Live or recorded, tradition of playing ‘Taps’ at military funerals has a storied history

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Four notes arranged in the nation’s most familiar and emotional bugle signal. Taps turned 150 this year, and a local bugler believes all veterans should get a live playing of the beloved call at their funerals. However, many don’t.

“It’s really not the same when they play a recording,” Robert Hill, Vero Beach, said. “It’s getting it done live that counts.”

Hill is a volunteer bugler with Bugles Across America, an organization of horn players dedicated to giving live performances of Taps at veterans’ funerals and memorial events.

Daniel Blackman, military honors state coordinator for the Florida Army National Guard Military Honors Program, said that budget cuts mean fewer veterans are getting live performances of taps. Many are getting digital performances done with music players that fit into bugles’ bells. A user presses a button, and has a few seconds to raise the instrument to his or her lips to appear to be playing.

“The correct name is the ceremonial bugle, which is a recording made by a soldier,” Blackman said. “I’d love to have a live bugler at every service.”

But he can’t. Mr. Blackman said he has to pay buglers $50 to perform taps at funerals, or get unpaid volunteers. He said the price of travel often keeps buglers from volunteering, so members of the honor guard stand with ceremonial bugles and act like they’re playing taps. He said the honor guard attends about 425 funerals a month.

Many count Jari Villaneuva (not pictured) as the nation’s foremost expert on military bugle calls, particularly Taps. He’s performed the call for thousands of funerals and memorial events at Arlington National Cemetery and others. Additionally, he was the curator of the Taps exhibit at Arlington. Villaneuva was inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame in 2007, the first active duty bugler ever so honored. ‘It’s a tune that’s easily recognized in the first couple notes,’ Mr. Villaneuva said. ‘It’s a song that touches people in so many ways, and affects people in so many ways.’

Many count Jari Villaneuva (not pictured) as the nation’s foremost expert on military bugle calls, particularly Taps. He’s performed the call for thousands of funerals and memorial events at Arlington National Cemetery and others. Additionally, he was the curator of the Taps exhibit at Arlington. Villaneuva was inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame in 2007, the first active duty bugler ever so honored. ‘It’s a tune that’s easily recognized in the first couple notes,’ Mr. Villaneuva said. ‘It’s a song that touches people in so many ways, and affects people in so many ways.’
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in the area. He explained that we would be launching two community newspapers, one covering St. Lucie West and Tradition, one serving the Palm City and Tesoro areas, and “this other little thing that shouldn’t take much of your time …”

This “other little thing” turned out to be Veteran Voice, and it has taken MUCH of my time over the last year. But it’s been a labor of love.

Veteran Voice just turned a year old last month. In that year, we’ve published stories, photos and information for veterans in a five-county area: Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie, Indian River and Brevard counties. The goal was to provide service to veterans and offer insight into the lives of those who serve; our fighting forces deserve to be spotlighted and recognized, and we wanted to provide a vehicle to do that. Florida has more than 1.6 million veterans. The state currently has 19.5 million residents; veterans make up about 8 percent of the state’s population. We knew there was an audience in the areas we cover.

Eight percent might not sound like a big number, until you start measuring it anecdotally. Just about everybody you ask either IS a veteran, is related to veteran, or knows a veteran. I am a veteran of the U.S. Army; so is our company’s vice president and operations director, Phil Galdys, who served in the Army Signal Corps from 1990-1993. So is the husband of one of our newspaper’s investors, Sharon Elkins, whose husband, Ted, served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1964-68, which spanned a period that included Vietnam service in VMO-3 and Phu Bai.

I teased my publisher and our two investors — all civilians, none of whom have served in the military: “Good thing you guys have me; you wouldn’t know a private from a full-bird colonel …”

When we launched Veteran Voice, I hadn’t given much thought to my Army days for 32 years. I had transitioned to civilian life years ago, and I never saw combat during my short tenure, so I wasn’t really comfortable calling myself a “veteran” alongside those who have been on the front lines. My family history is filled with people who served. Among fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers and sisters, my own father died in 2000 of cancer that was related to Agent Orange exposure during his Naval service in the Vietnam era.

As my drill sergeant would have phrased it, my thinking needed “an attitude adjustment.” It only took a few weeks of talking to veterans in our area for me to realize service to our country comes in many forms. I may not have seen combat, but my job supporting the “boots on the ground” was important and necessary. And the bottom line is, every veteran’s basic training includes preparation to fight if called upon. We are taught everything from the tenets of the Geneva Convention to the dismantling and cleaning of an M-16 semi-automatic rifle. We are all prepared to risk life and limb to protect our country and the freedoms we cherish.

If you have served in the U.S. military in any capacity for any period of time, you are a veteran. Period.

I was fortunate to serve during a period that was relatively peaceful, from 1982-84. I belonged to the 716th Military Police Battalion, based at Fort Riley, Kansas, home of the “Big Red 1,” the U.S. Army’s 1st Infantry Division, the oldest division in the United States Army. In 1982, the U.S. sent a small contingent of Marines — 800 — to occupy Beirut during Lebanon’s civil war. Of that number, 241 were killed — the largest number of Marines killed in a single day since the Battle of Iwo Jima in World War II. Other than that horrific incident, the U.S. military’s involvement around the globe was relatively minimal at the time I served.

But the U.S. military had, and still has, other missions: one is to serve as a deterrent to outside attacks against the Republic of Korea, in accordance with an agreement the United States has had with that country since 1957. In 1984, I received orders to serve a year-long unaccompanied tour in Korea to be part of the armed peacekeeping mission when I was five months’ pregnant with my son. I would have had to report when he was two months old, and be gone for the first year of his life. I had an option, my commander informed me: I could ask to be honorably discharged in order to care for my son.

Just like the day I arrived at Fort McClellan, Ala., for basic training, that day, in an instant, my life changed. I had my sights set on attending officer candidate school after my baby was born; I liked military life and wanted to be involved on a larger scale. But fate had other plans.

After fighting for several months trying to get my orders changed, I reluctantly took off my uniform for good. I took on a different — but equally important — mission. And I hadn’t really given it much thought since then, until “this little thing that shouldn’t take much of my time” — Veteran Voice — came into my life last year.

According the Pew Research
Veteran made long journey to success

Shelley Koppel
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ST. LUCIE WEST – Harvey Arnold is an American success story.

The Vero Beach native dropped out of high school in the 11th grade. Some 20 years later, after a tour of duty in Vietnam, return to college and service in Okinawa with the Marine Corps, he earned a doctoral degree in economics from Florida State University.

Today, Arnold is provost of the St. Lucie West Campus of Indian River State College, where he has worked since 1977. His story is one that belie resonence for veterans and many of the students who come to his campus.

“I was bored in high school,” he said. “There was a lot going on in the world and high school was not capturing my interest. That created challenges for my teachers. At 17, I walked into an armed forces recruiting station. Twenty-four hours later, I was on a train to Miami. I’d never been on a train.”

Arnold would later take his first plane flight and sea voyage, the latter when he was sent to Germany.

“I walked around the missile base. It was snowing and I thought, ‘I’m happy with my life.’ While he was stationed in Germany, a staff sergeant told the young soldier that he was being sent to school.

“I told him I didn’t like school,” Arnold said. “He said, ‘I think it would do you some good and you’re going to go. It took six weeks to get my GED.”

In September 1966, Arnold was sent to Vietnam.

“We were sent as part of the build-up, ” he said. “It gave me a sense of urgency in life. Every member of my platoon was a high school dropout. We were acutely aware that because we had not graduated from high school, our lives were not valued as highly as those that had.”

Arnold returned home in 1967. His father picked him up in Orlando and he said, “Dad, I want to make something of myself.” His father responded that he’d been waiting all his life to hear those words.

Arnold enrolled in the last class of what was then known as Indian River Junior College.

I loved college from the first day. They had an open-door policy,” Arnold said. “The universities do not accept a GED. Even though I had the GED, I wasn’t college-ready. There were college prep courses in math, English and reading to bring me up to college level. The educational foundation I built took me all the way through a Ph.D program.”

Arnold received his associate degree in business administration in 1970 and transferred to the University of West Florida, where he earned a bachelor’s and master’s degree in economics. He decided he needed a change.

“I had been going to school for six or seven years,” he said. “I never played collegiate sports and I wanted to see what I could do physically. I was anticipating a career in the service.”

Arnold applied to Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps. He was stationed in Okinawa when he learned of an opening in the economics department at Indian River Community College, as it was then known. He accepted the position of instructor in 1977. He rose through the ranks, becoming department chair in 2002. In 2004, he was named provost of the St. Lucie West campus.

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Center, as of 2012, only half a percent of the American population has spent any time on active duty in the last 10 years, compared with 9 percent during the height of World War II. But that .5 percent is a special brotherhood whose military experience is unique to that of their civilian counterparts. It is this segment of the population we are publishing counterparts. It is this segment of the population we are publishing...
To the Class of ‘66:

As I ponder the approaching Aug. 5 reunion for the Class of ‘66, the excitement surrounding the possibility of reuniting with old high school days and classmates memories. Since I was only 18 my side of the plane was occupying my buddies sitting on the other. The only alternative to staring at the state penitentiary!” you don’t change your direction is impossible. Consequently, we were left alone with our thoughts for reflection.

For the duration of my unit’s flight to Vietnam, the roar of the engines from the C-130 was so deafening that even the most basic, face-to-face communication was impossible. Consequently, we were left alone with our thoughts for much of the four-day flight. The only alternative to staring at my buddies sitting on the other side of the plane was occupying my mind with recent, high-school memories. Since I was only 18 my high-school days and classmates were not that many months removed, so I spent much of the flight mentally retracing my daily treks to McNeil’s Grocery Store, Langbean’s Bakery, and Peat’s Meats. I even visualized walking the hallways to locate my classrooms as if I were still a junior at Vero Beach High School.

I also reviewed the sequence of events that had seemingly captured me forward in time to my present, ominous predicament. I was just days before my entrance exam, and on Jan. 25, 1965, I did an about face: I heeded my principal’s advice and abruptly changed my direction in life forever by quitting high school and joining the Army.

There was much irony in the days and weeks immediately following my life-changing decision. Our class jester, Danny Hazel, showed up at the Tower Restaurant where I was to meet the recruiter to sign up for basic training to graduate with his original unit. As a consequence, he was recycled into my unit during the fourth week of basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C. Kenny had quit high school and joined the Army several weeks before I did, but he had become ill during basic training and missed too much training to graduate with his original unit. As a consequence, he was recycled into my company. Longing for home and friends, Kenny evidently identified with me as a homeboy, so my worst tormentor in high school became my best buddy throughout the remainder of basic training. Who would have thought?

Mainly, though, my thoughts were of my own fears, ineptitudes, and self-doubts about my ability to meet the challenges and unforeseen events that lie ahead. Basic Training was just 18 months removed and the physical demands had been a daunting challenge to the 17-year-old boy who stood all of 5 feet, 6 inches tall and weighed 105 pounds. Indeed, for my first year in the Army I had simply been referred to as “The Kid.”

I also reflected on the words my father had written in his only letter to me during basic training. He admonishingly wrote that although he had been opposed to my decision to quit high school and join the Army, it was, nonetheless, my decision. He told me it was time to leave irresponsibility and immaturity behind, and time to become a man. He went on to say that I had stepped into a man’s shoes and to make damn sure that I wore them, because there was no more room in his life for me unless I did. Tough love! Now on the flight, I reflected on the scene at the Greyhound Station that had occurred just days before. My father and I had already said our perfunctory goodbyes before I boarded the bus. As I made my way down the aisle toward an empty seat, my progress was suddenly halted by an unexpected force that spun me around. There, with tears streaming down his cheek was my father who had followed me onto the bus. He clutched me to him, kissed me on the forehead, told me that he loved me, and then exited the bus just as quickly as he had entered. I always knew that my father loved me; it’s just that he had never told me so face to face before.

Vietnam was hard time! And just like serving a prison sentence, you couldn’t see your future until the day you were released and passed through the gate into the arms of your loved ones. We endured the elements, the separation from our families, the inclement weather, and the lack of amenities. We endured the loneliness of our youth and left any youthful misconceptions about war behind as we witnessed and participated in man’s inhumanity towards man. For the majority of our class, the Vietnam War is now in the history books, revisited only when viewed on the History or Military Channel through the intelligent lens of hindsight. For me, however, the Vietnam experience continues to exert a powerful influence on every aspect of my life by serving as a constant reminder of what almost wasn’t.

So forgive me if my excitement about the possibility of reconnecting with old classmates at our 40th reunion is tempered by the knowledge that those who paid the human price of the Vietnam War won’t be there. Danny Hazel, Tim Spurlock and Kenney Signore all went on to serve in Vietnam where Tim and Kenney were badly wounded. Tragically, Steve Wiggins, Mark Jackson, Louis Laudermilk, and Frank Clovis all made the ultimate sacrifice. I returned home safely on Sept. 7, 1967. On their behalf, I would like all of you to know that although we did not walk across the stage to graduate with you, you were always foremost in our thoughts and dreams of homecoming; and, although our constant prayers was always for a safe return home to family, friends, and the sleepy little town of Vero Beach.

Harvey E. Arnold
Arnold from page 3

Arnold highlighted several programs unique to his campus: The new STEM Center and the associate in science programs in Golf Course Operations and Landscape and Horticultural Technologies.

“STEM” is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. The goal of the new center, opening in January 2013, is to meet a critical need for students proficient in those areas.

“There is a real shortage in the state of students graduating with the STEM skill set,” Arnold said. “Leaders in education and private industry have a mantra that we need students with the STEM skill set, that we have jobs.

“There is a transition from the Treasure Coast to the Research Coast. We are attracting the life science high-tech firms like Torrey Pines and the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute. The STEM Center is the educational piece to the puzzle.

“The past, if a student graduated from IRSC, they went to the University of Florida or left the state to get a good-paying job. We will be the only state college, as opposed to a university, to offer a B.S. in molecular biology and organizational biology.”

The new center will have three stories and cover 53,000 square feet.

“It will be an incredible building,” Arnold said. “There are so many ‘Wow’ factors. It’s not just a classroom building. All of our labs for a bachelor’s degree will be there. We’re creating the jobs of the future, high paying jobs so our students stay here.”

The campus also offers a two-year associate in science degree in Golf Course Operations and Landscape and Horticultural Technology. They are designed to graduate people responsible for golf course operations and maintenance, including the use of herbicides and pesticides for the maintenance of fairways and greens.

For Arnold, the opportunity for a high school dropout to be a role model for others is as rewarding as the success he’s achieved. He is justifiably proud of how far both he and the school he has served for so many years have come.

“This is my home and I love being here,” he said.

The St. Lucie campus of Indian River State College is located at 500 N.W. California Blvd., Port St. Lucie. Call (772) 879-4199 or visit the website, www.irsc.edu.

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Sgt. Harvey Arnold, in dress greens after returning home in the U.S. following his discharge from the Army.

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OUR MISSION STATEMENT AND OUR OBJECTIVE

Veteran Voice is a weekly publication designed to provide information to and about veterans to veterans and to the broader community. Veterans are an integral part of their Florida communities, which currently have individual organizations of their own, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Vietnam Veterans of America and many other groups with a narrow focus, but no convenient way to connect to a wider population of veterans and to the community in general within a limited geographic area, their community.

The mission of Veteran Voice is to publish a weekly source of information that will provide, in one place, a listing of resources available to veterans, articles about changes in policies or organizations affecting veterans and events of interest to veterans as well as articles about veterans of interest to the general public.

Veteran Voice LLC is organized as a partnership of experienced newspaper executives with an interest in veterans and in the communities of Florida veterans and friends. Veteran Voice is a start-up intended to address a perceived lack of information readily available to veterans on programs and policies affecting them and objective reporting of veteran affairs to the public.

To our knowledge, and based on comments from leaders of local veteran organizations, there was no media or website currently meeting this need until the launch of Veteran Voice.

We hope you agree, and will support this publication with your subscription. Without subscriptions there will be a limited number of people we can help, without which this mission will not be realized. As part of our commitment to supporting local veteran communities, we will donate 10 percent of our profits each quarter to qualified veteran charities recommended by you, our readers and subscribers. Please let us know what you think by emailing news@veteranvoiceweekly.com or mailing your comments to us at 1919 S.W. South Macedo Blvd., Port St. Lucie, FL 34984.
VERO BEACH — John Darling, a combat-wounded Vietnam vet, is looking for a few good men and women to help veterans in Indian River County.

Darling is one of the forces behind the Victory Center Military Store in the Indian River Mall. The store, which is celebrating its first anniversary, sells military merchandise and memorabilia, with all of the proceeds benefiting veterans in Indian River County.

Darling is looking for volunteers to ring up sales and visit with vets in the store’s back room for coffee, conversation, and perhaps a game of checkers.

The store began with a desire to help area vets. Darling, who served in the Army, and retired Air Force Col. Martin Zickert, a financial planner and president of the Veterans Council of Indian River County, were looking for a way to raise money. They began talking to officials at Simon Malls about setting up a table during the holidays for donations.

“Then it became a storefront and then a store,” Darling said. “Col. Zickert signed a lease and then said, ‘Does anyone know anything running a store?”

Fortunately, Mr. Darling had been in the retail end of the grocery business for more than 50 years. He started when he was 15 and returned to it when he got out of the service. While he had experience in merchandising and creating displays, setting up a 3,200-square-foot store was a daunting process.

“Col. Zickert said, ‘What are we going to do?’ Darling said. ‘I said, ‘Hell, I don’t know.’”

The store received a donation of start-up money from county resident Doris Jorgenson, and that enabled the men to get things going. While the store was going to sell merchandise like bumper stickers, patches, camouflage and other items of military interest, Darling knew they needed something more to draw people in.

He set up a “Wall of Honor,” with one side honoring veterans from Desert Storm on and the other from Vietnam back. He asked Indian River County residents to bring in photos of county residents who are or were in the military. He also set up a display called “Four Heroes” for several Indian River County residents who were killed in recent years.

“We knew we’d sell patches and T-shirts and hats,” he said. “I thought if they’d see the wall, maybe they’d make donations.”

Col. Zickert also wanted to give veterans a place to sit and visit. A room at the back of the store became the “R and R Bunker.”

“Vets can sit, relax, have coffee and cookies, Skype, use WiFi, watch TV, read or play chess and checkers,” Darling said. “It’s a place to sit and relax and let the wife go spend money. It’s kind of like a USO store.”

The space has become a meeting place for veterans groups. A social worker comes on Tuesday nights at 7 for a support group for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. They hope to offer classes in everything from yoga to financial planning to how to use a smartphone. There are also service officers who can help veterans file for benefits.

Money raised at the store has already helped purchase a bus to take vets to the VA hospital in West Palm Beach. Organizers also want to raise money for an Honor Flight out of Vero Beach so that elderly veterans won’t have to travel far to catch a plane.

While Darling has ambitious plans, he depends on volunteers to make them a reality.

“We need volunteers for two-hour shifts,” he said. “There’s no physical work and you don’t have to be a vet. I’m from Publix and I tell people to meet and greet every customer, make eye contact and talk to them about the store, about how 100 percent of the money stays in this county to help our vets.”

Darling said that people from Simon Malls were so impressed with the store that they are looking into starting similar operations at other outlets.

Even with the success of the store, Darling is not resting on his laurels. He is concerned that younger vets are not joining veteran’s groups and hopes they will find a home-away-from home in the store. His mission is to make certain that all vets understand that their service is valued and that help or just a friendly chat is available.

The Victory Center Military Store is located at 6200 21st St. in the Indian River Mall, near Macy’s. Hours of operation, beginning Nov. 1, are Monday-Saturday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and Sunday from noon-6 p.m. For more information, call (772) 226-5316.
Akron, Macon live on in memory

By Col. Terry Yon, USA, retired
For Veteran Voice

Have you ever heard of an “airborne aircraft carrier”? Well, I had not either, until I started volunteering at the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum in Titusville. It is just one of the many interesting and historically strange evolutions in our nation’s military aviation history.

In the 1930s, the U.S. Navy designed two lighter-than-air ships, the USS Akron and USS Macon, as airborne aircraft carriers. They could launch and recover heavier-than-air planes for use in both reconnaissance and self-defense. They were only about 20 feet shorter than the famous Hindenburg, however, they were among the largest flying objects in the world in terms of length (785 feet long) and volume. Although the hydrogen-filled Hindenburg was longer, the two sisters still hold the world record for helium-filled airships.

The ships were equipped with hangars, approximately 75 feet by 60 feet wide by 16 feet, which could stow and service up to five aircraft in flight. Aircraft were launched and retrieved by means of a trapeze, and could enter and exit the hangar through a large T-shaped opening at the bottom of the hull. Because the giant airships made large, slow targets, the Navy eventually realized that the vulnerable airship was best employed out of sight of the enemy. The airship’s function would be to carry scouting planes within range of the enemy.

Rather than the airplane extending the scouting range of the airship, it was the airship which extended the scouting range of the airplane. The Akron and her sister ship, the Macon, are truly unique and were the world’s only fully functioning aerial aircraft carriers. These airships could carry several new “sparrow hawk” fighter planes in a ventral docking bay and hanger.

But this fascinating story does not end here. The Akron was launched in September of 1931 and was a technical marvel. The design team for the Akron viewed the German ships as too heavy and unnecessarily reinforced. One of the major differences was its internally mounted engines.

Because the Akron was filled with nonflammable helium, it was safe to put the power plants internally, which made servicing them easier and had the added bonus of making the ship more streamlined and faster. Its eight props were built on outriggers on either side of the ship.

Unfortunately, in April 1933 the Akron, under command of Commander Frank McCord, was off the Atlantic coast of New Jersey, making its way through a huge thunderstorm. At a quarter past midnight, a horrific blow rocked the Akron. Fierce winds caused the massive airship to buck wildly until finally the force of the storm started to rip the ship apart. Because the Akron carried no life vests and there had not been enough time to lower her one life raft, the crash of the Akron caused an appalling loss of life, and of the 76 persons on the ship, only three survived; two sailors and the ship’s executive officer, Herbert Wiley. The rest of the ship’s passengers and crew died in the ocean from exposure to the frigid water, compounded by the lack of any lifejackets to keep survivors afloat.

USS Macon, sister of the Akron, was built at Akron, Ohio. She first flew in April 1933, only a few weeks after Akron’s tragic loss. Following a series of test flights, she flew to Moffett Field, Calif. During the rest of 1933, Macon and her embarked airplanes began what would be an extensive program of participation in exercises off the Pacific Coast, testing her abilities for fleet scouting and other missions.

Later in 1934, Lieutenant Commander Herbert Wiley, one of the three survivors of the USS Akron crash on April 3, 1933, and now captain of the USS Macon, surprised President Franklin D. Roosevelt (and the Navy), when Macon searched for and located the heavy cruiser Houston.

See AKRON page 15

Photo courtesy of the Naval History & Heritage Command

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The story of the history-making American Volunteer Group

By Col. Terry Yon, USA, retired

For Veteran Voice

What was “The American Volunteer Group” and why was it important? Young men who, in the opening days of World War II, belonged to the first aviation unit to hurl themselves against overwhelming odds in a desperate attempt to hold back the relentless attacks of the Japanese forces, that filled the skies of China. Perhaps you will know them by their more popular name -- The Flying Tigers. In early 1942, they were the only Americans doing anything against the Axis. With an American public reeling from Pearl Harbor and anxious to strike back "NOW!" The Flying Tigers were "the only game in town" at that point. Therefore, they received a lot of favorable press coverage, from reporters anxious to write about the only Americans doing ANYTHING ANYWHERE against the Japanese. This, then, is the story of a small group of inexperienced pilots who banded together to become the stuff of legends!!

The AVG was largely the creation of Claire L. Chennault, a retired U.S. Army Air Corps officer who had worked in China since August 1937, first as military aviation advisor to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in the early months of the Sino-Japanese War, then as director of a Chinese Air Force flight school. In 1940, Chiang asked for American combat aircraft and pilots, sending Chennault to Washington as ambassador to China's ambassador.

Since the U.S. was not at war, the "Special Air Unit" could not be organized overtly, but President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself approved the request. Chennault spent the winter of 1940–1941 in Washington, supervising the purchase of 100 Curtiss P-40 fighters, which were diverted from a Royal Air Force order; and the recruiting of 100 pilots and some 200 ground crew and administrative personnel that would constitute the 1st AVG.

Concerning the proposed American Volunteer Group, Chennault stated:

“...my plan proposed to throw a small but well-equipped air force into China. Japan, like England, floated her lifeblood on the sea and could be defeated more easily by slashing her salty arteries than by stabbing for her heart. Air bases in Free China could put all of the vital Japanese supply lines and advanced staging areas under attack. This strategic concept of China as a platform of air attack on Japan offered little attraction of the military planners of 1941. This support came from two civilians, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and was offered against the strong advice of their military advisors."

The first combat for the AVG occurred over southern Yunnan Province on Dec. 20, 1941. Chennault preached a radically different approach to air combat based on his study of Japanese tactics and equipment, his observation of the tactics used by Soviet pilots in China, and his judgment of the strengths and weaknesses of his own aircraft and pilots. Chennault faced serious obstacles since many AVG pilots were very inexperienced.

His doctrine called for pilots to take on enemy aircraft in teams from an altitude advantage, since their aircraft were not as maneuverable or as numerous as the Japanese fighters they would encounter. He prohibited his pilots from entering into a turning fight with the nimble Japanese fighters, telling them to execute a diving or slashing attack and to dive away to set up for another attack. With these tactics and this leadership, the American Volunteer Group and their shark-nosed P-40s flew into history. Always outnumbered, in a target rich environment, the group that the military experts predicted would not last three weeks in combat fought for seven months over Burma, China, Thailand, and French Indo-China, destroying 299 Japanese planes with another 153 probably destroyed all of this with a loss of only 12 P-40s in combat (an unbelievable 30:1 kill ratio) and 61 on the ground. Four pilots were killed in air combat; six were killed by anti-aircraft fire; three by enemy bombs on the ground; and three were taken prisoner. Ten more died as a result of flying accidents.

The AVG was disbanded at midnight after its last mission on July 4, 1942. It had only been seven months since it first flew in combat. But that was not to be the end of the “Flying Tiger” legend. The AVG was replaced initially with the China Air Task Force and ultimately, as the American forces strengthened; the 14th Air Force was formed with Chennault as the commander. One of his fighter outfits was the 23rd Fighter Group and since it, along with all the other organizations in the 14th Air Force, were in the same theater of operations, conducting the same missions against the Japanese, they also picked up the nickname of “Flying Tigers” -- and the name lived on. This legacy continues today with the 23rd Fighter Group at Moody Air Force Base with their famous A-10 Warthogs; descendants of these same AVG/Flying Tiger heroes. Additionally, right here at Patrick AFB, the 45th Space Wing is a subordinate command of the present day 14th Air Force and can also trace its lineage back to Claire Chennault and the famous “Flying Tigers.”

Retired U.S. Army Col. Terry Yon served as public relations officer for the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum in Titusville. For more information, call the museum, (321) 268-1941 or by email at vacwarbirds@bellsouth.net.
Gold Star Mothers: A club no one wants to join

There are some wounds that never heal. But the American Gold Star Mothers of the Treasure Coast helps comfort those that have lost family members who were serving in the military.

On Sept. 19, 1999, a hunter mistook Sgt. 1st Class Timothy John “Hodge” Hodgins for a bear and shot him.

“When he died, my pride in my country died,” his mother, Juliane “Sunshine” Johnson, said. “I wasn’t against my country; it was just all gone. He would teach us how to salute the flag, and fold the flag.”

As Johnson speaks about her son, her emotions are raw. Between audible efforts to hold back tears, she talks about a 35-year-old who joined the Army shortly after a two-year stint at a Florida Bible college. She tells of a man proud of his service who’d impressed many at his base.

He returned from a humanitarian operation in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch, and excitedly called Mom to tell her about the mission to help a devastated country.

Then came news of his death. Johnson had a crisis of faith. Hodge’s wife, Johnson said, descended into alcoholism and drifted from the family. His father died not long after Hodge.

“I didn’t know anything about Gold Star Mothers, so for the next 10 years I was all alone (in grief),” Johnson said.

Then she saw a woman in a white dress with a folded flag at the Stuart Veterans Day Parade.

“I said, ‘That’s me,’” Johnson said.

Patrick McCallister
FOR VETERAN VOICE
patrick.mccallister@yahoo.com

See MOTHER page 15

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Editor’s note: This is the first of a series of stories commemorating the 60th anniversary of the signing of the armistice of the Korean War.

It’s approaching 60 years now. On July 27, 1953, the Korean War ended without ending. That day, an armistice was signed that stopped the shooting, but left the world perilously hanging without ending. That day, an armistice of the Korean War ended.

July 27, 1953, the Korean War ended. That day, an armistice of the Korean War ended.

During the last legislative session, the Florida Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott funded nine new claims examiners for the FDVA. Claims examiners help veterans navigate the federal Department of Veterans Affairs to file, and appeal declined, claims. They’re similar to veterans service officers who work for counties and many veterans service organizations, such as AMVETS.

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs hiring women’s veterans coordinator.

Patrick McCallister
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Women are different from men, and many more of today’s veterans are women. Now they’ll have a full-time advocate at the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, a statewide women’s veterans coordinator.

During the last legislative session, the Florida Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott funded nine new claims examiners for the FDVA. Claims examiners help veterans navigate the federal Department of Veterans Affairs to file, and appeal declined, claims. They’re similar to veterans service officers who work for counties and many veterans service organizations, such as AMVETS.

The FDVA elected to use the newly funded positions to hire a full-time claims examiner specializing in women’s issues.

“We have had a women’s veterans coordinator since I got here in 1999,” Alene Tarter, director of benefits and assistance, said in a phone interview. She went on to say, “It’s been rotated among different female veterans in the department. What’s new is it will be a full-time position. In the past we had a coordinator, but it was an additional duty.”

According to the department, Florida has the third largest population of women veterans, about 160,000. There are about 1.6 million veterans in the Sunshine State. Nationally there are about 22 million veterans, and about 1.9 million are women.

Tarter said that military sexual trauma, MST, is a big reason a statewide women’s veterans coordinator is needed. She said that the experience isn’t unique to women, and many men making MST claims to the VA prefer to have women veteran service officers representing them.

The Florida Department of Veterans Affairs is a state agency not related to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. It does several things, such as running the state’s veteran nursing homes, along with helping veterans file claims with the VA.

Tarter said among both genders there remains in the military a great reluctance to report repeated sexual harassment, unwanted sexual attention, unwanted sexual advances and forced sex, the things the VA defines as military sexual trauma, MST.
Nevertheless, he’s found other opportunities to lend his horn to area veterans. He recently performed Taps at a Veterans Day service at Horizon Bay Assisted Living, where his father-in-law, Joseph Vincitore, resides.

Many count Jari Villaneuva as the nation’s foremost expert on military bugle calls, particularly Taps. He’s performed the call for thousands of funerals and memorial events at Arlington National Cemetery and others. Additionally, he was the curator of the Taps exhibit at Arlington. Villaneuva was inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame in 2007, the first active duty bugler ever so honored.

“It’s a tune that’s easily recognized in the first couple notes,” Villaneuva said. “It’s a song that touches people in so many ways, and affects people in so many ways.”

Some also know the bugle call—that later had lyrics written for it—as Day is Done and Butterfield’s Lullaby.

“It’s a call played every single day in virtually every corner of the nation,” Villaneuva said. “I don’t know any other piece of music like that.”

Taps’ haunting beauty has a mystique that evokes melancholy images which easily spin themselves into fantastic tales. One of the most circulated tales about Taps involves a Civil War Union captain, one Robert Ellicombe. After a fierce day of pitched battle, Captain Ellicombe heard a wounded soldier moaning alone in the blackness of night. The captain risked his life thatinky evening to retrieve the injured man who was trapped on a narrow piece of torn land separating the battle-hardened Union and Confederate armies. When the captain neared campfires he realized that he was saving a Confederate soldier—a Confederate soldier who turned out to be his son. The lad had been studying music in the South when the Civil War broke out. Unbeknownst to the captain, the younger Ellicombe volunteered for the Confederate Army.

Sadly, the young man died that night, but the heartbroken father found a short bit of music in his son’s pocket. The captain had the uncompleted melody played at his son’s burial the next day. Thus was Taps born.

Villaneuva said it’s a great story that captures the imagination, but it is bunk. To prove it, he has something for anyone who produces evidence Captain Ellicombe and his son existed.

“I was offering a $2,000, gold-plated bugle,” he said. “All I need is the unit the guy was in and where he’s buried.”

At his website, www.utapsbugler.com, Villaneuva has the real story of Taps. Turns out that like so many tunes, calls and songs of the Civil War, Taps was a variation of an existing bugle call, which was itself a variation of another bugle call. In July 1862, General Daniel Butterfield and brigade bugler Oliver Norton crafted the new extinguish-lights bugle call. Butterfield felt the Army’s official end-of-day bugle call, which was apparently a variation of a French bugle call, was too stiff and formal. While the two men later gave slightly different accounts of how Taps was composed, the new end-of-day bugle call caught on quickly with Union and Confederate buglers. Union and Confederate camps were often close enough that fifers, buglers and drummers could hear one another.

Villaneuva said that Taps has been an official bugle call at military funerals since 1891, but likely came to be used for that purpose long before then. How the name Taps came about is open to some conjecture. It could have been a reference to the bugle call requiring the closure of beer taps. More likely it’s a reference to the fact that after a bugler played the end-of-day call, a drummer would sound a short series of taps.

To request live buglers to perform Taps at funerals and memorial events, visit www.buglesacrossamerica.org.
Nothing bonds men more strongly than shared brushes with death. Port St. Lucie’s Ronald Yeaw was a Navy SEAL in Vietnam. He fought alongside a lot of men, but was significantly wounded in combat only once. That once was alongside Nguyen Hoang Minh.

“I met Minh on 12 March, 1968,” Yeaw said. “I had just joined that platoon that day.” The two did little more than exchange pleasantries. Their relationship was off to an unremarkable start. About 30 hours later, their contact would end altogether after spending only a few of them together.

“We went out the next night,” Yeaw continued. “That was the day we ran into the main force, reinforcement battalion, and got the same grenade.”

Got a Chinese-made grenade that was exploding.

He continued, “I got shrapnel all up the left side. He got it up the front. The third person in the (thatch hut), Chief Bob Gallagher, got it up the right side.”

And a SEAL outside got hit by the tiny, fast-moving metal fragments, too.

Fortunately, none died.

Yeaw headed one way for life-saving treatment; Minh another. They never saw each other again. Never talked. But Yeaw thought about Minh.

“Probably 1,000 times, if not 2,000 times,” he said.

Yeaw said he spent 28 months in Vietnam. He was well aware of the fact Minh, having worked for the Americans, was likely in grave danger from the communists.

“We all thought that he had been killed by the North Vietnamese when they took over in 1975,” he said.

Others were thinking about and looking for Minh, and located him.

“As it turned out, he went into a re-education camp and was tortured,” Yeaw said.

But survived.

The two recently met at the National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum in Port Pierce. Minh stayed in Sebastian for a few days to visit with many of his former U.S. Navy companions.

“It was magnificent to see him,” Yeaw said. “He didn’t recognize the face, but he recognized the name.”

Veteran Voice reached Minh by telephone when his wife, Hyunh Thi Nhi, and he were in Virginia to meet others from the legendary SEAL Team Two. A translator helped facilitate the conversation. Even with the aid of a translator, Minh seemed to wrestle with answering many questions. The translator, John Tran, said Minh was exhausted from time-zone changes and traveling, along with being emotionally overwhelmed by seeing many former colleagues.

“I very enjoyed when I come to see the museum and my friends,” Minh said.

He explained that he was a member of South Vietnam’s navy when he started translating for American patrol boat, river crews. He eventually discharged from his nation’s military, but continued working with Americans. Eventually, he went to work with SEAL Team Two.

“When 1967, I got out of the Vietnamese navy, and I volunteered to work for SEALs,” he said.

In 1975, communists captured Minh and took him to a re-education camp. By July of ’76, the unified Vietnam shed its old separate names and became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. According to various estimates, at least a million Vietnamese were put into the notorious prisons without charges or trials. Many died.

Minh said he spent 28 months in the re-education camps. He was accused of being a CIA agent.

“Because I worked for the Americans,” he said.

After Yeaw recovered from his wounds in the United States, he went onto a stellar naval career. He served from 1965 to 1995.

“Among my 45 medals, nine of them came with a combat V,” he said.

And he has another claim to fame. The United States in 2010 awarded him the Distinguished Service Medal.

“Sometimes I met the Viet Cong, a home that could become a fire-fighter,” he said. “If you don’t want to go in and fight fires, you shouldn’t be a fire-fighter,” he said.

No doubt, all the American service members who went to Vietnam were courageous, particularly those who knew constant combat.

“We didn’t go to Vietnam and stay in Vietnam with a real sense of the political implications,” Yeaw said. “The SEALs went because it was combat.”

He said Vietnamese like Minh who helped the Americans were in many ways more courageous than SEALs.

“We were fighting for far different reasons than Minh was fighting for,” Yeaw said. “We’d go for six months and go home, but that was his home.”

A home that could become a very dangerous place after the shooting war was done, as Minh experienced.

Minh laughed off suggestions that he was courageous. When he was in combat situations with SEALs, he was... Well, he was with SEALs.

“Sometimes I met the Viet Cong, but I was never afraid of them,” he said.
Freedom through the eyes of a Vietnamese American

Editor’s note: The following was sent to Veteran Voice via email from retired Air Force Col. Marty Zickert.

On Saturday, July 24, 2010, the town of Prescott Valley, Ariz., hosted a Freedom Rally. Quang Nguyen was asked to speak on his experience of coming to America and what it means. He spoke the following in dedication to all Vietnam veterans. Thought you might enjoy hearing what he had to say:

Thirty-five years ago, if you were to tell me that I am going to stand up here speaking to a couple thousand patriots, in English, I’d laugh at you. Man, every morning I wake up thanking God for putting me and my family in the greatest country on Earth.

I just want you all to know that the American dream does exist and I am living the American dream. I was asked to speak to you about my experience as a first generation Vietnamese-American, but I’d rather speak to you as an American.

If you hadn’t noticed, I am not white and I feel pretty comfortable with my people. I am a proud U.S. citizen and here is my proof. It took me eight years to get it, waiting in endless lines, but I got it, and I am very proud of it.

I still remember the images of the Tet offensive in 1968, I was 6 years old. Now you might want to question how a 6-year-old boy could remember anything. Trust me, those images can never be erased. I can’t even imagine what it was like for young American soldiers; 10,000 miles away from home, fighting on my behalf.

Thirty-five years ago, I left South Vietnam for political asylum. The war had ended. At the age of 13, I left with the understanding that somehow, my family and I were reunited five months later, amazingly, in California. It was a miracle from God.

If you haven’t heard lately that this is the greatest country on Earth, I am telling you that right now. It was the freedom and the opportunities presented to me that put me here with all of you tonight. I also remember the barriers that I had to overcome every step of the way. My high school counselor told me that I cannot make it to college due to my poor communication skills. I proved him wrong. I finished college.

You see, all you have to do is to give this little boy an opportunity and encourage him to take and run with it. Well, I took the opportunity and here I am.

This person standing tonight in front of you could not exist under a socialist/communist environment. By the way, if you think socialism is the way to go, I am sure many people here will chip in to get you a one-way ticket out of here. And if you didn’t know, the only difference between socialism and communism is an AK-47 aimed at your head. That was my experience.

In 1982, I stood with a thousand new immigrants, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and listening to the National Anthem for the first time as an American. To this day, I can’t remember anything sweeter and more patriotic than that moment in my life.

Fast-forwarding, somehow I finished high school, finished college, and like any other goof-ball 21-year-old kid, I was having a great time with my life. I had a nice job and a nice apartment in Southern California. In some way and somehow, I had forgotten how I got here and why I was here.

One day I was at a gas station, I saw a veteran pumping gas on the other side of the island. I don’t know what made me do it, but I walked over and asked if he had served in Vietnam. He smiled and said yes. I shook his hand. The grown man began to well up. I walked away as fast as I could and at that very moment, I was emotionally rocked. This was a profound moment in my life. I knew something had to change in my life.

It was time for me to learn how to be a good citizen. It was time for me to give back.

You see, America is not just a place on the map, it isn’t just a physical location. It is an ideal, a concept. And if you are an American, you must understand the concept, you must accept this concept, and most importantly, you have to fight and defend this concept. This is about freedom and not free stuff. And that is why I am standing up here.

Brothers and sisters, to be a real American, the very least you must do is to learn English and understand it well. In my humble opinion, you cannot be a faithful patriotic citizen if you...
can’t speak the language of the country you live in. Take this document of 46 pages — last I looked on the Internet, there wasn’t a very close translation of the U.S. Constitution. It took me a long time to get to the point of being able to converse and until this day, I still struggle to come up with the right words. It’s not easy, but if it’s too easy, it’s not worth doing.

Before I knew this 46-page document, I learned of the 500,000 Americans who fought for this little boy. I learned of the 58,000 names scribed on the black wall at the Vietnam Memorial. You are my hero. You are my founders.

At this time, I would like to ask all the Vietnam veterans to please stand. I thank you for my life. I thank you for your sacrifices, and I thank you for giving me freedom and liberty. I have today. I now ask all veterans, firefighters, and police officers, to please stand.

On behalf of all first generation immigrants, I thank you for your services and may God bless you all.

Quang Nguyen
Creative Director/Founder
Caddis Advertising, LLC
“God Bless America”
“One Flag, One Language,
One Nation Under God”

For those who understand, no explanation is needed.

For those who do not understand, no explanation is possible.

GOD BLESS AMERICA!

FREEDOM from page 13

WOMEN from page 10
tary sexual trauma. Much of that reluctance, she said, is because of the lack of poor procedures to address sexual trauma.

“Very often the female is not removed from that work situation and the sexual assault came from the supervisory levels,” she said. “Often times the female knows that there won’t be any assistance, so they don’t bring it to anyone’s attention. You can’t always count on a paper trail that the assault happened.”

And paper trails are all important to filing VA claims. It wants documentation to demonstrate that an existing psychological or medical problem is directly related to one or more events that happened when in the military. Nevertheless, Tarter said those involved with helping veterans file VA claims have learned to look for and show “markers” in service records indicating sexual trauma. For example, model service members suddenly becoming poor performers, having sudden weight gains or losses. Additionally, she said service officers have learned to look for indications of sudden personality changes, or sudden sexual promiscuity.

“Or people who go AWOL,” Tarter said. “One of the ways to get away from (military sexual trauma) is to go AWOL.”

Tarter said she’s represented dozens making MST claims. “I would say, over the years probably 200,” she said. “I know there are a lot of women who don’t come forward. We can tell that by the number who wait years to come forward — sometimes you’re working with a 20-year-old issue.”

She said that in the last decade, the VA has become much more responsive to the existence of MST and the need for treatment.

“Most of the VA medical centers have special programs developed for females who’ve had sexual trauma,” she said. According to the VA’s website, it has programs for treating men and women who’ve been victims of sexual trauma.

According to the site, one in five women and one in 100 men have told their VA healthcare provider that they experienced sexual trauma in the military.

There are other reasons for having a statewide women’s veterans coordinator.

“There are certain issues, such as reproduction,” Tarter said. “We’re not entirely sure of the effects of the burn pits and that sort of thing. That’s probably on the horizon as the next big disability issue for the VA, the burn pits.”

The military has operated open-air burn pits for garbage disposal in Iraq and Afghanistan, which raised health concerns among many service members. The VA asked the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine to investigate whether the pits posed a health risk. In 2011 the institute released a report that focused largely on a pit operated in Balad, Iraq.

It concluded that there wasn’t sufficient evidence to say that the pits emitted toxins in sufficient quantities to pose any health risks. The finding remains controversial among many veterans who served in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Many Vietnam-era veterans have also been vocal about the issue, noting that there were similar studies and findings early on about the defoliant Agent Orange, long linked to many health-related problems from birth defects to cancer.

Donna Carlsen, St. Lucie County’s veterans services coordinator, said she’s glad to see the VA create the position.

“There’s a lot of issues for female veterans,” she said. “It is a full-time job.”

The state department has 71 veterans claims examiners. Most, 55, work at VA facilities around the state. The Florida Legislature approved adding nine more, with the goal of dollars, in its $74.5 billion 2013-2014 budget.

At press time, claims examiner Cynthia T. Brown is serving as the part-time statewide women veterans’ coordinator at the FDVA.

MUSEUM from page 10

1940s. That’s part of the Road to Victory museum plan.”

The Martin County Airport was born in patriotism and raised by the military. As America cranked up to fight the Japanese and Germans in the early 1940s, landowners gave property to Martin County to build an airport to help the war effort. It was first named MacArthur Field.

In 1942, the county leased the 900-acre airport to the federal government, which used it as a Navy aviation training center. In addition to giving the county $800,000, the Navy put down $10 million to build and operate the training airport. The county got the airport back in 1947.

The first Navy aviator from Stuart to die during the war was a fellow named Paul Homer Witham. He went by Horace T. MacArthur Field was renamed to honor the local boy, thus Witham Field at the Martin County Airport today. He still has family living in Palm City.

At least two of the buildings at the Martin airport are ones the Navy built. Roberts said there are more World War II vintage buildings around the area, because of a Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Hobe Sound. Well, actually not because of the park, but something that used to be at the same location.

“It was a World War II military base, Camp Murphy,” Roberts said. The Army’s Southern Signal Corps operated a top-secret radar training facility there, according to the Florida Historical Society. It was named after Col. William Murphy, an electronics pioneer.

The camp operated from 1942 to 1944 doing research and development in addition to training. The Army put about 1,000 buildings at Camp Murphy, and Roberts said many were moved elsewhere after the war.

“That’s how the museum got its building. That building was moved right after the war,” he said. “For years it was a Legion, used by the American Legion. When the Legion moved out, we applied to the City of Stuart) and the city let us use the building.”

Roberts wants to move that building to the Martin airport and get ready to save, salvage and display more of its World War II history.

“I’m envisioning a five-acre piece of land, so if World War II buildings become available we can take them,” he said.

Roberts said that he’d like to approach owners of some of the Camp Murphy buildings he’s aware of with an offer.

“If I have five acres, I can say, ‘Hey, in moving this building down, let us move it and salvage it’,” he said.

Of course all this takes a couple things, neither of which come easy. The first is money.

“My biggest concern would be raising money,” Roberts said. He estimated that moving the museum to the airport, or other location, could run into the tens of thousands of dollars. The museum doesn’t charge admission; it requests donations. Some have the means and inspiration to be more generous than others.

“We have about $1,500,” Roberts said.

The other thing the museum would need to move the airport is regulatory approval and public funding. Roberts said the Federal Aviation Administration would have to approve the museum’s site plan, as would the Martin County Commission after public hearings.

Roberts said any move is likely years off.

In the meantime, Roberts said the museum is looking to add cover at its current location to display some of its World War II vehicles. Folks have a chance to help raise money for that on Saturday, June 29.

Lotus Gun Works, 3558 N.W. Federal Highway in Jensen Beach, is hosting Guns & Girls, a fundraiser for the museum. That’ll be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and include displays from the museum.

The museum uses more than 100 volunteer hours a month and is always looking for folks to help out with all sorts of projects.

For information about the museum and volunteering, visit roadtvorotarymuseum.org, or e-mail colonelj.Specialforcesus.com.
KOREA from page 10

an DMZ since 1953. "They've been in harm's way, some have been killed, since the armistice," he said. "We do have a new logo. It says Korean War and Korean Service Veterans. That's the direction the organization is going." Small numbers of North Korean soldiers have crossed the Korean DMZ and retreated for several decades. It's happened as recently as 2006. The DMZ's 160 miles remains the most heavily militarized border in the world.

To its north, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has been a persistently belligerent state plagued with constant poverty and repeated famines, yet eagerly developing nuclear and missile technologies that have kept the world on edge. In 2009, the International Atomic Energy Agency declared North Korea a nuclear site. The Central Intelligence Agency has opined that it is a massive chemical weapon state as well.

The country is a single-party state led primarily by the Kim family. For decades, it operated on a hybrid and heavy-handed admixture of traditional Korean monarchy and communism. In 2009, all references to communism were stripped from its constitution.

To the south, the Republic of Korea was strongly influenced by its strong ties to the highly structured Confucianism as it developed toward a democratic representative republic with free-market capitalism. "I had a hand in freeing the country, to come from an impoverished agrarian society to becoming a world manufacturer," Rathbun said. "Their standard of living is quite high. The thing I feel good about, is what I can see firsthand what has happened to the country and how it's built up."

Rathbun and his wife visited South Korea a couple years ago. He said the people venerate the members of the United Nations forces that kept them from being swallowed by the North.

Howard said reports of persistent North Korean poverty bother him greatly. His grandson served in Korea and married a Korean woman. He said Koreans are a charming, industrious and proud people who achieve remarkable things when they have the chance.

"With our help, North Korea would be a very prosperous country," he said. "They're just a source of conflict."

Howard said the Korean War likely changed America for the better. He said many black soldiers served alongside others and earned tremendous respect.

That, he believes, likely translated to softening racial attitudes in America in the 1950s. Howard was an officer in the Third Battalion, 16th Infantry.

"It was the black battalion," he said. "At the time, there was a lot of bias against black soldiers. I was tickled to be able to say we had some tough fighting and black soldiers were tough fighters."

The Brevard Korean War Veterans Association hasn't yet made plans to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the armistice. Rathbun said the organization likely will. It has about 60 members. The chapter meets at the Brevard Veterans Memorial Center, 400 S. Sykes Causeway, Merritt Island. Those meetings are on the first Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m.

Now, more than ever, Rathbun and Howard said the association and its chapters are important for helping the country understand the history of an unfinished war with a dark, 60-year shadow.

"The fact we didn’t end the war means that the North Koreans over and over are saying we’re still at war," Howard said. "Technically we’ve never terminated the Korean War. I don’t think that’s a good idea."

The national organization is on the web at kwva.org.

MOTHERS from page 9

who’d lost his father. He was excited for Mom when she announced her engagement to Navy veteran Frank Maitland.

"Buck was my best man at my wedding," she said.

Maitland said after her son died she, like Johnson, felt a haunting emptiness. Her husband found out about Gold Star Mothers and wanted to get a local chapter. "He wanted me not to be in pain anymore," she said. "He thought I should talk with another woman who had lost her child."

But Maitland found out Gold Star Mother meetings were far away, in Orlando and Miami. She wanted to get a local chapter going. Coincidently, she was featured in a local newspaper article. "Other Gold Star mothers started seeking me out," she said.

Johnson was one of them after she saw a Gold Star mother at the parade. "I e-mailed (Jo Ann) and she called me back," Johnson said. "She said, ‘Can you be here at the AMVETS at 7 p.m. tonight?’"

Although Johnson was about to head elsewhere, she changed plans on the spot.

“It’s the place I needed to be," she said.

In 1918, Grace Darling Seibold, got news that her son, George Vaughn Seibold, died while serving in The Great War as an American volunteer for the British Royal Flying Corps, 148th Aero Squadron. In her grief and resolve, she reached out to others who’d lost their children in that war. By 1928, they’d organized into American Gold Star Mothers. The organization’s website explains, "During the early days of World War I, a Blue Star was used to represent each person, man or woman in the Military Service of the United States. As the war progressed and men were killed in combat, others wounded and died of their wounds or disease, there came about the accepted usage of the Gold Star."

Maitland said that although the organization has "mothers" in its name, all who’ve lost family during their military service are welcome to attend meetings.

"Together we’re stronger," she said.

Meetings are at the AMVETS Post 92, 2230 N.E. Dixie Highway, Jensen Beach. They’re on the third Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. For information about the organization, visit gold-starmoms.com.

“It’s awesome for us to be able to talk about our boys and girls,” Maitland said. "We need to talk about them. People are scared to bring it up with us."

AKRON from page 7

which was then carrying the president back from a trip to Hawaii.

On Feb. 12, 1935, returning fleet maneuvers, Macom ran into a storm off Point Sur, Calif. During the storm, she was caught in a wind shear, which caused structural failure of the upper tailfin. Control was lost and any heavy and with engines running full speed ahead, the Macom eventually settled gently into the sea and sank off Monterey Bay. However, this time only two crew members died from her complement of 76, thanks to the warm conditions and the introduction of life jackets and inflatable rafts after the Akron tragedy.

With the death of the second airship, the concept of an airborne aircraft became unacceptable to the Navy, the public and Congress. This ended a short, but interesting chapter of a unique and interesting experiment in military aviation history.

Retired U.S. Air Force Col. Terry Von is the public relations officer of the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum in Titusville.

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