the South Bend (Ind.) VA as a re-adjustment counselor. All of the cases she worked on were "unique," but she said she felt "so honored" to be in the presence of Vietnam veterans.

"Some of my more poignant cases were working with Vietnam veterans living with PTSD or TBI... [for] 40 or 50 years and just being able to be an outlet for them to unload their experiences," Green Byrd said.

After having her child, Daniel, in 2014, she switched careers within the VA and now works as a field examiner. She said her 23 months in the military didn't "shape or define" her, but rather enhanced "a few" of her pre-existing personality traits. It also offered a new career direction.

"It did open up the door to becoming an employee with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is something I never really thought about," Green Byrd said. "My goals were strictly to be a school counselor, work with K-12 [students] and be a girls' basketball coach." ★

EMAIL kwilliams@vfw.org



Danielle Green Byrd, a member of the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team, is a former left-handed college athlete who has learned to use her right hand on the ballfield. Green Byrd, an Iraq War veteran, now works for the South Bend (Ind.) VA as a field examiner.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWAST

It wasn't until her sergeant and fellow soldiers took her to Baghdad's Green Zone (the U.S. military and diplomatic center during the war) that Green Byrd realized she lost her arm. The former college athlete was awarded the Purple Heart that night.

BATTLE OF IWO JIMA BOWIE KNIFE



35 DAYS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Situated 650 miles from mainland Japan, the small island of Iwo Jima was considered the difference between victory and defeat for the Allies in the Pacific Theatre during World War II. It was a vital link as a refueling site for the U.S. bombers and fighter escorts on their way to Japan.



On February 19, 1945, U.S. Marines hit the shores of Iwo Jima after 3 days of pre-invasion bombing. Their objective was a dormant volcano named Mt. Suribachi, which rose 546 feet above the shore. Control of Suribachi meant control of the island.

The climb up Suribachi was fought inch by inch. The Japanese fought from a fortified network of underground bunkers which made gunfire ineffective. The high ground had to be taken using flame throwers and grenades. Finally, on February 23, U.S. forces reached the summit. The raising of the American flag that day provided a lasting impression, inspiring not only the combatants, but also a war-weary nation.

On March 26, the entire island was secured. The Allied Forces suffered 25,000 casualties, with nearly 7,000 dead. Those sacrifices led to air superiority in the Pacific . . . and victory in World War II.

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