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‘PROUD’ ARMY OLYMPIANS
Four Army National Guardsmen from New York represented the United States at the 2018 Winter Olympics. They all participated through the Army’s World Class Athlete Program. **BY KARI WILLIAMS**

‘I WAS BECOMING THAT GUY’
Transitioning to civilian life after 32 years in the Army can be a daunting task. After deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, this VFW member hiked through the desert to contemplate his future. **BY KARI WILLIAMS**

KOREA’S YONGSAN LEGACY
A U.S. base since 1945, Yongsan Garrison occupies an area of central Seoul that is gentrifying at a rapid pace. Once GIs relocate later this year, the former home of U.S. Forces Korea will become a city park. **BY JUSTIN MALZAC**

ANTELOPE HUNT ‘HUMBLING’
Three veterans wounded during the Vietnam War traveled to Montana last fall to hunt antelope. Here’s how they enjoyed this free trip, which VFW magazine has sponsored for 36 years. **BY DAVE SPIVA**

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VFW Opines on Supreme Court Cases

The U.S. Supreme Court currently is considering three cases of particular interest to VFW. In fact, we have issued amicus briefs to bolster our positions on each.

In November, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the Republic of Sudan v. Harrison. The case concerns the families of the 17 sailors killed and the 42 wounded in the bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000. The families sued the country of Sudan, whom they believe was responsible for the terrorist act, and won a judgment in a lower court.

Sudan — supported in the case by Libya, Saudi Arabia and, unbelievably, our own government — is asking the Supreme Court to reject the multimillion-dollar judgment. This is a profound disappointment to us.

It is shocking and deeply disturbing that our government would stand with the nation that facilitated the Cole bombing and against the surviving American sailors and their families. I want those veterans and their families to know that VFW supports their case, particularly when the U.S. government won’t do the same.

The next case — Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission v. American Humanist Association — regards a World War I memorial in Bladensburg, Md. It is a 32-foot-tall, cross-shaped memorial that was built with private donations and erected on then-private property to honor the 49 men from Prince George’s County who died in the war. The Humanist Association contends that the memorial endorses Christianity rather than memorializing the fallen. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit in Richmond, Va., agreed and ruled that the memorial be moved or redesigned.

This is preposterous and reflects a profound lack of historical understanding. During and after WWI, the cross became a symbol of military sacrifice. Cross-shaped battlefield grave markers carpeted the fields of Europe.

The Gold Star Mothers of Prince George’s County in the 1920s chose the memorial’s shape specifically for that reason. As one mother said, “My son lost his life in France and because of that I feel that our memorial cross is, in a way, his grave stone.”

VFW wants the 4th Circuit ruling overturned. We’ve been involved with this issue since 2015 and demand that the Bladensburg Peace Cross stay where it is.

The third case in which we’ve provided an amicus brief is Gray v. Wilkie. At issue are U.S. Navy “blue water” veterans of the Vietnam War, those sailors who served offshore Vietnam.

Because of that, VA ruled in 2016 that they were not exposed to the defoliating Agent Orange, and thus, not eligible for compensation for conditions connected to exposure. Conversely, “brown water” sailors, those who served on inland waterways or rivers, are eligible for Agent Orange compensation.

Robert H. Gray, who served in DaNang Harbor during the war, wants the ruling changed and the presumption of Agent Orange exposure extended to all Vietnam War “blue water” sailors. VFW agrees.

In addition to issuing the amicus brief, VFW advocated diligently for passage of H.R. 299 — the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act this past year. Our National Legislative Service staff testified before the Senate VA Committee in August when the bill stalled in the Senate. At press time, VFW Action Corps members had targeted their senators with more than 31,000 messages and calls to urge them to pass the bill.

VFW will be watching these cases closely this summer when the Supreme Court is expected to make its rulings. Hopefully, our support will help the veterans and families affected by these rulings prevail.
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Checkpoint is Now an E-Newsletter

VFW’s award-winning newsletter for its Post, District and Department commanders is now digital. Beginning with the January/February 2019 issue, the Checkpoint enewsletter is available only by email.

Geoehrnia Schools Good for Vets

In October, Military Times released its 2019 rankings of the best colleges for veterans. The publication rated schools based on their university culture; academic quality and outcomes; policies; student support and costs; and financial aid. Here are the results.

4-Year Schools
1. Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, with satellites in Savannah and Hines, counts 8 percent of its student body as vets.
2. University of South Florida in Tampa reported that its vets had a higher grade point average — 3.21 to 3.17 — than nonveteran students.
3. Rutgers University in New Jersey has campuses in New Brunswick, Newark and Camden. Its student vet population has tripled in the past decade.

2-Year Schools
1. Central Community College-Nebraska has campuses in Columbus, Grand Island and Hastings. It has topped this category for six consecutive years.
2. Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City boasts an Office of Military and Veterans Services and gets high marks for “culture.”
3. Tarrant County College Trinity River Campus in Fort Worth, Texas, has a veterans center and a veterans office on campus.

Online and Nontraditional Schools
1. Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., was designated a Purple Heart University in 2017 in recognition of its support of active-duty troops and veterans.
2. University of Maryland University College in Adelphi is the second-most popular school for troops using transition-assistance benefits and is one of the 10 most popular colleges for GI Bill users.
3. Excelsior College in Albany, N.Y., had the highest military-student graduation rate of any online or nontraditional school.

Career and Technical Colleges
1. ECPI University is a for-profit college located in Virginia Beach, Va. It offers a year-round, flexible schedule to help troops and vets.
2. Savannah Technical College in Georgia counts 25 percent of its students as veterans, service members or dependents who graduate at a 73 percent rate.
3. Gwinnett Technical College of Georgia has campuses in Lawrenceville and Alpharetta. “Student support” was its highest-ranked category.
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Pentagon Eyes 2020 Space Force Launch

President Donald Trump's push for a Space Force has caused guesswork on what the military service would do and how much it would cost. But Congress will need to make the final decision.

BY DAVE SPIVA

With no official plans for the Trump administration's proposed Space Force, the cost, details and even the purpose of the would-be service still are unknown.

In June 2018, Trump signed an executive order directing the Defense Department to create a new military service “separate but equal” from the Air Force and other services.

While making a statement at the Pentagon in August, Vice President Mike Pence called for the establishment of a Space Force by 2020. He mentioned threats from countries such as Russia and China as reasons to establish the service.

But Trump’s support for creating a new military service isn’t enough; Congress has final say. For a Space Force to become a reality, the nation’s legislators must establish a new military service in law and provide funding.

While VFW doesn’t have a resolution for the creation of a space-faring service, the organization is on record with Res. 403 — Keep Defense Budget Relevant that states: “America’s No. 1 priority is to defend herself and her citizens.”

VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles said he believes it’s important to ensure the U.S. “has mechanisms in place” to protect the country against any threat.

“But nobody has really been told fully what the threats are in space, only that the force is needed,” Towles said. “There may be difficulties as an organization to justify an investment this large when there are other unfunded priorities within the Department of Defense that have been tossed by the wayside as a result of sequestration.”

Speaking at an October meeting of the recently re-established National Space Council in Washington, D.C., Pence outlined the progress for creating the Space Force, saying it soon “will be a reality.”

“Our administration is already working closely with leaders in Congress to chart a legislative and budgetary pathway to create a new department that will organize, train and equip space forces, including both combat and service support functions for offensive and defensive operations,” Pence said.

As of November, the Pentagon had yet to release a cost estimate for a Space Force. But speculations for the cost has been inconsistent.

Todd Harrison, the director of Defense Budget Analysis and the Aerospace Security Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, believes a new Space Force may only cost $300 million to $500 million — less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the Defense budget.

“While the cost of a space service would largely be budget neutral, except for the additional staff needed for headquarters and secretariat functions, this means that the existing military services would stand to lose personnel and budget from such a reorganization,” Harrison wrote in the bipartisan Washington-based think tank’s article, “How Much Will the Space Force Cost?”

Harrison stated that the Air Force could lose “more than $11 billion in annual budget authority.”

This is a stark contrast to an internal memorandum obtained by several media outlets, including Defense One and The Associated Press. The Sept. 14, 2018, memo written by Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson estimates the cost for the Defense Department’s new Space Force to be more than $3 billion the first year and almost $13 billion over a five-year period, according to The Associated Press.

During an interview with Defense News, Wilson said the estimated costs stated in the memorandum are “additive costs.” She also said the undertaking of a new department is “a bold idea.”

“They are not just the movement of other capabilities and consolidate them,” she said. “To stand up a department that’s responsible for [recruit-

Vice President Mike Pence speaks during a February 2018 National Space Council meeting at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Merritt Island, Fla. In August, Pence said the establishment of a Space Force is expected by 2020.
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Remains Recovered from Korean DMZ

South Korea’s defense ministry announced in November that five sets of remains from the Korean War had been recovered during mine-clearance operations at Arrowhead Hill near Cheorwon, just south of the DMZ. The discovery brings the total number of remains recently unearthed in the area to nine since Oct. 1.

The recovery was the result of an agreement between North Korea and South Korea. Both countries aim to remove weapons and munitions along the DMZ and have agreed to identify and return any remains that are recovered in the process.

Arrowhead Hill, otherwise known as Hill 281, was the site of several skirmishes during the Korean War.

As of November, there were 7,675 Americans who remain unaccounted for from the Korean War, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

High Blood Pressure Linked to Agent Orange Exposure

Researchers from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine published a report in November that links hypertension, or high blood pressure, and Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS) to Agent Orange exposure.

MGUS is a condition with no symptoms. It’s caused when an abnormal protein is present in the bloodstream.

The report, Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 11 (2018), links Agent Orange exposure to hypertension and MGUS. The finding about hypertension is an upgrade from a 2014 report by the academy, and MGUS is considered a new condition linked to the chemical’s exposure.

After the report was published, VFW called on VA to add hypertension and MGUS to the current list of presumptive diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam, Thailand and the demilitarized zone in Korea.

VFW Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence said there is “no doubt” that Agent Orange made veterans and their children ill, which has brought “pain and suffering” to many people.

“Even though it’s been a half-century since they were exposed, the results of that exposure is something they continue to live with daily,” Lawrence said.

Lawrence also called on VA Secretary Robert Wilkie to “recognize the science” in the academy’s report by adding the two illnesses to the VA’s presumptive list. Lawrence said action needs to be taken, so veterans can receive assistance “they earned and deserve.”

VFW encourages veterans who served in Vietnam or Thailand, as well as along the Korean DMZ, to contact a VFW service officer to discuss whether they are eligible to file a VA claim for Agent Orange exposure. Visit www.vfw.org/nvs to find a VFW service officer.

To view the current list of 14 presumptive diseases connected to Agent Orange exposure, visit https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/related-diseases/.

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.
VA changed the way it calculates income for needs-based benefits in October. VA has new requirements for evaluating a veteran’s net worth and assets when determining his or her pension. VA now identifies medical expenses that could be deducted from the veteran’s net worth when determining eligibility for VA’s needs-based benefits programs.

VA claims the newly enforced amendments help “ensure the integrity” of VA’s needs-based benefits programs. VA added that the rule change will help its employees offer vets more consistent decisions when determining claims for items such as pensions and parents’ dependency and indemnity compensation.

In September, VA published a final rule in the Federal Register that will establish a three-year “look-back” period when determining eligibility for income-based benefits, including pension with aid and attendance. Those types of transfers might bar the veteran from receiving pension benefits until the assets are used for their living expenses.

Veterans can transfer some funds without penalty:

- Special needs trusts for the benefit of helpless children (adolescent and adult).
- Trusts where the veteran retains control over the funds.
- VA’s final rule also states that veterans can reverse the transfer or buy back the asset in order to avoid a penalty.

Some of the changes that went into effect on Oct. 18, 2018, allow veterans to:

- Increase their net worth amount to qualify for a pension.
- Deduct medical expenses for dementia care and third-party care providers.

For questions about VA benefits, visit https://www.vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits to find a VFW-trained service officer to assist you.

VFW Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence and Brett Reistad, the national commander of the American Legion, demanded in November that VA give immediate attention to its nursing home program. About 70 percent of VA homes received failing grades by the department’s own rating system.

Lawrence and Reistad called on VA Secretary Robert Wilkie to improve those ratings. The call came after USA Today and The Boston Globe published articles about the failing grades. Donovan Slack of USA Today and Andrea Estes of The Boston Globe documented poor quality of care at a VA nursing home in Brockton, Mass.

Of the 132 VA nursing homes:

- 45 received one star, the lowest rating available.
- 47 received two stars.
- 16 received three stars.
- 15 received four stars.
- Nine received five stars, the highest rating.

Both commanders said that the 46,000 veterans who reside in VA nursing homes must not be forgotten. “These veterans earned the right to receive high quality care in a fully-staffed and well-managed facility,” Lawrence said. “Their families deserve to know that their loved ones — their heroes — are not being abandoned or abused, and America needs to be reassured that the VA is honoring our nation’s promise to those who have borne the battle.”

Lawrence also said VA “must improve” its delivery of quality care. “[VA] must recruit and retain only the best healthcare professionals and support staff, and it must hold all employees accountable for their actions or inactions,” Lawrence said. “It is not a right but a privilege to work for America’s veterans, and anything less is unacceptable.”

Veterans enrolled in VA health care now can schedule medical appointments through the new VA Video Connect app.

Instead of a standard in-person medical appointment, the new app provides a video connection for veterans through a smartphone, computer or tablet. The app aims to give direct access to health care. VA says Video Connect has already helped “thousands” of veterans receive services while reducing their travel and wait times.
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The 41st President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush, died Nov. 30 at the age of 94. To date, he is the last of eight presidents to hold the distinction of being a VFW member.

At the time of his death, Bush was a life member of the Department of Texas. When he ran for president in 1988, he was a member of VFW Post 4344 in Houston, which later went defunct.

During his election bid for office as the Republican presidential nominee, Bush saluted delegates at the 1988 VFW National Convention in Chicago.

Just two years later, he appeared as president at VFW’s 91st National Convention in Baltimore.

On the occasion of VFW’s 100th anniversary, Bush said: “The VFW has become part of the fabric of our nation. For many years now, I’ve been inspired by the motto of the Veterans of Foreign Wars — ‘Honor the Dead by Helping the Living.’ I congratulate all of you for the work you’ve done to enhance the lives and well-being of those veterans and families who are less fortunate than others.”

On his 18th birthday in 1942, Bush enlisted in the Navy and became a naval aviator. When he received his wings, he was the Navy’s youngest pilot. He would go on to fly 58 combat missions in WWII.

During one harrowing mission at 20 years old, Bush was shot down during raids on Chichi Jima, about 700 miles south of Tokyo. Of the nine men on that mission, Bush was the only survivor. He ditched his plane further from the island than the others, who were not able to swim ashore.

The submarine USS Finback rescued Bush, who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery in action.

Following the war, he held many positions that paved the way for his 1988 presidential run. From 1967 to 1971, he served as a U.S. representative for Texas’ 7th District; from 1971 to 1972, he was ambassador to the United Nations; 1976-77, he was CIA director; and he served two terms as vice president under Ronald Reagan, beginning in 1981.

Always proud of his VFW membership, Bush once said: “By supporting this nation’s veterans, VFW has enriched America.”
Here’s a memorable beach moment: You’re basking in the warm sun, toes in the sand, letting the gentle turn of the foam-capped waves lull you into a state of complete relaxation. As your eyes scan the endless horizon of blue on blue, you’re rewarded with a school of dolphins making their way across the sea. There’s no denying their signature shape as they leap from the water. If you don’t see anything else extraordinary the rest of day, you can take solace knowing you’ve witnessed one of nature’s most playful and intelligent creatures in their natural habitat.

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VFW PRIORITY GOALS FOR 2019
WHERE VFW STANDS ON THE ISSUES

Listed below are VFW’s official positions on issues impacting veterans, service members and their families, as well as national defense and homeland security. They are based on national convention resolutions and rated as priorities by direct feedback from VFW members.

BUDGET
To fully fund veterans and defense programs, Congress must:
• Reform the dysfunctional federal budget process and end sequestration.
• Authorize VA to receive reimbursements from TRICARE and Medicare.
• Ensure the POW/MIA Accounting mission is fully funded.
• Never reduce one veteran’s benefits to pay for another.

HEALTH CARE
To ensure service members and veterans receive timely access to high-quality health care without increasing cost shares, Congress, VA and DOD must:
• Properly implement the VA MISSION Act of 2018.
• Reduce the number of troops and veterans who die by suicide.
• Preserve the integrity of TRICARE.
• Modernize VA and DOD health IT systems.
• Strengthen health care and research for mental health and traumatic brain injuries (TBI).
• Expand gender-specific programs and competencies.
• Research and effectively treat health conditions associated with toxic exposures.
• Prevent the increase of pharmaceutical copayments and remove copayment requirements for preventive medicines.
• Research the efficacy of medical cannabis.
• Expand telehealth services.
• Make nursing home eligibility part of the VA health care benefits package.
• Keep community care reimbursement rates competitive with private health insurance.

DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
To ensure veterans and their dependents have timely access to earned benefits, Congress and VA must:
• Properly implement the modernized appeals process.
• Consider treatment of presumptive conditions as a claim for disability compensation.
• Establish presumptive disability compensation benefits for hearing loss, tinnitus, TBI, and for health conditions associated with toxic exposures.
• Increase burial allowances to account for inflation and include spouses’ information on all headstones.
• Authorize more than one adaptive automotive grant for disabled veterans.
• Reform the Gulf War Illness Disability Benefits Questionnaire.
• Transfer the control of the Mare Island Naval Cemetery to NCA.
• Update regulations and laws governing claims to account for digital claims processing.
• Expand VA wartime benefits to early Vietnam veterans.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND TRANSITION ASSISTANCE
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• Hiring preferences in the civil service and with large government contractors.
• National veterans treatment court advocates.
• Education and training in new and expanding career fields.
• Timely and improved transition assistance including access to programs for veterans after they leave military service.
• Affordable housing and wraparound services to avoid homelessness.
• Equitable education benefits for dependents regardless of where they live.
• Improved character-of-discharge review and appeals procedures.

MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE
To maintain a quality, comprehensive benefits and retirement package that is the backbone for an all-volunteer force, Congress and DOD must:
• Increase military base pay comparability with private-sector wages.
• Protect and improve on-base quality-of-life programs.
• Ensure that military housing is safe and free of toxic substances.
• End the military retirement pay and VA disability compensation offset.
• Eliminate the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset.
• Increase the government’s Thrift Savings Plan contribution.
• Eliminate sexual assaults in the military.
• Establish the Armed Forces University.
• Improve stability and support for military families.

NATIONAL SECURITY, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND POW/MIA
To fully support U.S. troops and their mission to fight the war on terrorism and protect our nation’s citizens and interests around the world, Congress, DOD and DHS must:
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• Preserve the all-volunteer force.
• Maintain a substantial military presence in the Republic of Korea.
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STUDENT VETERANS HELPING STUDENT VETERANS

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS’ STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER AIDS OR ASSISTS VETERANS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS THROUGH THEIR COLLEGE EDUCATION. VETERANS RECEIVING THE HELP SAY SVA IS ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THEIR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL.

BY DAVE SPIVA
Over the past few years, groups of college students across the country have made it their mission to provide military-affiliated students with the advocacy and resources needed for a successful college education and post-graduation careers.

The University of Kansas (KU) Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter, located in Lawrence, Kan., is one example.

SVA chapters nationwide advocate for improvements to student-vet benefits while helping vets attending their specific college navigate the complexities of academic life.

“SVA isn’t like any other college organization,” 2018-19 KU SVA President Omar Williams said. “We are not a fraternity or a sorority. We are very professional. We have the ability to network with people across the country that we otherwise might not be able to meet and have the opportunities that other student organizations don’t have available.”

According to SVA, its 1,583 chapters at campuses nationwide advocate for more than 700,000 military-affiliated students.

VFW and SVA have been official partners since signing a memorandum-of-understanding in 2013. The two groups attend each other’s annual conventions, and VFW selects 10 SVA members annually to participate in a fellowship program.

Williams added that he is always trying to show student veterans and military-affiliated students the “value” SVA can have. He said this includes offering roles as leaders, advocates for veterans policy and the social members of various college organizations.

**ADVOCACY FOR VETERANS**

Williams, 25, was born in Arkansas and raised in Wichita, Kan. He enlisted in the Navy in 2012 after high school and became a corpsman. He served in the emergency room at Naval Hospital Jacksonville in Florida for two years, then finished aboard the USS *America* in San Diego. He was discharged from active-duty in July 2017, but before getting out, he applied to KU to start attending in the 2017 fall semester.

“Initially, I was in pre-nursing — as a corpsman, it just made sense,” Williams
Alex Hinesly, University of Kansas Student Veterans of America secretary, and Vice President of Media Kylie Coffelt enjoy each other's company in November in front of Strong Hall at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kan. SVA boasts 1,583 chapters on campuses throughout the country that help military-affiliated students with college life.

PARTNERSHIP AMONG VETERANS

VFW and the Student Veterans of America (SVA) established a formal partnership in 2013. The partnership has given student veterans the opportunity to promote causes important to veterans.

Former VFW Commander-in-Chief Jim Nier, who was serving as VFW's director of student veteran outreach at the time, said “there is a high degree of synergy” between the two groups. He explained that they have similar missions and can help each other.

VFW offers its experience, expertise and knowledge it has gained over its 119-year history. SVA members have the youthful energy and zeal college-age veterans possess, while offering VFW a pool of degreed members who can lead the organization into the future.

One initiative of the two groups, the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellow program, gives student veterans the opportunity to advocate with VFW on issues facing student veterans. Fellows meet lawmakers responsible for implementing veterans' policy on Capitol Hill.

Are you a student veteran interested in the fellowship?

For more details, visit https://studentveterans.org/programs/vfw-sva-legislative-fellowship.

said. “But, prior to joining the service, I wanted to be an attorney. So that's what I'm working toward.”

Williams is now an English major and said he wanted to work on his writing skills before heading to law school.

“In the military, I learned punctuality, meeting deadlines and professionalism,” Williams said. “I absolutely learned how to be a professional in the military, and that trickled over into my academics.”

Williams has been married for four years and has a 3-year-old daughter. But having a wife and child at home, as well as attending school full-time, has not stopped Williams from being heavily involved in SVA.

He said he has been involved with KU’s chapter since he started attending the university, which is one of the top military-friendly schools in the country. The University of Kansas was among the top five for the second year in a row.

“I started really getting involved after I went to the SVA National Conference,” Williams said.

He added that the conference, which took place in San Antonio in January 2018, was “inspirational” and that he was stunned by all the advocacy work SVA does for veterans. (See sidebar, “Partnership Among Veterans.”)

Williams also said he receives advice from past KU SVA presidents, such as J.R. Cadwallader, a member of the VFW Department of Kansas and Marine Corps veteran who served in the Iraq War in 2009 and the Afghanistan War in 2011.

“I’m now in more of an advisory role with KU’s SVA,” said Cadwallader, who was president in 2016-17. “I try to answer any questions that any members might have about the past few years SVA has been around.”

Currently attending KU for a Master of Business Administration, Cadwallader said that being in the military gave him the “discipline” to attend college.

“I never in my life thought I would go to college,” Cadwallader said. “I now see how valuable and important an education is.”

SVA does not just serve student veterans but all military-affiliated students. This includes students who are members of the military—active-duty, reserves or National Guard—as well as students in the Reserve Officer Training Corps and students who are spouses or dependents of military members and retirees.

One dependent involved in KU SVA is Brandon Decker, 20, who is attending KU for degrees in political science and philosophy. Decker is the son of two retired Navy chief petty officers.

“I’m involved with SVA because it advocates for veterans and for veterans’ rights on campus,” Decker said. “When I advocate for veterans, it’s as if I’m advocating for people like my parents. It doesn’t benefit me, but it benefits people like my parents who served in the military.”

Decker currently is KU SVA’s student senate representative. His role with SVA is to give the organization information on what other groups, as well as KU, are doing on campus.

Another student, Kylie Coffelt, helps with KU SVA’s social media presence. Coffelt, 19, is the daughter of a retired Navy chief petty officer. She is KU SVA’s vice president of media and is studying unified early childhood education.

“I was asked to join because they needed help with their social media pages,” Coffelt said. “I’m here to help with SVA’s mission, and to help get events going and to spread the word about them.”

Coffelt and Decker said they enjoy being around SVA students because veterans typically take school seriously.

“It’s motivating to see someone like Omar, who has a family, getting their school work done on top of being a
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“I wouldn’t be where I am today without [the Forever GI Bill], and VFW and other organizations are the reason for it.”

Omar Williams
Navy veteran and KU SVA President

Since implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which VFW helped write, and now the Forever GI Bill, which VFW helped pass, campuses and organizations have opened military-affiliated student centers nationwide. At the University of Kansas, the Lt. Gen. Jones Student Center opened in March 2017 thanks to fundraising efforts by KU SVA.

The center helps military-affiliated students at KU find campus resources and obtain VA education benefits. The center also aims to help students transition from the military to school and from school to post-graduation careers.

Williams said he would not be the student he is today without the experience he gained from his five years as a sailor, and that he wouldn’t be in school without the GI Bill.

“It’s amazing to know that all these resources are here and all these people are fighting for you, so we can have things such as the Forever GI Bill.”

“This wouldn’t be where I am today without that legislation, and VFW and other organizations are the reason for it.”

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

AN ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

In November, KU SVA hosted the KU Vets Day 5K in Lawrence. The event aims to raise funds for student veterans on campus. A record 451 participants registered in the 2018 run and walk.

Proceeds from the event went toward supporting KU SVA, the school’s veterans alumni network and KU’s Lt. Gen. William K. Jones Military-Affiliated Student Center.

“Having members who are a little more involved with the younger college students and organizations helps us get the word out about our program and our activities.”

Omar Williams, University of Kansas Student Veterans of America president and English major, studies for an exam in November at the Watson Library on campus in Lawrence, Kan. Williams, a former Navy corpsman, said he got involved with SVA after attending its national conference last year.
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NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIERS REFLECT ON OLYMPIC COMPETITION

Four soldiers participated in the Army’s World Class Athlete Program and represented the nation at the 2018 Winter Olympics.

BY KARI WILLIAMS
Matthew Mortensen has served with the 1156th Engineering Co., as an interior electrician since February 2010. As a member of the Army’s World Class Athlete Program, he also has represented the United States in two Winter Olympic Games.

olympic-level athletes have the opportunity to serve their country while continuing to advance their dreams. Four New York National Guard members did just that — with all of them earning spots in last year’s Winter Olympics.

Sergeants Emily Sweeney, Matthew Mortensen, Justin Olsen and Nick Cunningham competed in PyeongChang, South Korea, in February 2018 as part of their service with the National Guard’s World Class Athlete Program (WCAP).

In the program, soldier-athletes compete and train at the international level and “keep current with Army requirements, attend military schools and stay competitive with their uniformed counterparts,” according to the WCAP website.

MATTHEW MORTENSEN, LUGE
Matthew Mortensen has served with the 1156th Engineering Co., out of Kingston, N.Y., as an interior electrician since February 2010 and represented the Army in two Winter Olympic Games.

“Not a lot of athletes can say they were representing their country not only as an athlete but as a soldier as well,” Mortensen said. “I think it brings a bit of responsibility … You are an extension of them.”

Mortensen’s final Olympic venture was in South Korea in 2018, after which he retired from competition. The day prior to opening ceremonies, doctors discovered two bulging discs in his back.

“I had zero to little spinal fluid left in the lower portion of my back,” Mortensen said.

Through it all, his most memorable moment was from the 2018 Winter Olympics, with his parents in attendance and able to see him nearly medal.

“Jayson [Terdiman] and I were able to come through and put the team back ahead. [It was by] the closest of margins that we were able to get the lead back for our team,” Mortensen said.

“Just those moments of, ‘I might be an Olympic medalist’... that definitely has an impact on me.”

Mortensen trained and competed with the WCAP through October 2018, but his luge career began in childhood. He joined WCAP because it provided “financial stability” and an opportunity to focus on luge.

The military, according to Mortensen, allowed him to dedicate time to his sport, be a soldier and move life forward “in a positive way.” He earned a business communication degree in November 2017 from DeVry University and plans to focus on transitioning into the business world.

NICK CUNNINGHAM, BOBSLED
Nick Cunningham served as a construction masonry engineer alongside Mortensen with the New York National Guard’s 1156th Engineering Co., from 2011 to June 2018.

Cunningham joined the National Guard after his first appearance in the 2010 Winter Olympics.

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Cunningham joined the National Guard after his first appearance in the 2010 Winter Olympics.

“I knew the way I was going to be able to attempt to do the next couple of Olympic runs was to join the military and get that backing,” said Cunningham, who had a childhood goal of being an Olympian.

Joining the Guard and the WCAP had a “huge” influence on his training.

“The greatest thing they afford us is the ability to rest and recover,” Cunningham said. “We’re pretty much put on orders to train and compete and win medals for our country and serve our country.”

Representing the Army was “unique” for Cunningham because of his prior Olympic experience. But he felt the “same sense of pride” putting on his military uniform as he did competing in Vancouver, Canada, in 2010.

“It’s not about me anymore,” said Cunningham, a native of Monterey, Calif. “It’s about what this represents.”
His bobsledding career began 10 years ago, in what began as a joke with his parents. A track athlete throughout college in California, Cunningham said his parents once joked after a track meet that the road looked like a bobsled track. Then, as a “graduation gift” to himself, he flew to Lake Placid, NY, and tried out for the national bobsled team.

“I came out to the tryout, and 18 months later, [I was at my] first Olympic trials,” Cunningham said.

EMILY SWEENEY, LUGE

Emily Sweeney was 7 years old when she saw her sister, Megan, begin a luge career. Three years later, Emily started competing herself, with sights set on the Olympics.

Sweeney began her Army National Guard career with the 206th MP Company and transferred to Joint-Force Headquarters in Latham, N.Y., in 2016. She joined the WCAP in 2011, after her coach, Bill Tavares, introduced her to the program, and currently is on active-duty, fully assigned to WCAP.

“He was one of their first athletes,” Sweeney said. “He was very well-versed in the program. I had seen him around and had known vaguely what WCAP was and how you could couple sport with service, but I didn’t truly know until I had a conversation with him about it one day.”

Sweeney said her parents were “pretty shocked” when she told them about joining the National Guard.

“I was the first person since my grandfathers in my family on either side to join a branch of service,” Sweeney said.

Becoming a soldier has added a “little more weight” to the notion of representing the U.S. in competition, she said.

“I’ve kind of grown up with USA on my back because we start so young in our sport,” Sweeney said. “I started competing internationally at 14. When [I became] a part of the National Guard and the Army, that kind of brings it to a new level.”

But still, there are no words to describe what representing the Army means to her.

“I’m a very proud American, love the values of our country and I love the opportunity that I have to hopefully be a good ambassador for that,” Sweeney said. “I take that seriously. I don’t take that lightly.”

Currently, Sweeney is “working back” from an injury she suffered while competing in PyeongChang.

JUSTIN OLSEN, BOBSLED

Justin Olsen served with Joint-Force Headquarters as a human resources specialist in Latham, NY, and has a gold medal to his name from the 2010 Winter Olympics. He now is stationed in Fort Carson, Colo. It wasn’t until 2011 that he joined WCAP. Olsen discovered the program through Mike Kohn, a former roommate and now coach.

“I noticed his uniform in his closet, and immediately started asking a bunch of questions,” Olsen said. “I have a tremendous amount of respect for those [who] serve.”

Attending basic training after winning gold made Olsen feel “rejuvenated,” he said.

“I felt like I had another purpose,” Olsen explained. “I was competing not just for my country, but for all those people [who] I met face-to-face during basic [training] and AIT [Advanced Individual Training]. And I was just representing more than what I was previously.”

At the 2018 Winter Games, Olsen had surgery after suffering abdominal pains. Some 12 hours after surgery — and three days before the opening ceremonies — Olsen sent a message to his team that he would be out for a “couple” days.

“The responses I got from them, along with our staff and my loved ones, were really inspiring,” Olsen said. “Because nobody questioned whether or not [I] could do it. They didn’t give up on me, and I didn’t give up on myself.”

The team ultimately placed 14th in the two-man competition and 20th in the four-man race. A former football player, Olsen said he was drawn to the competition and adrenaline rush of bobsled.

“I just knew in the summer of ’08, I was going to train as hard as I could,” Olsen said. “[I would] give it my best effort, and it turned out, the outcome was pretty good. Here we are 10 years later.”

Olsen said he still is competing and anticipated completing his technical management degree from DeVry University in December. He also hopes to become a commissioned officer in the Army.

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Justine Olsen is an Olympic gold medalist who also serves his country through the Army’s World Class Athlete Program. The former football player has served since 2011, while competing in bobsleds.

Emily Sweeney is an active-duty member of the World Class Athlete Program. She joined the Army National Guard in 2011 and first was assigned to the 206th MP Company. She has competed in luge since childhood.
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After a 32-year Army career, this retiree hiked 800 miles across Arizona last year. The months-long venture helped him transition to the civilian world.

BY KARI WILLIAMS

‘THE SOLITUDE WAS WONDERFUL’

Mike Buckley served 32 years in the Army, complete with six deployments and three combat tours. He watched men die in Afghanistan and Iraq. Four of his friends committed suicide.

Through it all, Buckley refused to take medication to manage what he had witnessed. Instead, he turned to nature.

“Sometimes it seems like things are kind of a swirl... [In the desert], there’s no swirl out there,” said Buckley, who hiked from March 28 to May 22 last year on the Arizona Trail — traversing 800 miles across the state — in a venture organized by the veteran-owned nonprofit Warrior Expeditions.

VFW life member Sean Gobin founded Warrior Expeditions in 2013 after he spent four-and-a-half months hiking the Appalachian Trail immediately following his 2012 departure from the Marine Corps.

“I realized the significant therapeutic effect of spending all that time hiking in nature,” said Gobin, who served in Iraq (2003, 2005) and Afghanistan (2011) as an armor officer with the 2nd Tank Battalion.

It wasn’t until after his first-hand experience that Gobin began looking into research and background on the benefits of immersing oneself in nature.

A 2015 study conducted by Shauna Joye and Zachary Dietrich of Georgia Southern University investigated how “long-distance hiking and paddling” affected the mental health of 31 veterans.

“Our wilderness therapy program showed promise as a way for veterans to address issues related to experiencing traumatic events while deployed,” Joye and Dietrich concluded. “We found significant decreases in general anxiety, anxiety related to fear or uneasiness when in new places and around crowds and feelings of wariness or self-consciousness around others.”

University of Michigan professors Jason Duvall and Rachel Kaplan studied the mental health of 31 veterans affected—distance hiking and paddling” long-term issues of immersing oneself in nature. The professors did note that a small
sample size — 73 veterans participated in events during the study, but only 31 provided follow-up responses — does not clearly indicate if the improvements are sustainable.

“However, the findings with respect to the reduction in perceived stress and negative affect, as well as the increases in feelings of tranquility and social functioning, suggest such benefits might persist and even continue to increase for several weeks after the intervention,” Duvall and Kaplan stated.

CONFRONTING A STIGMA

As of Aug. 1, Buckley had been retired for one year, and he said it had been a difficult “year.”

“It was harder than I thought it’d be… [You’re] transitioning to a culture you, frankly, don’t fit into,” he said.

Buckley said he started having panic attacks in 2010, after leaving Iraq. But Afghanistan, he said, was worse.

“It was the culmination of the whole year,” said Buckley, an at-large member with VFW’s Department of New York.

Buckley said there is a “huge stigma” in asking for help, and people in his situation “don’t want to be weak.”

“You don’t want to become that angry vet that everybody whispers about,” Buckley said. “I was starting to become that guy.”

The Army veteran became aware of Warrior Expeditions through Facebook and sent his information in for consideration. Though he initially wasn’t selected, an opportunity later arose to hike the 800-mile trail across Arizona. Buckley said he wanted to participate on the hike because he knew it was an “alternative” treatment.

“I don’t want to be addicted to the pharmaceutical industry,” Buckley said. “[They] treat a symptom, they don’t provide treatment to the underlying cause.”

The biggest challenge during the hike, according to Buckley, wasn’t the solitude, but, rather, swollen ankles and the Arizona heat. The trail provides two choices, he said — “move forward or quit.”

“The solitude, truthfully, once I locked into it, was wonderful,” Buckley said.

Buckley’s experience also supports other research from Joye, Dietrich and Joseph Amos Garcia, which specifically looks at Warrior Expeditions participants and was published in 2015 in the Journal of Experiential Education.

“The isolation of the trail gave time for respondents to contemplate what they wanted and needed for their future well-being,” Joye, et al. wrote. “Although their goals were vastly different, all respondents made decisions to improve their lives and were confident that they would follow through with their decisions.”

BECOMING ONE WITH NATURE

But for Buckley, his most vivid memory was the “absolute primitive” austerity and beauty of the trail itself. The first 500 miles, according to Buckley, consisted of six different mountain ranges.

“It is truly astounding,” Buckley said.

What brought Buckley peace from the hike was the calmness and breathtaking moments he experienced — like when he walked up on a desert fox that just looked at him, then went back to its own business.

Gobin said there are three elements related to the programs Warrior Expeditions offers — a chance to separate themselves from their service, camaraderie of other veterans and community support.

“First is just having eight hours a day of hiking, biking or paddling for months on end in nature,” Gobin said. “It gives our vets time and space to decompress from their wartime experiences.”

Being surrounded by fellow veterans who can relate to what each other has gone through — or is going through — is “really beneficial,” according to Gobin. Group sizes range anywhere from two to 10, depending on the type of trail.

“Since you’re spending so much time on the trails, it’s like a deployment,” Gobin said. “[The people you’re with] become as close as family.”

Community support throughout the journey also “re-establishes the basic faith in humanity that veterans tend to lose” after experiencing a combat deployment, Gobin said.

 “[Veterans] tend to have a really cynical view of people and society and humanity,” Gobin said. “[The expedition] breaks that cycle of isolation and helps reconnect veterans to communities.”

Social interaction was a key component of the experience, Joye and Dietrich found.

“Not only did respondents mention their relationship with their fellow warrior hike hikers, but they also mentioned the friendship and bonding they experienced with strangers along the trail,” Joye, Garcia and Dietrich wrote.

A friend told Buckley the trail does not give people what they want, but what they need.

And for him, that rang true.

“The emotion thing kind of rolls on you,” Buckley said. “It happened to me multiple times. It becomes very raw.”

For more information, visit https://warriorexpeditions.org.

EMAIL kmwilliams@vfw.org
George Breen was a Spec. 4 when he met the woman he would call “Marie” a few days after arriving in Korea in 1958. Assigned to the Army’s 570th Ordnance Company, he arrived in July of that year aboard the USS James O’Hara and was assigned as a wheeled-vehicle mechanic for the company. Breen was based at the U.S. Army’s Yongsan Garrison, located in central Seoul on the north bank of the Han River.

Breen’s friend’s real name is Han Soon-Ah, and he is still searching for her.

During Breen’s time at Yongsan, Marie and her two younger siblings lived nearby in a simple house with no indoor plumbing and only one light bulb. That bulb went dead when the Korean government turned off the electricity every night at 10 p.m. Marie’s parents had both been killed during the Korean War.

Breen provided them candles for the dark nights and joined them for breakfast every Sunday. Even after departing from Korea in July 1959, Breen stayed in touch, sending letters and money back to Marie. The two shared letters for seven years, as Breen tried to find a way for Marie to come to the United States. His efforts proved fruitless.

This exchange between local Koreans and foreign visitors was nothing new. Yongsan Garrison has long been the focal point of the U.S. military presence in Korea. But even before the U.S. took over the space in 1945, Yongsan had been a historical area associated with the presence of foreign military forces in Korea.

‘DRAGON MOUNTAIN’

Part of the appeal of the location was certainly the strategy of holding the high ground. In the Korean language, Yongsan means “dragon mountain.” Another important geographic factor was its location outside the stone walls of ancient Seoul, the capital of the Joseon Dynasty. This allowed the King of the Hermit Kingdom to keep foreigners at bay.

Historian Harold E. Raugh has suggested that Yongsan was used as a logistics base by the Mongolian army in the 13th century, as well as by the Japanese during their failed invasions at the end of the 16th century. When droughts and public anger led to riots and the burning of the Japanese legation in 1882, Ming China responded by deploying around 4,500 troops to Seoul, stationing them in the Yongsan area.

This, of course, was one of the catalysts for the First Sino-Japanese War. After Japan began the process of colonizing Korea in the early 1900s, Yongsan was quickly selected as the location for its headquarters.

Perhaps it was inevitable that the United States would follow the historical pattern. Yongsan has been the headquarters of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) since 1953. But all of that is changing.

MOVING TO CAMP HUMPHREYS

In 2004, the U.S. and Korean governments laid out plans to transfer all U.S. military forces south of Seoul. The move was supposed to have been completed by 2008 but is still ongoing. Deadlines have been repeatedly missed for a variety of reasons, such as disagreements over when operational control will be turned over to the Koreans and how much each country should pay for the move. Other issues, such as outright inefficiency and corruption, have plagued the negotiations.

As of October 2018, around half of the garrison had successfully moved the 50 miles south to Camp Humphreys. A former one-strip airfield, Camp Humphreys has grown to become America’s largest overseas military base.

The population at Yongsan dropped from more than 22,000 in 2017 to 12,000 in the summer of 2018. Some think that tally will drop as low as 8,000 this year. The major speed bump has been the transfer of the main USFK hospital to a new facility at Humphreys, which won’t be ready until the end of 2019.
After the move is complete, the only American officials to remain in Seoul will be U.S. embassy staff. They will occupy a new compound at the northern edge of Yongsan Garrison, formerly called Camp Coiner. Meanwhile, members of the Combined Forces Command staff will move to the compound of the Korean Ministry of National Defense, outside the garrison walls.

Roughly 90 percent of the land being handed over to Seoul is expected to be turned into a central park, designed by the Dutch landscape architectural firm West 8, which has developed projects in London, Moscow, New York, Amsterdam, Shanghai and several other major cities. It is a mark of Seoul's drive to be a modern global icon, a goal that cannot be accomplished as long as foreign troops remain in the city.

OFFER YOUR YONGSAN MEMORIES

History is all about change. The American men and women who start their first military tours in Korea in the coming years will face different circumstances than previous generations. They will trade World War II-era barracks and offices for state-of-the-art buildings. They also will have to sacrifice a direct and intimate connection with their host nation for something more distant.

And what will happen to the history and memories of that place when it is inevitably reshaped, repaved and redesigned? Once the buildings and spaces are removed, the stories and memories also might vanish.

Daniel Oh, a professor of architecture at Korea University in Seoul, doesn’t want to risk losing that historical legacy. He started “Yongsan Legacy” in 2013, aiming to capture the personal memories, stories and life experiences of GIs and civilians who served and lived on Yongsan Garrison.

Oh believes the magnitude of Yongsan Garrison’s influence on the development of modern South Korea was remarkable and deserves to be recognized.

From fashion to K-pop (South Korean popular music), friendships to families, Yongsan Garrison offers a unique perspective in understanding Korea today that most fail to recognize and appreciate.

“Most people only see buildings built in various periods, and this is a part of the memory,” Oh said. “But the buildings and the places will only be empty shells once USFK moves out of Yongsan Garrison. Our project is interested in archiving the ‘soft memories’ — human stories and the interactions of people who spent time inside the base.”

The vision of Yongsan Legacy, as Oh described it, “is to create a virtual memorial that will inspire people of all generations and remain relevant yet true to the spirit of the place, the genius loci, called Yongsan Garrison.”

George Breen shared his story with Yongsan Legacy. It is the only reason we know about Marie and how much Breen did for her family.

But Yongsan Legacy is a crowd-sourced project that relies on veterans sharing their experiences of life at Yongsan Garrison.

The Yongsan Legacy project needs the help of veterans who served in Korea, to save an important part of history. The land will soon be returned to the Koreans, but the legacy will always be American, too. If you would like to share your experiences at Yongsan Garrison, please visit its website at YongsanLegacy.org.

Justin Malzac is a 15-year Army veteran with service in Korea. He is a member of VFW Post 10223 in Camp Humphreys and a freelance writer.
Members of a quick-reaction force who fought one of the Army’s worst urban street battles in October 1993 gathered last fall for a special showing of a documentary about the mission. Here’s a first-person account of the harrowing ordeal they faced more than 25 years ago.

Members of a quick-reaction force who fought one of the Army’s worst urban street battles in October 1993 gathered last fall for a special showing of a documentary about the mission. Here’s a first-person account of the harrowing ordeal they faced more than 25 years ago.

THE QUICK ACTING MEN OF “BLACK HAWK DOWN”

By A.A. Forringer


Once on the ground in Somalia, this group of soldiers was housed near the U.S. Embassy at the old University of Mogadishu compound on the city’s western outskirts. To this day, Golden Dragons will sometimes refer to themselves as “alumni” of the University of Mogadishu.

The job of the Golden Dragons and the attached units was to find weapons caches, provide security and assume responsibility as the U.S. quick reaction force (QRF).

Early in their stay, they received sporadic mortar attacks and sniper fire on the western side of the compound. But after they placed an automatic grenade launcher on the roof and responded promptly, there were no more incidents on that side of the compound.

A majority of the battalion’s junior enlisted personnel were made up of three COHORT (Cohesion, Operational Readiness and Training) units from the 10th Mtn. Division’s U.S. base at Fort Drum, N.Y. The Army developed the COHORT program to promote strong unit camaraderie. It kept soldiers together through their basic and MOS training, as well as their first assigned unit.

BUILDING CLOSE TIES AT FORT DRUM

Spc. J.T. Cooper and Pfc. Jimmy Martin of 2nd Plt., A Co., 2nd Bn., 14th Inf., were two COHORT members who came to Fort Drum in September 1992. They had become close in basic training, and after Cooper’s younger brother drowned, his fellow soldiers took up a collection so he could fly home.

ABOVE: Veterans of 2nd Bn., 14th Inf. Regt., 10th Mtn. Div., attend a special screening of “Black Hawk Down: The Untold Story,” on Oct. 4 at Fort Drum, N.Y. The screening was a part of the unit’s reunion marking the 25th anniversary of the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia.
They noticed that after Cooper returned, he would go into the latrine to grieve, missing precious sleep to look at a picture of his brother. During those times, Martin would come in and sit with him. When Cooper would ask Martin why he was there, Martin responded, “I am not going to let you cry alone.”

On Aug. 8, 1993, in Somalia, the QRF responded to the scene of an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on an MP Humvee that resulted in the deaths of four U.S. personnel.

Just more than a month later, on Sept. 13, 2/14 had its first combat casualties. After completing a raid of a suspected weapons cache, the unit received small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire. Two soldiers were wounded.

It was around this time that the task force requested that armored vehicles be deployed. Then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, under President Bill Clinton, denied the request.

TF Ranger arrived in Mogadishu in August 1993. It consisted of Army Rangers; Delta Force operators; pilots and crew of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment; Air Force combat controllers and pararescuemen; and Navy SEALs.

Its purpose was to arrest Mohamed Aidid, a Somali warlord who had been disrupting U.N. food distributions and stealing the provisions. Aidid's actions prolonged and worsened the famine that was consuming Somalia at that time. The U.N. had issued an arrest warrant for Aidid after he planned a June 5, 1993, ambush that left 24 Pakistani soldiers dead.

‘BLOOD ALL OVER HIM’

On Sept. 26, the QRF responded at the crash scene of a Black Hawk helicopter shot down by an RPG, killing three crewmembers. Three Golden Dragons received wounds on that mission.

Sgt. 1st Class Domingo Ledesma, leader of 3rd Squad, 41st Engineers, recalled seeing Sgt. Christopher Reid of 3rd Pltn., C Co., 2/14, receive his wounds.

“He was lying there on the ground with blood all over him as the medics worked to keep him alive,” Ledesma said. “The AT4 (anti-tank weapon) on his back got shot and exploded.”

On Sunday, Oct. 3, 1993, the QRF received word that TF Ranger was going to conduct a raid at Mogadishu's Olympic Hotel to arrest two of Aidid’s top lieutenants.

The raid began at approximately 3:40 p.m., with vehicles and aircraft participating. The mission went relatively smoothly, but some 40 minutes later a call came over the radio that would change everything for the Americans. “Black Hawk down!” was the message.

Soon after, other helicopters began taking heavy fire. Most Black Hawks
were able to safely make it back to the airfield at Mogadishu International Airport, but a second helicopter was shot down several blocks away from the first near the Olympic Hotel.

Commanders ordered the QRF to the airfield, which was the Rangers’ headquarters and one of the closest allied bases to the crash site. The QRF, with soldiers riding in open Humvees and 5-ton trucks, made an initial attempt to reach the crash sites. But the Golden Dragons had to turn around at the K-4 traffic circle about a mile northeast of the airfield when they encountered barricades and intense small-arms fire.

Sgt. 1st Class Dimitri Pavlov, who worked on 2/14’s S-2 (intelligence and security) staff, accompanied the command group that night. Pavlov said he and Spc. Gary Holmes endured withering fire that held them up at the K-4 circle.

“We were pinned down behind a discarded refrigerator that shielded us before the convoy withdrew back to the airfield to regroup,” Pavlov said.

HEROISM IN THE FACE OF CHAOS
Knowing that they would need time at the crash site to find the dispersed Rangers and recover the bodies of fallen comrades, U.S. commanders decided upon alternative transportation back into the city. They ordered the QRF to load into a hastily thrown-together caravan of Pakistani and Malaysian armored personnel carriers (APCs) and chose a new route.

But this solution presented incredible challenges. The U.S. and foreign troops spoke different languages and had not previously interacted or trained together. In addition, the Americans lacked any familiarity with the foreign vehicles.

The mixed convoy worked its way toward the downed Black Hawks with covering fire from helicopters above. When Martin’s APC made a wrong turn and became separated from the convoy, he got out with the other troops. He then helped protect the vehicle when its M-60 machine gun jammed.

“Martin came over as the assistant gunner to lay down suppressive fire until the gun got back up,” said Spc. Gary Blanton, a medic with 2nd Pltn., A Co., 2/14. “I saw Martin slump back against the steps and I knew something was wrong.”

Blanton tended to Martin until the battalion surgeon told the medic to cease his efforts. Cooper would not know about his friend’s death until the next day.

In addition to Martin, the QRF also lost Sgt. Cornell Houston of the 41st Engineers, who died of his wounds after being evacuated.

Sixteen soldiers from TF Ranger also lost their lives that day and a total of 73 soldiers were wounded.

At the time it was judged to have been the longest firefight the U.S. Army had been involved in since Vietnam. Less than 5 percent of 2/14 had seen combat before their deployment. The battalion earned the Meritorious Unit Commendation for their courageous and extraordinary service that night.

A.A. Forringer is a freelance writer based in Kissimmee, Fla. He served with 2nd Bn., 14th Inf., as an intelligence analyst and listened to the Battle of Mogadishu from the Tactical Operations Center. Forringer is a VFW life member.
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More and more Americans are reaching the age where mobility is an everyday concern. Whether from an injury or from the aches and pains that come from getting older—getting around isn’t as easy as it used to be. You may have tried a power chair or a scooter. The Zinger is NOT a power chair or a scooter! The Zinger is quick and nimble, yet it is not prone to tipping like many scooters. Best of all, it weighs only 47.2 pounds and folds and unfolds with ease. You can take it almost anywhere, providing you with independence and freedom.

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—Dana S., Texas

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RECOVERING MONEY FOR VETERANS ‘MEANS A LOT’

For Reginald Sims, becoming a veterans service officer was not something he planned. But once he got started, it became his passion.

Sims has been the accredited VFW service officer at the Madison County Veterans Services in Jackson, Tenn., for six years. He served in the 1991 Persian Gulf War with the 10th Special Forces Group as a canon crewmember; in Iraq and Afghanistan from June 2005 to October 2006 with the 278th Field Artillery Battalion as a canon crewmember; and in Kuwait from January 2011 to February 2012 with the 278th as an automated logistical specialist.

Sims, a life member of VFW Post 6496 in Jackson, Tenn., became a service officer after a VA assistant commissioner in Tennessee, whom he knew from his time in the service, suggested that he would be a good fit in that role. As Sims was retiring from the military, he chose to give back to his community and “help fellow veterans” and their families.

“I ended up loving it,” Sims said. “It became a big, strong passion.”

The most rewarding part of the job, he explained, is when a veteran receives his or her compensation, regardless of the amount.

“Even if it’s only 10 percent, it means a lot to someone just living off of social security or just barely getting by,” Sims said.

In one case in 2013, Sims assisted a widow whose husband was a World War II veteran and had been a prisoner of war. She had not been receiving compensation, and Sims helped her through the process of receiving what she was eligible for.

Now, every time the woman sees Sims in the community, he said, she makes a point to talk to him.

One of the most common cases Sims assists with is “50/50 compensation,” in addition to pension cases for widows.

“I do about 50 percent compensation, which requires me to look at the veteran’s military service medical records and apply all issues for the veteran for compensation benefits,” Sims said.

Sims and one other staffer handle at least 500 cases annually.

For anyone looking to become a service officer, Sims said they should make sure it’s something they “really want to do” and that they have a thick skin.

“It’s going to be challenging,” Sims said. “Several times vets come in and blame you for them not getting compensated, not knowing [that we only assist with filing claims, not granting compensation].”

By and large, the most challenging part of the job, Sims said, is getting the veteran into his office to begin with.

“It’s convincing veterans to come in because for so long they’ve had negative views of VA as far as service officers helping them,” Sims said.

The NVS staff in VFW’s Washington Office is “willing to assist” with any questions he might have, according to Sims, and the accreditation classes NVS holds for its service officers are beneficial.

“[At the classes], I’m always learning something new that I can apply to a veteran’s case here, and it just helps me a lot,” Sims said. “We can always refer to [what we learned] because we get to keep all the materials.”

Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of feature articles on VFW’s accredited veterans service officers. In 2019, VFW is commemorating 100 years of veterans advocacy by its National Veterans Service and National Legislative Service offices in Washington, D.C.
Now you can finally have all of the soothing benefits of a relaxing warm bath, or enjoy a convenient refreshing shower while seated or standing. Introducing Safe Step Walk-In Tub’s exclusive NEW Shower Package!

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1-800-433-7107
Those familiar with Albany, N.Y., know how frigid the temperatures can get in the winter months, with an average snowfall of 54 inches per year. For those living on the streets of this capital city, winter can be deadly.

That’s why VFW Post 1498 in Clifton Park, N.Y., about 10 miles north of Albany, and clothing retailer Haband in Mahwah, N.J., some 33 miles north of New York City, have partnered to provide winter apparel to vets in need.

Post members have long been involved at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany. On one visit a few years go, Post Commander David Brinkmoeller witnessed a man come in off the street in desperate search of a coat.

“I thought this is something that the government did for our veterans,” Brinkmoeller said. “Noney Grier with [VA’s] Voluntary Service told me that clothing and personal items are all donated from the community — there is no funding for things like that.”

Brinkmoeller took this story back to his Post members, who decided to do something about it.

Meanwhile, at Haband headquarters in Mahwah, then-CEO and president John DiFrancesco held an operational meeting where company leaders discussed how Haband could support veterans.

“We wanted very much to contribute to something beyond the commercial,” said DiFrancesco, who retired in 2016 after a four-year tenure. “I’ve known Dave a very long time, and he told me what was needed. It was a good fit with the kind of products we were able to give.”

The Post had raised about $1,200 to purchase clothing from Haband. In exchange, pallets of clothing worth “thousands of dollars” showed up at Brinkmoeller’s home for delivery to the Stratton VA.

October marked the fourth such delivery. Haband sent 648 clothing items to Brinkmoeller totaling more than $25,000 for this delivery. Everything from coats and parkas to sweaters and flannel shirts were delivered to the Stratton VA. It took four SUVs to deliver the items.

Jim Keller, chief of VA’s Voluntary Service at Stratton, said that last year his department helped 5,917 veterans, issuing 31,991 items, including clothing, shoes, toiletries, snacks, meals and transportation vouchers, as well as gift cards.

“This level of support for our veterans and Auxiliary. Almost any day of any week, you will find VFW members here. They are the reason we are able to do the service work we do.”

Noney Grier, Stratton VA Medical Center Voluntary Service
Members of Post 1498 in Clifton Park, N.Y., donate more than $25,000 in clothing items to the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, N.Y., in October. This was the fourth such delivery made possible through the generosity of clothing retailer Haband, located in Mahwah, N.J. Incidentally, Haband is the longest-running advertiser in VFW magazine.

is only possible with the incredible support of our donors, especially organizations like VFW,” Keller said. “Over the past five years, VFW has contributed more than $145,000 in monetary and material donations — $71,000 of that originated from Post 1498. The VFW Auxiliary contributed more than $79,000 during the same period.”

Serving 22 counties, Grier said clothing is one of the primary needs she sees daily, especially winter clothing.

“Our food pantry serves about 20 veterans a day,” Grier said. “Donations come from the community. The items we need the most and have the most requests for are winter coats and boots.”

Voluntary Service has three storage rooms at the medical center to hold donations. New patients admitted to the hospital are delivered a handmade blanket and a bag of toiletries.

“We get a tremendous amount of support from VFW and Auxiliary,” Grier said. “Almost any day of any week, you will find VFW members here. They are the reason we are able to do the service work we do.”

An Army vet who served two tours in Vietnam, Brinkmoeller said his Post also donates about 800 pairs of socks each year to the VA.

“What they do helps so many people,” he said. “And not just homeless vets, but those who are brought in to the hospital with nothing on but their pajamas. That’s why what Haband is doing is really a wonderful thing.”

‘IT’S VERY PERSONAL TO THEM’

DiFrancesco said the Haband and VFW endeavor is “employee” driven.

“I didn’t dictate that we do this,” he said. “These are just really great people who work at Haband. They embraced this project because it’s very personal to them.”

Lisa Spitz, Haband’s inventory manager, is responsible for organizing the clothing assortment.

“I always try to pull things I think will be useful for vets in need,” she said. “I try to pull an assortment of sizes since we don’t know who will end up with the clothing. Our goal is to accommodate as many vets as we can.”

Spitz said 27 percent of the Mahwah staff are veterans or have family members who are vets. Incidentally, Spitz’s husband is a veteran.

DiFrancesco said his 95-year-old father is a WWII veteran, having fought through North Africa and into Europe. His uncles all served in WWII as well.

“All of a sudden, we discovered we had a lot of deep connections to the military,” DiFrancesco said. “Everyone is very proud of this program. And while most of my senior staff has retired or moved on, new people have stepped in and embraced this very worthy cause.”

Spitz, who has been with Haband for three years, concurs. “As long as the VFW wants to continue doing it, we are happy to send clothes,” she said.

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

HABAND SUPPORTS VFW FOR 50 YEARS

2019 marks the 50th anniversary of Haband’s long relationship with VFW magazine. This makes the retailer the longest-running advertiser in the 109-year-old publication.

Started as a men’s necktie company in 1925 by Max Habernickel Jr., and John Anderson, Haband, of Mahwah, N.J., has become a mega mail-order business for all things fashion.

ITEMS DELIVERED TO STRATTON VA MEDICAL CENTER ON OCT. 30

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Whenever Sarah Tsuda encounters a veteran or someone in a military uniform, she hugs and thanks them for their service. Growing up as Dinh thi Muon in an orphanage on China Beach in DaNang, Vietnam, Tsuda has fond memories of U.S. servicemen — one in particular.

In August 1966, Stan Anderson was the Administration NCO at the Tactical Unit Operations Center at DaNang Air Base in Vietnam with the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing. His wife, Bette, was back home in Virginia with their two sons. Anderson regularly took supplies to the orphanage, which was run by the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade.

A first aid instructor at the time, Anderson traveled the six miles once a week to address minor medical problems. At Christmas, he delivered presents to the children.

Tsuda’s story of survival struck a chord with Anderson. A member of the Catu tribe of Montagnards in Vietnam’s Central Highlands, Tsuda was 3 years old when her village was bombed. Her biological father had previously been taken away by the Viet Cong. Her biological mother and grandmother were killed.

Two of Tsuda’s aunts, only a few years older than her, took her and ran away. They were discovered by “a big American,” who “scooped them up” and took them to the orphanage.

In November 1966, Anderson started going to the orphanage, and by December of that year, he was ready to adopt Tsuda, who was 7.

“My wife and I had been married six years and had two small sons,” Anderson said. “When I told Bette about Muon (now Tsuda) and that I wanted us to adopt her, she wanted that as well.”

Anderson spoke to Tsuda on multiple occasions about taking her to America to be part of his family. And while Tsuda liked Anderson’s friendship, she felt safe at the orphanage and her two aunts, who she thought were her cousins, were with her.

“I couldn’t understand why she didn’t want to come with me,” Anderson said.

“I didn’t know then that her two aunts were there with her in the orphanage. I had a photo of the two of us, and I carried it with me every day.”

Tsuda fondly remembers Anderson and spending time with him at the orphanage. She said she knew, even at 7, she had no future in the war-ravaged Vietnam, yet she wanted to stay longer so that she would have more memories of her home country.

“The incident never left me,” Tsuda said from her home in Honolulu. “He was persistent in trying to get me to come to America. I felt so bad in my heart because he was my friend, and I didn’t want to hurt his feelings. I had my friends at the orphanage, but at the same time, I really wanted to come to America. I remember that I hugged him a long time before he left.”


Every two or three years, he would make inquiries with his network of
Tsuda, then known as Dinh thi Muon, but she wanted to stay behind at the orphanage with her two aunts. When she was 11, Tsuda was adopted and moved to Minnesota with her new family. Anderson spent more than 30 years looking for her. Though Tsuda lives in Hawaii, she and Anderson remain friends.

Vietnamese contacts trying to find out what had happened to her.

Meanwhile, back in Vietnam, Tsuda had another set of parents wishing to adopt her, but she still was not ready: “I thought, maybe someday I’ll go, but not this time.”

A third set came along when she was 11, but she still was unsure. Then she was told by those running the orphanage that her future was grim. They said that at 18, she would have to leave the orphanage, and there wasn’t much in Vietnam for a young woman.

“This scared me a little bit,” Tsuda said. “I was so lucky being asked to be adopted more than once. I knew that I wanted to have a good future. I said, ‘God, thank you, I’m going.’”

At 11, Tsuda went from Vietnam to Minnesota to live with her new family. While she said she had a hard time acclimating to the vastly different climate, she was excited to be in America.

“I wondered, ‘What did I do to deserve this?’” Tsuda said.

At 18, she told her parents that she wanted to go out on her own. She moved to Hawaii, where she would, years later, meet her husband, Earl Tsuda. Twenty years her senior, Earl was a police officer.

“He’s gone now, but he was a lovely Japanese man,” Tsuda said.

Just a few months after Earl’s death in 2010, Tsuda got a phone call that she never expected. The man on the other end of the phone said, “My name is Stan Anderson, and I have been looking for you for 31 years.”

When Anderson left Vietnam in August 1967, he never thought he would see “little Muon” again. He said that in the years that followed, he felt a certain sense of helplessness.

That’s why he worked to expand his network of Vietnamese contacts. He said his email and Internet searches took him from Kansas to DaNang, to Tennessee then Minnesota and on to Illinois, Ohio and Florida, with several stops back in DaNang before hitting gold in Ho Chi Minh City.

A woman living in the former city of Saigon emailed Anderson to tell him she was the translator at the orphanage from 1972-75. She had received an email from Tsuda’s adopted sister trying to connect her with her family back in Vietnam. Not only was Anderson able to reconnect with Tsuda, he helped her get in touch with her aunts.

The Andersons invited Tsuda to come to their 50th wedding anniversary celebration in California in June 2011.

“Remember, we hadn’t seen each other since she was a small child,” Anderson said. “We met her at the airport in Sacramento, and she locked in on us and we locked in on her and started waving.”

Tsuda stayed a week with the Andersons. Since then, they have kept in touch on a regular basis.

Tsuda’s aunts who were with her in the orphanage still live in Vietnam. One of them has cancer. Tsuda hopes to get back to Vietnam — the first time since she left at age 11 — to see her aunt.

At 58, Tsuda said she’s living a better life than she ever imagined because she had been told she wouldn’t live past age 10 due to health issues. Her father died, but her mother lives in Minnesota. Tsuda has two brothers and one sister still living.

Because Honolulu is such an “expensive” place to live, Tsuda works two jobs. She has an adopted dog who keeps her company. She loves football and says she’s proud to be an American.

“At 5, I almost died and had to be taken to the hospital,” Tsuda said. “An American woman from the orphanage gave me some of her blood. I remember being so happy and saying, ‘I have American blood in me! I’m American!’ But now I really am.”

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org
Three wounded veterans participated in the 36th annual antelope hunt sponsored by VFW magazine and Doonan Gulch Outfitters this past October near Broadus, Mont.

Every fall for more than three decades, VFW magazine and Doonan Gulch Outfitters have sponsored an antelope hunt on the great plains of Montana. During this year’s hunt, three Vietnam War veterans not only hunted antelope, but partook in sightseeing, as well as conversations about their Vietnam experiences.

Located 25 miles west of Broadus, Mont., in the southeast portion of “The Treasure State,” Doonan Gulch Outfitters is owned and operated by Russ and Carol Greenwood, who started hosting the hunt in 1982. Russ said they wanted to honor Vietnam War veterans because the Greenwoods didn’t like the way those vets were treated when they came home decades ago. Russ has a twin brother — Roger, a member of VFW Post 987 in Baraboo, Wis. — who was a helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War.

While the hunt started as a tribute to Vietnam War veterans, it has evolved to include veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Doonan Gulch Outfitters has hosted veterans of every generation since the Vietnam War. Two decades ago, the Greenwoods opened it up to wounded veterans of all eras. Here are profiles of this year’s participants.

‘VERY HAPPY’ WITH THE HUNT

Michael “Woody” Coots is a Vietnam War veteran who served in the Marine Corps. He arrived in Vietnam in January 1970 and was a part of Combined Action Groups 2 and 3 during his tour.

Originally from Indiana, Coots received two Purple Hearts while in Vietnam. He earned the first when he was hit with shrapnel by a mine during a patrol in April 1970 about 10 miles south of Da Nang.

Coots earned his second Purple Heart while on patrol on Aug. 17, 1970, about 10 miles south of Da Nang near Vietnam’s Highway 1. That is where he suffered wounds from a booby trap. His left leg was amputated below the knee, and he received multiple shrapnel wounds. He was taken by an Army helicopter to the naval hospital at Da Nang.

“I remember they shoved me in the chopper, I had all these bloody bandages on me, and the chopper pilot looked back at me and yelled, ‘Million-dollar wound!’” Coots said and laughed. “I was so mad.”

Coots was transported to DaNang, and eventually transported back stateside later that month. While on the flight from Vietnam to the United States, the reality of his wound set in.

“I remember a guy telling me, ‘OK, Marine, you are going to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital. You’re going to Ward A, the amputee ward,’” Coots said. “That was the first time I was told I was an amputee, and it was the first time it connected with me.”

Coots stayed at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital for eight-and-a-half months. He said some of his “fondest memories” were being treated there.

“Inside the amputee ward, there were about 200 to 300 amputees from Vietnam,” Coots said. “Those were some of the best people in the universe.”

After his time in Philadelphia, Coots

MONTANA HUNTING TRIP RECOGNIZES VIETNAM SACRIFICES

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVE SPIVA

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was one of the three wounded veterans selected for the antelope hunt near Broadus, Mont.

Because he was not near any medical facilities while on Hill 881, he said he was only able to take aspirin for the pain. The day after he was wounded, Erickson came off the hill and helped carry the dead and wounded with them.

“That’s also when a corpsman dug out the shrapnel from my right arm and leg and wrapped them up,” Erickson said. “It was a bad first 30 days. I don’t think there was a day in Vietnam that we didn’t have mortars land on us.”

The second time he was wounded was during a patrol in July in the Quang Tri Province near the DMZ. Erickson said he ran into a “big ambush,” where most of his platoon died.

“It was a heavily jungled area,” Erickson said. “We were just dropping like flies. We fought on, but we had to retreat.”

Erickson said that’s when he was hit by mortars and received a gunshot wound to his right side. Because of his wounds, he lost the use of his left arm.

“I got hit with artillery and mortars, from the top of my head to the heel of my foot,” Erickson said. “When they put me on a helicopter, they flew me to the Sanctuary.

(The USS Sanctuary was a Navy hospital ship that was based in Da Nang during Erickson’s time in Vietnam.)

“When I finally came to my senses a few days later, I was really hurting,” Erickson continued. “I had about 300 stitches in me, but the doctors and corpsmen took awful good care of me while I was aboard that ship.”

After about 10 days aboard the Sanctuary, he was transported to Da Nang to be flown out of Vietnam. He left the next day and landed in Yokosuka, Japan, where he started recovering. He went through multiple operations there and was sent back stateside and eventually ended up at the Great Lakes (Ill.) Naval Hospital.

Erickson said it was about nine months from the time he was wounded to being released from care in Great Lakes.

“When I left for Vietnam, I was about 210 pounds, but when I was released from the hospital, I was only 160,” Erickson said. He was discharged in March 1968 and married his wife, Shirley, nine months later. They met at a wedding shortly after his discharge.

“She supported me through everything,” Erickson said. “She really pushed me hard.”

For more than 38 years, Erickson worked at the Sundstrand Aviation Plant in Rockford, Ill. In 2000, he retired, then moved to Chetek, Wis., where he currently resides with his wife.

Erickson, a member of VFW Post 10331 in Chetek, Wis., said the 2018 antelope hunt was “spectacular.”

“Everyone has treated us so well here,” Erickson said. “They’ve done everything for me, and you can’t eat any better meals than they have here. Everything has been top notch. I really like it here.”

**THANKFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY**

John “Mick” Zingo is an Army veteran who served in the Vietnam War with 2nd Bn., 12th Cav Regt., 1st Cav Div. He returned home to Indiana and eventually moved to Alaska, where he currently resides. Coots worked in heavy marine construction and for the department of transportation. He retired in 2014 and now lives in Seward.

Coots, a member of VFW Post 10041 in Bethel, Alaska, said he was “very happy” to be a part of the VFW magazine and Doonan Gulch Outfitters 2018 wounded veterans antelope hunt. He called his time in Montana “outstanding.”

“I’m so humbled, and when I say I’m humbled, that means something,” Coots said. “I can’t say enough about the people here. I have nothing but the highest praise for everyone.”

**A ‘TOP NOTCH’ EXPERIENCE**

Douglas Erickson is a Vietnam War veteran who served in the Marine Corps with 2nd Bn., 3rd Marines.

Erickson arrived in Vietnam in March 1967. He was wounded the first time “a few days” after arriving in Khe Sanh.

“Hill 881 was just full of North Vietnamese,” Erickson said. “For about three or four days, we got pounded. I watched all my buddies fall. I remember watching one get a rifle shot right through his chest and another one right through the center of his head.”

During one firefight, Erickson was wounded by a grenade that landed about eight feet in front of him and exploded.

“From training, I was taught to crawl into my helmet, so I just dove down and pulled my shoulders back,” Erickson said. “My helmet, and my right arm and right leg took the brunt of the grenade. It wasn’t too bad, but the trouble was the concussion. That was hell.”

**FOR THE OPPORTUNITY**

Christopher “Woody” Coots sights in his rifle before the VFW magazine and Doonan Gulch Outfitters annual antelope hunt in October 2018. Coots, a Marine Corps veteran and member of VFW Post 10041 in Bethel, Alaska, was one of the three wounded veterans selected for the antelope hunt near Broadus, Mont.
arrived in Vietnam in April 1968.

Zingo was based at Landing Zone Jane in the Quang Tri Province near La Vang, about 12 miles south of the DMZ. Within a month of arriving in Vietnam, Zingo said he was wounded on May 12, 1968.

While on patrol that night, Zingo said he was wounded by friendly fire after he was shot by a member of another platoon. He was shot eight times.

“They thought our platoon was Viet Cong,” Zingo said. “Getting shot hurts like hell.”

After the incident, Zingo was medevaced out of the area.

“They had me loaded up on morphine because of my wounds, so I don’t remember an awful lot,” Zingo said of his experience. “But I do remember that I was being held in one of those Quonset huts. I was only supposed to be there overnight, but I was there a lot longer. I was told later that they lost my orders.”

Zingo said he doesn’t have any memory of where he was, but after a week, he was transported by bus to the Air Force hospital in Da Nang.

“That was the roughest ride of my life,” Zingo said. “I was on a stretcher — in excruciating pain — and I was getting tossed all over the place. I couldn’t wait to get there.”

Once in Da Nang, Zingo said he remembers the hospital being “nice and clean,” which he said was a lot different than the conditions at the landing zone near the DMZ. He said he remembers an Air Force medic who cared for him at Da Nang.

“I told him that [my] bandages hadn’t been taken off in a week,” Zingo said. “[The Air Force medic] said, ‘We need to get these off of you right now.’ At that point, my flesh grew through the gauze and it was a part of me. So, for the next three hours, I was being skinned alive.”

Zingo said the medic had to soak the bandages in peroxide to help soften them during the painful process. Zingo said he remembers others around him holding his hand to help him through the pain.

“I remember telling the medic to skin it off like he was skinning a groundhog,” Zingo said and laughed. “I don’t think he knew what a groundhog was. But that medic was crying taking those bandages off of me. He didn’t want to hurt me. I wish I knew who he was.”

The following day, Zingo was airlifted to Japan and then to Brooke General Hospital at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. He was a patient there for more than five months.

After getting out of the hospital, he received orders for Fort Riley, Kan. He applied for an “early out” in the spring of 1969 and was granted a discharge from the Army.

After returning home to Martins Ferry, Ohio, Zingo worked in the coal industry for 30 years. He retired in 2002.

Zingo, a member of VFW Post 626 in Bellaire, Ohio, said he thanks VFW magazine and Doonan Gulch Outfitters for the opportunity to hunt antelope in Montana.

“Everyone involved in this program is just super,” Zingo said. “It’s just beyond description how much I appreciate everyone here. Also, having people like Russ and Carol inviting strangers into their home, feeding them and taking them on a hunt is just phenomenal.”

**EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org**
Did You Know That Men With Military Service Are 2x As Likely To Suffer From Urinary Incontinence?

If you’re a veteran looking for urinary incontinence treatment for daily leaks or as a result of an injury while serving our country, Men’s Liberty can help you get out of absorbent products, condom catheters or pads and start living your life without letting incontinence get in your way. Men’s Liberty keeps you dry and leak free for up to 24 hours.

Men’s Liberty is Covered by VA/TriCare

“ I can keep doing what I want to do, without having to worry about running to the bathroom or changing my clothes. It’s a Godsend. ”

— John in Michigan

Regain your freedom, mobility, and confidence. Men’s Liberty is a life-changing solution. This patented and proprietary external collection device for men ends dependency on adult absorbent briefs, pads, guards, and condom catheters — making embarrassing accidents a thing of the past!

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VA's Drug Abuse Stats Are Sobering

The number of veterans who are addicted to opioids has doubled since 2002. Here's how to avoid becoming a statistic and where to go for help.

BY JEROME GREER CHANDLER

VA is on the front lines of a war that exhibits few signs of resolution. In 2017, VA treated more than a half-million veterans for a slew of drug-related problems. The prime culprits, alcohol and tobacco, are legal on a federal level. “Therefore, more veterans have become addicted to them,” said Dr. Karen Drexler, VA’s national mental health program director for substance abuse disorders. Tobacco and alcohol can kill you slowly. A more dramatic and, possibly, instant form of death is the product of opioids, the abuse of which can exact a deadly stranglehold on users.

Within the VA system alone, Drexler said they track more than 64,000 veterans with opioid disorders. She added that the prevalence of the painkillers is alarming. “We know veterans, compared with the general population, are at greater risk of overdose and death,” she said. “We are very concerned about the dramatic rise in opioid use disorder (OUD).”

VA’s tally of OUD has more than doubled since 2002.

FIGHTING BACK

The roster of opioids is long and potentially deadly: hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, fentanyl, methadone, codeine, tramadol, oxymorphone and hydromorphone. These drugs fall into one of two categories: prescription medications such as hydrocodone (a.k.a., Vicodin®) that are usually used to treat pain, and illegal drugs, such as heroin.

VA says OUD develops over time. It is neither a choice nor a weakness. It’s a brain disease, one that calls for timely treatment, just like other diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Despite the publicity OUD has garnered over the past few years, myths persist, such as:

- Opioids are effective for the long-term management of pain.
- Developing OUD is a choice.
- Heroin is the only opioid that can trigger OUD.
- People with OUD will never recover.

All of these assertions are false. Physicians know opioids are not effective for long-term pain management and that patients can develop the disorder from opioids, even those prescribed for pain.

“For OUD, we strongly recommend treatment with medication,” Drexler said. For example, she noted that methadone, when administered through an opioid treatment program, can be effective. Buprenorphine, when combined with naloxone, also works, as does injectable naltrexone.

GETTING HELP

If you think that you or someone you know has OUD, get help and get it fast. Some signs to look for include:

- A craving and strong urge to use.
- Difficulties with work, relationships and everyday activities.
- The realization that the drug you’re using is hard to control — even when it hurts you.

Drexler said most veterans who meet the criteria for a diagnosis of OUD don’t get treatment. “Part of it is denial, such as a veteran’s contention that, ‘It’s not that bad yet,’” she said. “But, part of it is not knowing that effective help is available.”

If you’re experiencing any of these symptoms, or know a vet who is, call VA’s Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, Press 1.

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Jerome Greer Chandler is a member of VFW’s Department of Alabama. The Vietnam War vet served as a medic with D Co., 2nd Bn., 501st Inf., 101st Abn. Div. in 1970. He is a former assistant professor at Jacksonville State University in Alabama.
A patented relief cream stands to help millions of Americans crippled from the side effects of neuropathy by increasing sensation and blood flow wherever it’s applied

BOSTON, MA – A recent breakthrough stands to help millions of Americans plagued by burning, tingling and numb legs and feet.

But this time it comes in the form of a cream, not a pill. The effectiveness is remarkable.

The breakthrough, called Diabasens, is a new relief cream developed for managing the relentless discomfort caused by neuropathy.

When applied directly to the legs and feet, it causes arteries and blood vessels to expand, increasing the flow of warm, nutrient rich blood to damaged tissue.

However, what’s most remarkable about the cream...and what makes it so brilliant...is that it contains one of the only natural substances known to activate a special sensory pathway right below the surface of the skin.

This pathway is called TRPA1 and it controls the sensitivity of nerves. In laymen terms, it determines whether you feel pins and needles or soothing relief.

Studies show that symptoms of neuropathy arise when the nerves in your legs deteriorate and blood flow is lost to the areas which surround them.

As the nerves begins to die, sensation is lost. This lack of sensation is what causes the feelings of burning, tingling and numbness.

This is why the makers of Diabasens say their cream has performed so well in a recent clinical use survey trial: it increases sensation and blood flow where ever its applied.

No Pills, No Prescriptions, No Agony

Until now, many sufferers have failed to consider a topical cream as an effective way to manage neuropathy. Diabasens is proving it may be the only way going forward.

“Most of today’s treatment methods have focused on minimizing discomfort instead of attacking its underlining cause. That’s why millions of adults are still in excruciating pain every single day, and are constantly dealing with side effects” explains Dr. Esber, the creator of Diabasens.

“Diabasens is different. Since the most commonly reported symptoms – burning, tingling and numb legs and feet – are caused by lack of sensation of the nerves, we’ve designed the formula increase their sensitivity.

And since these nerves are located right below the skin, we’ve chosen to formulate it as a cream. This allows for the ingredients to get to them faster and without any drug like side effects” he adds.

Study Finds Restoring Sensation the Key To Effective, Long Lasting Relief

With the conclusion of their latest human clinical use survey trial, Dr. Esber and his team are now offering Diabasens nationwide. And regardless of the market, its sales are exploding.

Men and women from all over the country are eager to get their hands on the new cream and, according to the results initial users reported, they should be.

In the trial above, as compared to baseline, participants taking Diabasens saw a staggering 51% increase sensitivity in just one week. This resulted in significant relief from burning, tingling and numbness throughout their legs.

Many participants taking Diabasens described feeling much more balanced and comfortable throughout the day. They also noticed that after applying, there was a pleasant warming sensation that was remarkably soothing.

Diabasens Users Demand More

Many of Diabasens users say their legs have never felt better. For the first time in years, they are able to walk free from the symptoms which have made life hard.

“I have been using the cream now for about ten days. It has given me such relief.

I’ve had very bad foot pain from injuries and overuse of my feet for years which have contributed to severe itching/tingling and pain for some time. (My father also suffered from this pain and itching. I wish I would have had this for him.)

The first time I used the cream, I felt an almost immediate relief from this.

I now use it at least twice a day: once in the morning before work and once at night before I sleep.

I am so delighted with this. It has helped my walking, also. It has helped generate feeling again in my feet,” raves Marsha A. from Texas.

Diabasens is shown to provide relief from:

- Burning
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Topical Cream Offers Sufferers a Safer, More Effective Avenue of Relief: Diabasens increases sensation and blood flow wherever its applied. It’s now being used to relieve painful legs and feet.

Targets Nerve Damage Right Below the Skin’s Surface

Diabasens is a topical cream that is to be applied to your legs and feet twice a day for the first two weeks then once a day after. It does not require a prescription.

Studies show that neuropathy is caused when the peripheral nerves breakdown and blood is unable to circulate into your legs and feet.

As these nerves deteriorate, sensation is lost. This is why you may not feel hot or cold and your legs and feet may burn, tingle and go numb.

Additionally, without proper blood flow, tissues and cells in these areas start to die, causing unbearable pain.

An ingredient called cinnamaldehyde in Diabasens is one of the only compounds in existence that can activate TRPA1, a special sensory pathway that runs through your entire body.

According to research, activating this pathway (which can only be done with a cream) increases the sensitivity of nerves, relieving feelings of tingling and numbness in your legs and feet.

Supporting ingredients boost blood flow, supplying the nerves with the nutrients they need for increased sensation.

How to Get Diabasens

In order to get the word out about Diabasens, the company is offering special introductory discounts to all who call. Discounts will automatically be applied to all callers, but don’t wait. This offer may not last forever. Call toll-free: 1-800-618-5695.
TAFF PICKS

BOOK CORNER RECOMMENDED READING

A Tiger Among Us: A Story of Valor in Vietnam’s A Shau Valley
By Bennie G. Adkins and Katie Lamar Jackson

While the rain and mist moved over the valley, then-Army Sgt. 1st Class Bennie Adkins, a Medal of Honor recipient, and 16 other Green Berets found themselves holed up in an undermanned and unfortified position at Camp A Shau in March 1966. Outnumbered 10-to-1, the Green Berets endured constant mortar and rifle fire, direct assaults, treasonous allies and volatile jungle weather. Filled with the sights, smells and sounds of a raging battle fought in the middle of a tropical forest, A Tiger Among Us is a true story about bravery, valor, skill and resilience. Da Capo

Big Week: The Biggest Air Battle of World War II
By James Holland

In February 1944, the Allied air forces based in Britain and Italy launched their first round-the-clock bombing offensive against Germany. Its goal: to smash the main factories and production centers of the Luftwaffe, or German air force, while also drawing German planes into an aerial battle of attrition to neutralize the German fighting force prior to the D-Day invasion. Officially called Operation Argument, this aerial offensive quickly became known as “Big Week,” one of the turning points of World War II. Big Week is both an original contribution to WWII literature and a piece of narrative history. It recaptures a largely forgotten campaign that was a critically important period of the war. Atlantic Monthly

Veterans’ Stories Book III: The Life and Times (Ventura County Veterans Stories)
By David E. Pressey, VFW Post 11461, Ojai, Calif.

The Ventura County Veterans’ Stories series was created to help people understand what it means to serve the nation as a member of the armed forces. According to Pressey, a Korean War Marine veteran, his book was not designed to glorify war, its individuals, famous generals or battle strategies. Rather, it recounts the average GI’s experience from World War II to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each individual story tells the roots of the service person’s actual experiences during service, followed by post-service life and accomplishments. According to Pressey, these are stories of ordinary people living through extraordinary times. Pressey Publications

Gigs, Guns, and Guilt: A Musician’s Tour of the Korean War
By Dick Slady, VFW Post 2503, Omaha, Neb.

As 17-year-old Dick Sladovnik auditioned for the U.S. Army’s band and enlisted in the Korean War, he had no idea what was waiting for him. This true story recounts the trouble he and his friends created that kept things interesting, such as during a USO tour, ceremonies and their tumultuous rivalry with the honor guard. But an unexpected incident forever changed Sladovnik and sent him home from Korea more cynical and disturbed than he ever thought possible. Slady Pyramid

Hidden Enemy — PTSD: A Puzzle Piece That Does Not Fit
By Jesse Munoz & Oscar Munoz, VFW Post 7420, San Diego, Calif.

This real story chronicles the life of Oscar Munoz, a young Marine who wanted to make things right in his life. The only things that stop him are the hidden enemies that still linger in his mind.

(Continued on page 56)
VFW Post Feeds Hungry Veterans

In a partnership with a Pennsylvania food bank, VFW members in Huntingdon, Pa., use their Post’s gaming proceeds to feed 120 veterans and their families every month.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

In 2014, Feeding America initiated a Hunger in America national study. It showed that one in five households served by the Feeding America network has at least one member that has served or is currently serving in the military.

In Pennsylvania, that number is higher. The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank currently serving in the military.

According to Post 1754 member Reeder Swartz, he has about 25 volunteers each month to distribute the food. In two hours’ time, some 120 families are served.

Each family receives eggs, milk, two types of meat, 40 pounds of dry goods, 10 pounds of potatoes, apples, onions and whatever fresh fruits and vegetables are in season.

It costs the Post $10 per family, but Swartz said area businesses and churches host fund-raising events for the food distribution.

“Pennsylvania state law requires that 60 percent of all gambling proceeds go back into the community,” Swartz said. “The two VFW Posts in Huntingdon County use part of their proceeds to pay for this.”

To qualify for the distribution, each family must be pre-approved. They need to provide a copy of a DD-214 or VA medical card and also meet certain federal income guidelines.

“It’s pretty simple,” Swartz said. “Each family drives into the distribution site, shows proper ID, opens their trunk, and we load the food and they take off.”

For those unable to drive, volunteers deliver food to homes. Swartz recalled a time when an 85-year-old woman and her 86-year-old husband were thrilled by taco shells.

“She calls the delivery her ‘goody box,’” Swartz said. “The next time I went to their home, they both told me they had never had taco shells in their lives, and that they really liked those a lot.”

Swartz said that Huntingdon County has the highest unemployment rate in the state and that many of the veterans he helps do not have much to live on.

“When our Post started doing this last January, we were feeding 32 families,” said Swartz, who served in Vietnam in 1968. “I had a goal that we would feed 100 families. We are now up to 120. It’s been so heartwarming for me.”

For Greg Stegall, MilitaryShare and Mobile Distribution manager with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, this program is critical because he doesn’t want to see those who have served in the military go hungry.

A former member of the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard in Washington, D.C., Stegall’s son is a veteran, and his father was a WWII vet whose twin brother died in France.

“There are too many veterans feel ashamed and don’t want to ask for help,” he said. “But it’s not just about the veteran. It’s the spouse and the kids who are at home, too.”

Stegall said that in addition to 24 monthly distribution sites, a homeless shelter is serviced weekly. Distribution also is done on a sporadic basis with National Guard units.

“I like working with VFW and American Legion because they are committed to taking care of their own,” Stegall said.

For more information on MilitaryShare, visit www.centralpafoodbank.org.

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Take Advantage of Special Events to Promote Your Post

VFW's national membership director has a message: Get out of your Post and into your city to find ways to connect with potential members.

**BY JANIE DYHOUSE**

Succesful membership recruiting is key to VFW's longevity. And to be successful, according to Membership Director Rick Butler, Post members need to get out of the Post and into the community.

“Contact your Chamber of Commerce, go to your town hall, connect with the mayor,” Butler said. “If you do this, you will know about upcoming events in your city and can have a VFW presence.”

Butler added that no matter the size of the town, there will be opportunities, such as festivals, fairs or car shows, for promoting your Post and potentially recruiting new members.

On a larger scale, VFW was the official sponsor of the Military Appreciation Day event during the 78th Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally last August in South Dakota.

At the event, VFW had a “membership awareness booth.” In addition to signing up 100 new members, the VFW team also provided a certified VFW service officer to help veterans with claims.

“The most important part of our mission always is to take care of veterans regardless of membership in VFW,” VFW Sr. Vice Commander-in-Chief Doc Schmitz said. “If we get some members as a result of our work there, that’s great. But the real gratification is knowing that we were there to help veterans and their families.”

Schmitz had the opportunity to speak to the sea of riders during the rally. VFW hosted a “Thank You for Your Service” reception complete with a B-1 bomber flyover.

VFW also distributed “guardian bells” to 500 active-duty military personnel and veterans who rode in the mayor’s parade. Complete with the Cross of Malta, the bells ward off “evil road spirits” — as legend has it.

“We are going to do it again this year in Sturgis, only bigger,” Schmitz said. “We’ll branch out to areas other than Sturgis to talk with veterans about what they may be entitled to and not know.”

Butler said that regardless of an event’s size, the potential for VFW promotion and recruitment is always available.

“Not every community event a Post attends will be a Sturgis,” Butler said. “But every new member a Post signs up is a member we didn’t have before. So get out there and make connections in your city.”

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For most, pets are part of the family. They are companions, cuddle buddies and feet warmers. They make you laugh when they fall for the laser pointer and make you proud when they master a new trick.

They are quick to help clean up a kitchen spill and greet you when you walk in the door.

They keep their owners active with daily walks and generally keep life interesting. Even when they get in the trash (again), track in mud, scratch up furniture or break great-great-grandma’s vase, pets are beloved and cherished family members.

It doesn’t matter if you’re more of a dog person, a cat person or love them both the same, having insurance to help care for them is critical.

HERE’S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PET INSURANCE

Do you remember the last time you left the veterinarian’s office spending less than $100? With the average cost of quality, routine pet care increasing year-over-year, it is expensive to care for your furry friends.

For example, an X-ray or spaying or neutering can cost hundreds of dollars, while hip and knee replacements or cancer care can cost thousands.

For most Americans, these costs can be a disruption to their finances or a blow to their savings, at the very least.

Like health insurance for you and your family, pet insurance can help you budget for routine and unforeseen medical expenses. Rather than dealing with an unwelcome expense, pet insurance helps you manage the costs of care for your pets.

Whether your new puppy needs vaccinations, needs to be spayed/neutered or your cat needs treatment for more serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease or diabetes, pet insurance will help make sure you have the means necessary to take care of them.

THE INS AND OUTS OF PET INSURANCE COVERAGE

Depending on the policy level, a variety of common procedures and treatments for cats and dogs are covered.

When your pets are young, pet insurance can cover routine vaccinations and spaying/neutering. Coverage can include unforeseen accidents and illnesses that might happen throughout their lives, from allergies to sprains.

As your pets age, they will have different needs — perhaps arthritis medication or cancer treatment — and pet insurance can cover that, too.

Pet insurance makes it easier to be prepared and care for your pets. It often covers these conditions and more:

- Accidents and injuries, like poisons and sprains.
- Symptoms of common illnesses, such as vomiting and diarrhea.
- Life-threatening illnesses, like cancer and diabetes.
- Chronic illnesses, such as allergies and arthritis.
- Hereditary conditions, like hip dysplasia and blood disorders.
- Testing and diagnostics, like ultrasounds and blood tests.
- Medical procedures, like surgeries and chemotherapy.
- Holistic and alternative methods, like acupuncture.
- Wellness procedures, like vaccinations and spay/neuter.

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head and the enemies that openly cross his path. Munoz and his brother, Jessie, have one thing in common — their family and Hispanic heritage. These traits are interwoven in the pages of this book, making it both interesting and enlightening. Outskirts Press

**May You Live in Interesting Times: My 1960s!**
By Calvin Seybold, VFW Post 4276, Mount Carmel, Ill.

The author spent the entire 1960s following the leadership of the greatest generation — those who fought in World War II — at the Virginia Military Institute and the Army. Seybold’s stories are about the Cold and Vietnam wars against international communism. It was a different world in the 1960s — more so than just through the innocence and enthusiasm of youth. There was a real threat to America and the world from international communistic aggression. Self-published

**Ol’ Shakey: Memories of a Flight Engineer**
By Gene Fish, VFW Department of Washington

This memoir shares some of the most memorable stories of the author as a flight engineer of a Douglas C-124 Globemaster II, nicknamed “Ol’ Shakey.” From a colorful layover on Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean to kite-flying at Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina, Fish’s stories aim to entertain military personnel, aviators or anyone enthusiastic about the romance of flying. This book gives a glimpse of the reality behind that romance. LitFire

**Crew Dogs: A Hero Myth of the Cold War**
By Paul H. Gore, VFW Post 3970, Sutherlin, Ore.

This novel is a modern day warrior saga of the Cold War. Drawing from Gore’s military experience, Crew Dogs: A Hero Myth of the Cold War is a story of life and love, as well as the wastefulness and absurdity of the Cold War. It is a story about the heroes that helped America win it. Gore, a retired veterinarian and former military officer living in Oregon, served 10 years in the Air Force. Self-published

**Gulf War Ghosts**
By William Armstrong, VFW Department of New Mexico

In this novel, troops are mysteriously being killed following the Operation Desert Storm cease fire. Only Army Maj. Walt Ransom can crack the case. Ransom assembles a team of experts to track down a seemingly immortal squad of Schutzstaffel troops created by Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler during World War II. Follow Ransom’s team in this fictional account as they make horrifying discoveries about an enemy that attacks at will and vanishes with hardly a trace in the sand near Safwan, Iraq. Gozinta

**The Great Crusade: A Guide to World War I American Expeditionary Forces Battlefields & Sites**
By Stephen Powers and Kevin Denneh, VFW Post 1, Denver.

This book is a guide describing the sites, battles and personalities associated with the United States’ journey through World War I. The Great Crusade brings forgotten Doughboys and their exploits back into focus more than a century after America’s entry into The Great War. The book also features easy-to-follow maps and tours; photographs of battles and historic sites; and updated descriptions of numerous military museums located in Europe and the United States. GTCI

**Paths Less Travelled of a Scholar Warrior (Spy) Teacher Healer**
By Hon Lee, VFW Post 8241, McLean, Va.

This memoir describes Lee’s adventures of growing up in New York’s Chinatown, being a combat Marine, running CIA clandestine operations, teaching Chinese martial arts and practicing Chinese acupuncture. Growing up as the youngest son of Chinese immigrants, Lee gets bullied so often that he yearns to be like his kung fu heroes. He becomes a Marine to prove himself, but the horrors of war make him wonder what it would take to achieve peace. He joins the CIA’s clandestine service, only to see his career threatened in an ordeal that makes him re-evaluate his life’s purpose, leading him to chase his dream to study Chinese medicine. CreateSpace

**Mekong Meridian: A Novel of the Vietnam War**
By Stephen MaGuire, VFW Post 10004, Jewett City, Conn.

Set in 1969 in the Mekong Delta, this novel follows an Army reconnaissance platoon leader, Gavin “Mondo” Carney, as he faces ominous dangers and bullet-quick dilemmas. A jungle infested with lethal booby traps and determined communist soldiers combat in his every thought and feeling in this fictional account of the Vietnam War. Replete with the infantry’s dark humor, Carney also confronts challenges inside the wire: the battalion executive officer’s machinations, uncertain trust in key NCOs and perplexing changes in his fiancée back home. CreateSpace

**Bracketing the Enemy: Forward Observers in World War II**
By John Walker, VFW Department of Ohio

During the Civil War, field guns were capable of firing shells out of sight of gun crews. But without someone forward of the guns to observe the fall of shells and adjust fire, the tactical advantages of long-range fire were largely wasted. By World War II, small groups of U.S. artillerymen, known as forward observer parties, accompanied maneuvering infantry and provided the close, spontaneous artillery support that had been lacking for nearly 80 years. Bracketing the Enemy is the first full-length history of forward observers and their vital contributions. University of Oklahoma

**Navy Grass**
By Bob Whited, VFW Post 4237, Austintown, Ohio

This memoir describes Navy life during the early 1960s. Navy Grass details the rigors of boot camp through duty stations, shipboard living and liberty calls. It includes meeting with many important military and government officials with whom the author came in contact. It strongly relates to romantic relations in many liberty ports and the many friends and crew members that Whited met. The title of the book comes from an incident in boot camp that was embarrassing, but quite typical, for a Navy recruit. Page
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A Shooting Star on the World Stage

A VFW member’s world-class talent with a rifle propelled her to an international competition last year in South Korea. The Army vet of Korea and Somalia said her military training prepared her well.

BY KARI WILLIAMS

V

y for the chance to represent the United States in a shooting competition was a homecoming of sorts for one VFW member.

Denise Loring, a life member of Post 1503 in Dale City, Va., earned her slot on the USA Shooting Team in September 2017 at Fort Benning, Ga., where she was stationed before serving in Somalia in 1993.

“It was like coming home,” Loring said about her return to Georgia. “I enjoy that range. I got to see a lot of people from the unit that are still in the area.”

After qualifying with her marksman’s skills in Georgia, she competed at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Championships in South Korea from Aug. 29 to Sept. 15, 2018. And much like her return to Fort Benning, setting foot in Korea was nothing new.

“I’ve been stationed in Korea twice, so it also felt very familiar to be back in Korea,” Loring said. “I really enjoy the food. I enjoy the people, and even though I had not been to Changwon [on South Korea’s southeast coast] before, it just seemed very comfortable to be there for the match. It felt very exciting.

“Having been out of the international competition realm for quite a number of years, it can be really exciting to come back and shoot an international match at that level.”

Loring was stationed in Seoul from 1988-1990 (HHD, 227th Maintenance Bn.) and Daegu from 2000-02 (Combat Support Coordination Team as a logistics liaison with the 2nd ROK Army), during which time she was unable to shoot. That resulted in a 10-year hiatus from the sport.

RECRUITED FOR THE ARMY TEAM

Loring’s shooting career began with her service in the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit while stationed at Fort Benning, Ga. She was studying communications/broadcasting while also shooting for King’s College in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., when the Army Marksmanship Unit recruited her.

“I shot competitively with the Army Reserve pretty much for the rest of my career,” said Loring, who served in Somalia from January to April 1993 with the 10th Mountain Division as a multi-functional logistician.

For most of her career, Loring competed in the international rifle (small-bore, air rifle) category.

During the last two years of her Army career, she transitioned to service rifle, using a match-grade AR-15, which she still uses while shooting with the non-profit Camp Valor Outdoors competitive marksmanship program, which is based in Northern Virginia.

‘SEASONED COMPETITOR’

But her competitive streak began after a fellow shooter at the Fairfax (Va.) Rod & Gun Club, who had been picked up by the U.S. team for the world championships in Spain in 2014, suggested she compete internationally.

She qualified at Fort Benning in 2017, and it wasn’t until eight months later that Loring learned she had made the World Championship team. It consisted of 82 people hoping to bring victories back in events such as skeet, trap, pistol, smallbore and 300M.

“I was surprised, but I was also very excited,” Loring said. “It’s exciting to be a part of the national team. You’re part of something that is huge.”

Though Loring placed 32nd in the Women’s 300M Prone event and 30th in the Women’s 300M Three-Position event at the World Championships, the experience stoked an eagerness for future events.

“My score was not what I had hoped, even though I put a lot into the training,” Loring said. “I am very excited to train for another four years and try and make the national team again.”

Loring said her military service helped ease the pressure of competition that she felt when she was younger.

“I think being a seasoned competitor [helped] and because I’m still competing, I think it was very good experience — a very positive experience for me,” Loring said of her time at the World Championships. “Nothing got me rattled. I wasn’t nervous. I didn’t feel a lot of pressure, and I really enjoyed the experience. And I think that comes from being a competitive shooter for a long time.”

For more information about the USA Shooting team, visit http://www.usashooting.org.

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