WAR HORSES FOR VETERANS
Caring for equine pals is a calming and enlightening experience

‘STORM OF STEEL’
101ST AIRBORNE TROOPS FACED ‘A LIVING HELL’ 50 YEARS AGO
THIS MONTH IN VIETNAM

BURN PITS: THE NEXT AGENT ORANGE?

U.S.-NORTH KOREA SUMMIT
What does it mean?
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‘MAKE IT HAPPEN’
B.J. Lawrence of New Mexico is VFW’s new commander-in-chief. The former Army artilleryman and private investigator is eager to re-energize VFW’s membership recruiting and advocacy for vets.
BY TIM DYHOUSE

IS IT THE NEW AGENT ORANGE?
The military has used burn pits routinely over the last 30 years to dispose of trash at various sites throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. The vets who inhaled the toxic fumes now want to know if they’re sick because of it.
BY STEPHANIE GASKELL

‘STORM OF STEEL’
In September 1968, near the village of Ap Trang Dau in Vietnam’s III Corps, GIs from the 101st Airborne and 25th Infantry divisions stood strong in the face of “human wave” attacks launched by North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong troops.
BY JANIE DYHOUSE

DOCUMENT YOUR MILITARY SERVICE
The Library of Congress is collecting and preserving the first-hand accounts of as many U.S. veterans as it can gather. Here are some tips on how to get your story enshrined in the nation’s archives.
BY DAVE SPIVA

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We Will Grow Stronger This Year

I am excited to begin my year at the helm of this venerable organization. Our delegates at the national convention have approved our blueprint in the form of resolutions and bylaws for the upcoming year. Our Kansas City and Washington office employees are moving forward. And our leaders throughout the various levels of VFW are already working hard toward meeting and exceeding their membership goals.

As an organization, we have our course set in front of us. As my theme for this year states, we are going to “Make it Happen.” Of that, I am certain.

My membership plan for this year includes a heavy dose of incentives for Post, District and Department commanders. I also have included awards for quartermasters this year. As a former Department assistant adjutant/ quartermaster, I know how hard they work, how involved they are in various projects and how much they contribute to the success of their particular VFW unit. I want them to share in the rewards.

My plan includes at least 12 different and distinct award programs recognizing VFW commanders and quartermasters. Some are new, some are previous programs that have been upgraded and some are old favorites. All will, if properly executed, make us stronger with a larger membership this time next year.

As we all know, recruiting is the lifeblood of any membership organization. For VFW, which has a congressional charter and the attention of decision-makers on Capitol Hill, it’s even more critical. As our numbers grow, so does our influence and what we can accomplish for veterans.

The youngest generation of veterans and their families need us more than they realize, especially as they move forward in their civilian lives. Some grapple with conditions such as PTSD, TBI or the unknown adverse effects of burn pit fumes they inhaled while serving overseas.

We’ve done a relatively successful job of recruiting vets 39 years old and younger. Retaining them — like any of our annual members — is key to our growth. To do that, I want to improve the ways we communicate with our members at all levels of the organization.

Reach out to your members. Communication is the first step in taking care of them and all veterans in your community. With the growing number of social media options at their disposal, VFW Post, District and Department leaders have an array of choices. Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook are examples of how younger vets communicate. Speak to them with a medium they know and use already.

We are here to help you. Our National Headquarters staff can assist you with coordinating programs, developing new membership initiatives and building awareness among our members and the entire veteran community.

VFW is going to grow this year. We will build on the success of our previous leaders and continue our outreach to young vets, female vets and minority vets. We will retain our current members, leaning on and learning from them as we forge ahead. We are the VFW, and with your help we will continue to grow stronger every day.
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Thanking Korean War Veterans for Service
Thank you for recognizing Korean War veterans. I thought we really have been forgotten. At 86 years old, there’s not too many of us left. I was attached to the III ROK Corps Artillery near the area of the Punchbowl. I suggest you might write an article on the Korean Military Advisory Group. Also, thanks for the article on the armistice signed 65 years ago. I was there then, and it was very welcomed after a couple of false starts.

RICHARD STRAND
NORTHGLEN, COLO.

It’s hard for me to express how pleased I was to read “Thank You, Korean War Vets.” Few people knew where Korea was or why we were there. On behalf of all Korean War vets, thank you.

RONALD MERRELL
CLEARWATER, FLA.

I want to thank you for your comments and the welcome “thank you” to Korean War veterans. A rarely seen or heard remark these days. Those of us who participated in the Korean War were convinced that we were in the middle of a full-fledged war even though our circumstances were often described as a “police action.” May we all continue the tradition to “leave no one behind,” even in our memories.

KENNETH F. HINES
LAS VEGAS

Celebrating World War I Poet
The 165th Infantry was formed from the 69th Infantry Regiment, or Famous Fighting 69th. I deployed with this unit to Iraq in 2004-2005. Kilmer’s poem “The Rouge Bouquet” was recited on each occasion of the loss of one of our troops by the battalion commander. Every Memorial Day, I recite the poem with all the names of our soldiers lost during deployment. It’s a fitting tribute to the fallen, the poet and unit alike.

DANIEL DUDZIAK, EMAIL

Private Doctors Not Prepared to Treat Veterans
I am a Vietnam combat vet and refuse to use any VA facility. I went to two and found both a waste of time. I have talked with many veterans and most agree with my opinions. I believe running all these VA hospitals can be well-handled in the civilian sector. My civilian doctors are well-equipped to handle my needs. Not only that, it was my duty to serve my country, and my country owes me nothing.

MARCEL DURAND
VINELAND, N.J.

Desert Hike Honors Bataan POWs
In the third paragraph of the article, 100-year-old Bataan Death March survivor Ben Skardon honored the Bataan Death March veterans after receiving the Congressional Gold Medal at the recent event. I am stunned that he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal since the veterans of New Mexico’s 200th and 515th Air Defense Artillery Regiments have not yet received this for their service and sacrifice in the “Death March.”

MELVYN MONTANO, EMAIL

Your story on the marble tournament brought back the good old days for me, growing up in Greenwich, Conn. The Greenwich Boys Club held a little tournament in their library on a fancy oriental carpet and if you won, you’d get a Greenwich Boys Club T-shirt.

BILL MORTON
NORWALK, CONN.

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BILL MORTON
NORWALK, CONN.

Earning Citizenship through Service
This year is the 50th anniversary of my becoming an American citizen. Having received the privilege of settling in the U.S. in 1961 as an immigrant kid under the Pastore-Walter Act of 1958, I did the usual stuff — assimilating into the American way of life. I worked summers in the plywood mill to pay college costs, then on to professional school. I ran out of money my third year of medical school and happened to run into an Army recruiter by the name of Maj. Herschel O. Billingsley. Long story short, I signed up and served in uniform from 1971-2001. Congrats to all immigrants who served in the military and became American citizens.

JAMES B. VAN DELDEN, EMAIL

Straight Shooters
After reading this, all I could think about was when I go into a VFW building or to a VFW picnic, I see grandparents and great-grandparents but no veterans with children. The writer stated “It helped ... veterans reintegrate into society and taught boys life lessons.” We should be doing that now with games and events from baseball to Scouts working with veterans who are parents and organizing or sponsoring these events or groups.

KINGSTON WINGET, EMAIL

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

Celebrate VFW’s Founding
VFW Day is Sept. 29. It marks VFW’s creation in 1899.

On that day in Columbus, Ohio, 13 veterans of 17th Infantry Regiment who had fought on Cuba during the Spanish-American War gathered to establish what they called the American Veterans of Foreign Service. That group led a merger with two other veterans associations in 1914 to form the VFW.

The original organization pledged to “promote the general welfare” of those who had “borne the brunt of battle.” It vowed to place the veteran “in the front rank of American citizenship,” among other goals.

At 119 years old, VFW is America’s oldest major veterans organization. Along with its Auxiliary, it counts nearly 1.7 million members and some 6,500 Posts in communities around the world.

VFW National Home Meeting
The annual meeting of the VFW National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Mich., will be held at 9 a.m. on Oct. 27. For more information, contact Michelle Jones, the Home’s executive secretary, at mjones@vfwnationalhome.org or (517) 663-7023.

Win a Free Trip Through VFW’s “Return to Vietnam” Drawing

If you received a Purple Heart for being wounded in Vietnam, you could be one of nine* lucky veterans to win VFW’s “Return to Vietnam” trip. This in-country tour from April 25 - May 8, 2019, will include Hanoi, Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), the DMZ, Khe Sanh, Hue, Da Nang, Hoi An, Marble Mountain, Cu Chi and Tay Ninh. Airfare, accommodations and meals are included. Don’t miss this chance to revisit battle sites and share your experiences with fellow Vietnam veterans.

Entries must be received prior to the drawing on Nov. 30, 2018. Winners will be notified by mail or email immediately after the drawing. To claim their trip, winners must send a copy of their Purple Heart documentation to VFW National Headquarters by Jan. 4, 2019, and their passport by Feb. 8, 2019. If you do not have a passport, please apply immediately upon notification that you are a trip winner and that your Purple Heart has been documented. (Obtaining a passport can take up to two months.)

Please consider the following before entering the drawing:
• The trip includes mainly Vietnamese meals but also will include American food on occasion.
• The tour features long bus rides and excessive walking.
• There are no handicap facilities anywhere on the trip.
• Everyone must participate in every inland trip and activity.

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Send entries to: Adjutant General, Attn: Vietnam Trip, VFW National Headquarters, 406 W. 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111
Top Leadership Change at VFW National Headquarters

Kevin Jones was appointed VFW adjutant general at the organization’s 119th National Convention in Kansas City, Mo. Jones assumed his new duties July 25.

He previously served as VFW’s assistant adjutant general for the past three years and has extensive experience at VFW National Headquarters. Jones joined the staff in 1996 as an accounting manager, and his VFW career in Kansas City includes positions as director of Marketing Services, deputy director of Programs, assistant director of Development and manager of Institutional Development for the VFW Foundation.

Jones’ military career began in May 1980 when he enlisted in the Air Force. He served for 12 years as an accounting technician, budget analyst and accounting manager. Beginning in December 1986, he logged a tour of duty at Osan Air Base in South Korea, where he coordinated travel pay and accounting as a staff sergeant with the 51st Comptroller Squadron.

His military awards include the Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters, the Air Force Achievement Medal with one oak leaf and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award.

During his time on active duty, Jones earned two college degrees. First, he received an associate of science degree in financial management from the Community College of the Air Force based in Montgomery, Ala. He later received his bachelor’s degree in business from Alabama’s Troy State University, where he is a member of the Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society.

Jones joined VFW Post 5789 in Lee’s Summit, Mo., in 1996. He later transferred his membership to Post 7356 in Parkville, Mo., where he maintains his Gold Legacy life membership.

Beginning his tenure as adjutant general, Jones said he is eager to help guide the organization into a new era.

“It’s important in this ever-changing landscape that we put heavy emphasis on positioning VFW for the future, and that will rely on a robust membership,” he said.

“VFW has faced 27 years of declining membership, so those numbers speak for themselves. What we have to do is reverse that trend, obviously. We’re asking our Departments to look at their recruiting practices and, we, at the national level, must do the same.

“I’m confident in our mission. We have committed leaders, passionate members and a fantastic story to tell the world about how we help our communities, our members and all veterans. Part of our goal going forward is to do a better job of communicating that. I know we will, and it will lead to a stronger VFW.”
The first face-to-face meeting between a sitting U.S. president and a North Korean leader took place in June during a summit conference in Singapore. Among the main topics discussed was the potential denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

While no details were formally agreed upon, there were a few short-term takeaways that are apparent from the unprecedented meeting. Ultimately, the U.S. and North Korea now are talking rather than threatening war. Also, the talks have opened up a potential restart to the MIA recovery mission in North Korea.

From 1996 to 2005, the predecessor organization to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) performed 33 recovery operations, which resulted in the repatriation of 229 sets of remains. However, these efforts were halted due to team safety concerns.

A total of 7,699 U.S. troops, as of July 19, remain unaccounted for from the Korean War, with 5,300 of them presumed to be north of the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ). In addition to Korean War losses are 111 Cold War losses, also in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula.

VFW’s Director of National Security and Foreign Affairs John Towles said that restarting the recovery mission is a “good first step,” but there is a lot of work that needs to be done by the Trump Administration. In November 2017, President Donald Trump placed North Korea on the State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

“This significantly complicates things due to the restrictions that it places on what agreements can be established with them,” Towles said. “In order for the DPAA to restart recovery missions in North Korea, there must be a more formal agreement between our two nations.”

The summit between the two countries also brought about the potential suspension of military training exercises between the U.S. and South Korea. The Pentagon announced in June it called off an August exercise between the two allies.

“Of course North Korea wants to suspend, if not end, all military-to-military exercises between the United States and the Republic of Korea,” said VFW Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence, “but until peace truly comes to the peninsula, we have an obligation to all our Indo-Pacific partners to maintain military readiness and joint force interoperability.”

Lawrence, a Korea DMZ veteran, said South Korea soldiers whom he worked with looked to U.S. troops “as true allies” who shared their democratic ideals.

“Any move to end that relationship without serious consideration could severely damage that relationship,” Lawrence said. “The President has stated that he is considering the withdrawal of all troops from the peninsula, but given the potential for hostilities in the region, I don’t see that happening until a peace treaty is finally signed.”

Towles said that South Korea and a lesser-talked-about stakeholder, Japan, have expressed concerns of a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean peninsula as part of any potential future treaty.

“Japan and South Korea both rely on the U.S. for military support,” Towles said. “A complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea could open the door for China to step in and fill that void. In this case, if something were to trigger an escalation of tensions between China and Japan, China would feel more emboldened to act militarily because Japan would not have the resources needed to defend itself.”

Towles said the U.S. has to “heavily rely” on China’s influence with North Korea to encourage denuclearization. However, he said there is some fear China might not be willing to help because of recent “tit-for-tat” trade tariffs between the U.S. and China.

“China may be less willing to continue its assistance to the U.S., regardless of any short-term advantage that China might reap from a nuclear-free North Korea,” Towles said.

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Thanks to the help of a VFW life member, President Donald Trump presented the Medal of Honor to the widow of a World War II veteran on June 26 at the White House.

Army 1st Lt. Garlin Murl Conner, a Kentucky farmer and World War II veteran, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1941 and was honorably discharged in 1945. He served as an intelligence staff officer with the 3rd Bn., 7th Inf., 3rd Inf. Div. During his service, he fought for 28 months on the front lines in 10 campaigns, participated in four amphibious assault landings, was wounded seven times and earned a battlefield commission, according to U.S. Army records.

The campaign to get him the Medal of Honor did not begin until 1996 when former Army Green Beret Richard Chilton, a life member of VFW Post 11279 in Twin Lakes, Wis., was conducting research on his uncle who died after the Anzio landing in Italy.

On the morning of Jan. 24, 1945, near the town of Houssen, France, German troops converged on 3rd Battalion’s position. According to the official citation: “As German infantry regrouped and began to mass in an overwhelming assault, Lieutenant Conner ordered friendly artillery to concentrate directly on his own position, having resolved to die if necessary to destroy the enemy advance.”

Conner’s widow, Pauline, accepted the medal on his behalf. Conner died in 1998 at the age of 79.

“We must have hope that this agreement will finally bring peace to the peninsula and help bring closure to thousands of families of missing American servicemen from the Korean War,” said then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman.

“The VFW salutes President Trump for bringing this issue to the table, and we thank the North Korean leader for agreeing to it. Now the hard work to bring the initiative to fruition begins.”

North Korea to Return U.S. Remains from Korean War

According to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, there are 7,700 American MIAs from the Korean War, with 5,300 of them believed to be in North Korea. From 1990 to 2005, a repatriation agreement between the United States and North Korea resulted in the return of 229 sets of remains and the identification of many others. However, the U.S. suspended its recovery mission in North Korea in 2005 due to security concerns. The VFW sent a letter to President Donald Trump ahead of his historic summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un asking him to include the repatriation of U.S. service members as part of his negotiations. He did.

According to a joint statement released after the June 12 summit, “the United States and the DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) commit to recovering POW/MIA remains.” As of press time, the agreement also included the immediate repatriation of remains already identified.

“We must have hope that this agreement will finally bring peace to the peninsula and help bring closure to thousands of families of missing American servicemen from the Korean War,” said then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION about specific legislation or VA benefits, contact VFW’s Washington Office at vfw@vfw.org. A member of VFW’s National Veterans Service staff will respond as soon as possible.
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Legislative Fellowship
Accepting 2019 VFW, SVA Now

VFW and the Student Veterans of America (SVA) are seeking candidates to participate in the 2019 Legislative Fellowship program. Now in its fourth year, the fellowship will bring up to 10 student veterans to Washington, D.C., next spring in conjunction with VFW’s National Legislative Conference.

“The VFW is responsible for the passage of every significant veteran and military quality-of-life program in this century and last, and we want to continue sharing this experience with a new generation of veteran leaders through our partnership with SVA and our annual Legislative Fellowship program,” said then-VFW National Commander Keith Harman in June.

Student veterans interested in applying for the 2019 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship must complete an application package that includes an essay proposal on one of four specific legislative issues. The proposal should include a discussion of why the issue is important to the veterans’ community, and how the fellowship candidate plans to address the issue through federal policy solutions and community-based advocacy.

Selected fellows will then be flown to Washington to deliver their proposals on Capitol Hill alongside 500 fellow veterans’ advocates as part of the 2019 VFW Legislative Conference, March 3-7. VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship opportunities are open to currently enrolled student veterans at colleges and universities with active SVA chapters. Candidates must be VFW members. For more information or to apply, go to www.vfw.org/studentfellowship.

VFW Endorses New Veteran’s Creed

The VFW has joined 10 other military and veterans organizations in introducing a new “veteran’s creed” to serve as a call to action for veterans to keep the values they learned in service as they transition into civilian life.

The creed is the result of the groups’ extensive discussions and consultations that began last fall at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

VFW’s Director of National Security and Foreign Affairs, John Towles, who served as an Army combat medic in Iraq and Afghanistan, participated in the announcement of the new creed for veterans.

“In the Army, I lived both the Soldier’s Creed and the NCO Creed,” said Towles. “Both set a path for who I was as a member of the armed forces, and served as a constant reminder of my obligations as a leader to those on my left and to my right.”

“As veterans, we must realize that our service does not stop simply because we take off the uniform. Many of us struggle to find our place once we leave the military, but now we have a new set of watchwords to guide and remind our brothers- and sisters-in-arms that our mission is far from over.”

Former Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. also endorsed the initiative.

“I believe the Veteran’s Creed could remind veterans of what they miss about their service and encourage them to continue to make a difference in their communities and across our country,” he said. “We need their talents.”

Officials Choose Desert Storm Memorial Site in Washington, D.C.

After more than three years of planning and debate, the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts voted in June to locate the new National Desert Storm War Memorial adjacent to the National Mall at the intersection of Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street, NW, in Washington, D.C. The commission voted 4-2 to approve the site, which will commemorate those who served in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm in 1990-91.

“No one could have envisioned an American-led international coalition defeating the then-fourth largest standing army in the world in six weeks from the air and 100 hours on the ground,” said Scott Stump, VFW life member of the Department of North Carolina and CEO and president of the National Desert Storm War Memorial Association. “But we did, and we did so magnificently, all because of our equipment, our training and our leaders — all of whom honed their teeth in Vietnam, where they learned how not to fight the next war.”

A total of 383 U.S. service members died in the conflict. The memorial’s location is near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial. The memorial is projected to cost about $25 million. The VFW has pledged $500,000 toward its construction, with three payments of $100,000 each already made.
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A program in Kansas teaches combat vets how to handle and care for horses. Those who've completed the program say the horses and the environment are calming influences, and the traits they learn apply to their everyday lives, too.

BY TRACI BADALUCCO

PHOTOS BY SUSAN MCSPADDE
Astrid Benson, who was a member of VFW’s Department of Washington, served a 10-month deployment in Iraq from 2009 to 2010. For years, doctors prescribed him medication to treat his PTSD symptoms, but in Kansas he was looking for a different remedy.

“It’s quiet,” he said of the calming effect of the farm. “Everything is not going a million miles a minute around you.”

Headrick is one of 152 veterans who came to Stilwell to participate in the War Horses for Veterans program. The nonprofit organization, founded in September 2014, aims to teach combat veterans about horsemanship while offering a mentoring program that helps them build possible career contacts.

Through a $7,000 VFW Foundation Grant, War Horses for Veterans trains volunteers to participate in its Mentorship Leadership Development Program. Mentors oversee 15-20 participants.

They identify changes veterans hope to make and create an accountability plan to meet those goals. War Horses for Veterans co-founder Patrick Benson said in April that the program had seven volunteers training to become mentors.

RELIEF BEYOND A PILL

At the farm, owned by program co-founders Andy and Pat Brown, around five to six veterans spend three days learning how to groom, saddle and ride horses with Benson and other volunteer veterans. The effect horses have on those who struggle with PTSD is astounding, Benson said.

“They can sense every bit of your emotions,” the 38-year-old VFW life member said. “It’s pretty remarkable. Once you build that connection and you click with them, it’s like nothing else. It’s like an endorphin release and then a rush of calming. Your anxiety goes away.”

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, PTSD is a condition that can develop when someone has experienced a shocking, scary or dangerous situation. Symptoms include flashbacks of the traumatic event, nightmares and difficulty sleeping. Sights and smells also can trigger the traumatic event.

According to VA, around 31 percent of Vietnam veterans, 20 percent of Iraq War veterans and 11 percent of Afghanistan War veterans have PTSD. The condition is generally treated with therapy and medication, but that hasn’t stopped veterans like Headrick from searching for relief beyond the kind that comes in the form of a pill.

Headrick, who had never ridden a horse before traveling to Stilwell, said he saw changes in himself on the first day of participating in the program.

“The first time I went to go into the pen with Wild Wind, he was going crazy,” Headrick said of his first experience on the Browns’ farm with one of the Paint horses, a registered breed bearing distinctive spots of color in their coats. “And I’m sitting there shaking. The next thing you know, I’m walking around the horse, then I’m up on him.”

Horses create a calming effect, he added.

“You are at the mercy of this creature and it’s humbling,” he said. “It literally stops you in your tracks and slows everything down because you have to focus with that horse.”

‘PAYBACK’ FOR MILITARY SERVICE

The focus Headrick described is not confined to the pen, Benson explained.

“You take that mentality and apply it to your personal life,” Benson said. “All of these traits transition over very well.”

Benson brainstormed the idea for War Horses for Veterans after he saw how equine therapy affect-
ed his own PTSD symptoms. After serving as an Army infantryman in Iraq in 2003, the Missouri native returned home from the war and entered the equestrian industry as a horse trainer.

“I realized what I was doing for a living was saving me,” he said. “I was fixing all these horses, but all in all they had been fixing me.”

When friends he served with visited him in Missouri, he observed the same effects.

“They would get clarity after working with the horses,” Benson said. “They would say, ‘Man, I haven’t been this relaxed in so long.’”

Benson met the Browns in 2013 through equestrian connections and began training and selling Morgan horses (one of the earliest U.S. breeds and used extensively as cavalry horses in the Civil War) for them later that year. When Benson proposed the idea for the equestrian program, the Browns were immediately on board.

Andy Brown, a 45-year businessman in the pipe and valve industry, and his wife, Pat, a retired travel agency owner, fronted more than $250,000 the first year to get the program started.

“It’s really important to us to make sure that our veterans are taken care of,” Pat said. “They have taken care of us. The guys who come through here are looking for help, and if we can provide that help with our horses and our programs, what better payback can there be?”

The Browns currently spend about $250,000 the first year to sustain War Horses for Veterans. The program also is funded through private donations and local and national grant programs.

**STAYING CONNECTED TO PARTICIPANTS**

The weekend immersion and mentorship program is open to all combat veterans. To qualify, veterans can apply on the organization’s website www.warhorsesforveterans.com. Once accepted, the organization and local sponsors provide airline tickets, lodging and meals throughout the three-day workshop.

What makes their organization different, Pat explained, is the follow-up they provide after veterans leave.

Army and Iraq War veteran Derrick Boddy, for example, moved to Pleasanton, Kan., for a ranch job in 2017 after participating in the program. The San Diego native said he found War Horses for Veterans through friends.

“I like animals,” he said. “I know animals...
respond to humans. I wanted to learn how to ride a horse.”

Through the organization’s mentoring program, Boddy, who was living in Washington state at the time, was able to land the job in Kansas.

“They are still showing help just to touch base to see how I am doing,” Boddy said.

Since the program’s inception, seven vets, as of June had moved to Kansas City for work they found through the program.

The organization’s co-founders were not the only ones who had seen the positive effects of equine therapy. In Leonia, N.J., a team of researchers from Columbia University’s Irving Medical Center in New York are studying how equine therapy can help veterans with PTSD. The Man O’ War Project is a nonprofit founded and funded by Army veteran and horse enthusiast Earle Mack.

In the study, veterans meet once a week for two months and are guided through interactions with horses. Veterans never mount the horse during the study. Like the program in Stilwell, participants in New Jersey experienced similar changes after working with the horses.

“There is something about the experience of being around the horses,” said Prudence Fisher, co-director of the study.

She added that “people are looking forward to these sessions,” even when they are ill and should rest at home.

“But they come because they feel like they need to be around the horse,” Fisher said.

Once the study is complete, researchers plan to write and publish an equine therapy manual for other organizations and individuals to use in the future. The manual will give step-by-step instructions on how to perform the equine-assisted therapy, according to the researchers.

ENDOWMENT ENSURES FUTURE

Back on the farm in Kansas, however, there is no guidebook to the day-to-day affairs at the Brown estate. Instead, participants move at their own pace while connecting with fellow veterans.

During summer sessions, they can be found unwinding after a long day under the sun with a swim in the Browns’ pool while barbecuing and listening to music.

“It’s opened my eyes that it’s not only about me,” Headrick said. “It’s about us as a whole. It’s amazing.”

Veterans can return to the farm for future workshops as many times as they want. They also have the opportunity to become mentors.
Gary Llewellyn, 71, a retired Army warrant officer and a member of VFW’s Department of Missouri, participated in the program in 2015. He later moved to Kansas from Michigan to become a program mentor.

“I knew I wanted to be involved with this,” Llewellyn said. “That light is going to click on, that smile is going to come across their face, and they are going to have that freedom of not having that anxiety in their life.”

Earlier this year, the Browns constructed an 11,520-square-foot indoor arena and a 2,500-square-foot lounge to expand workshops into the fall and winter months.

They also rolled out their spouse program, where spouses of veterans can join them during a weekend workshop.

Andy and Pat Brown also recently created an endowment to sustain the operation and a trust in which all of their land would go to the War Horses organization.

“Our goal here is that this will continue to grow,” Andy said. “We have all that set in place now. Whether we do or don’t live long enough, there will be funds there to continue this whole thing on and on and on.”

For veterans like Headrick, the open-ended invitation is too much to resist.

“It created a calm, and it doesn’t want to leave, and that’s a good thing,” Headrick said. “And I will be going back as many times as they allow me to come back. I’m addicted.”

**EMAIL** magazine@vfw.org

Traci Badalucco is a freelance writer based in Kansas City, Mo.
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VFW’s newest commander-in-chief is a man who wants to get things done, sooner rather than later. His experiences as an artilleryman in Korea and an undercover police officer in New Mexico, as well as his rapid rise through VFW’s ranks, underscore his leadership philosophy.

“I believe in more action and less talk,” Lawrence said. “And this all comes back to membership recruiting. We know what the plan is, now we have to execute it. That’s why I chose ‘Make it Happen’ as my slogan.”

To attract veterans of the post-9/11 generation, Lawrence said VFW members must do a better job of spreading the message about the organization’s reasons for existing.

“We’ve come a long way on reaching those vets,” he said. “What we need to do better is simply tell our story about the wonderful things we do for veterans and our communities. Young vets are interested in participating in projects where they believe they are making a difference.”

Lawrence said being a veteran who came of age in the 1980s puts him in a unique position. He’s been influenced by examples set by older vets and wants to pass on that knowledge to younger vets, a group with which he believes he has great rapport. He said it gives him “the needed sense of balance” to be successful in his tenure as Chief.

“I believe I can work with all generations,” the 52-year-old said. “Being involved with VFW for almost 20 years now, I understand the needs of our older veterans. I also can relate to our younger veterans and what they want. I want to hear their points of view and their visions for the future of the organization.”

As VFW transitions to younger leadership at all levels, Lawrence wants to make sure that all veterans feel welcome.

“Our membership is not only getting younger but more diverse every day,” he noted. “When young vets join a Post, they might
Vows to Happen’

FAMILY FAMILIAR AT NEW MEXICO POST

The Chief and his family are integral members of Post 7686 in Alamogordo, N.M.

Wife: Mary is the Auxiliary treasurer.
Son: Frederick, 32, a VFW life member, served multiple tours in Iraq as a Marine.
Son: Christopher, 30, a VFW life member, is an Army warrant officer and served with the 75th Rangers in Iraq and Afghanistan.
Daughter: Tianna, 16, is an Auxiliary member.
Daughter: Kaidyn, 12
Grandchildren: four

feel like they want to shape it to fit their goals. That’s wonderful. We want them engaged, but we don’t want anyone excluded.

“I tell Post commanders to make all their members feel involved. The military and VFW are made up of veterans from all walks of life. It’s imperative that we make all feel comfortable when they’re in a VFW Post.”

A FAMILY HISTORY OF MILITARY SERVICE

Lawrence’s motivation to join the military came from his father, a World War II veteran.

“I wanted to continue my family’s history of service,” he said. “When I was growing up, my father took me to my first VFW Post. My brother, Patrick, served in the military, too. He was on active duty in the Air Force when he died of a brain tumor.”

The Chief enlisted in the Army’s delayed-entry program while still in high school and entered service immediately after graduat-

VFW Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence pauses for a photo in May at the Centennial Plaza at VFW’s National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo. The former Army artilleryman and public servant said his overseas military service, civilian career and steady progression through VFW’s leadership ranks have given him the knowledge and vision to motivate an active and inclusive membership to reach greater heights for the organization.

ing in May 1983. He took basic training at Fort Bliss, Texas.

From the end of 1983 through much of 1984, Pfc. Lawrence served at Camp Stanley, South Korea, with C Btry., 2nd Bn., 61st Air Defense Artillery. He worked as a crew member on a Chaparral air defense missile system.

“One of the highlights of my tour was participating in Team Spirit, a series of exercises with the South Korean military,” he said. “The South Korean soldiers I worked with looked to the Americans as true allies and brothers- and sisters-in-arms. Another highlight during my time was getting to attend a USO show when they came over for Christmas.”

After his stint in Korea, Lawrence transferred back to Fort Bliss. He served there as a sergeant with the 4th Bn., 1st Air Defense Artillery Bde. In Texas, he coordinated nuclear, biological and chemical training for his battalion in the event of a chemical attack.

“What I remember most about that duty was the gas chamber training for new recruits,” he recalled. “Instead of being gassed, I got to see it from the other side.”

Lawrence was at Fort Bliss from 1985 until he was discharged on March 18, 1986. He said the training and experience he gained in the military helped shape him as a person.

“No. 1 and foremost, it gave me discipline,” he said. “It made me more organized and also put me in better physical shape. It also gave me more confidence to make decisions and improved my communication skills.”

FIREMAN, PARAMEDIC, POLICE OFFICER

Soon after his discharge, Lawrence ventured into the civilian world. Determined to become a public servant, he began training with the Alamogordo (N.M.) Department of Public Safety and earned his firefighter certification in August 1986. Two months later, he became a certified emergency medical technician.

The next year, on March 20, 1987, he graduated from the New Mexico State Law Enforcement Academy and was certified as a police officer.

In 1988, he began a two-year stint as an undercover narcotics agent with the New Mexico Interagency Narcotics Task Force. He then worked as a private investigator from 1990-99. After that, he joined the Tularosa (N.M.) Police Department for two years.

From 2002-10, he returned to work as a private investigator. In 2010, he opened his own firm, Lawrence Investigations, and closed that in 2015.

“My military training was invaluable to me in my role as a law enforcement officer and private investigator,” he said. “Much like the experience I gained as a soldier, it helped form me as a person.”

PAYING BACK HIS POST

While working for the Tularosa Police Department in 2000, Lawrence joined VFW Post 7686 in Alamogordo, N.M. It was an experience that made him an immediate fan of the organization.
As a Korea service veteran, Lawrence is particularly interested in the recent U.S.-North Korea agreement and how that could jumpstart the resumption of remains recovery operations in that country.

“As of July 16 of this year, a total of 7,699 American troops were still listed as missing from the Korean War,” he said. “That includes an estimated 5,300 in North Korea. In addition, 111 of the 126 missing from the Cold War are in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula. There is still much work to do to ensure that we recover and identify them all. This is a top priority for VFW and for me personally, as well. I look forward to working with the Trump Administration and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and providing any support we can.”

The Chief added that as an organization, VFW must always be mindful of what’s going on in the world and how to respond.

“We must be ready to adapt to new realities and uncertainties,” Lawrence said. “Our mission never changes but the logistics of accomplishing that mission can change. We must always be prepared to do what’s best for veterans.”

And as all VFW commanders know, the best method of accomplishing their goals is with the help of a robust membership. The Chief said that increasing membership and attracting new members are big reasons he chose “Make it Happen” for his theme.

“Our voice is important on Capitol Hill,” Lawrence said. “The bigger our membership, the louder the voice. We always must be in a favorable position to advocate for our military and veterans. A top priority will be sustaining that strong voice with a large, active membership.”

To increase membership and be in tune with today’s veterans, the Chief said VFW should reflect the demographics of the U.S. military in the 21st century. The key to that, he said, is for Post members to heartily welcome their brothers- and sisters-in-arms and their families when they walk through the doors and make them feel appreciated.

“VFW is made up of veterans from all walks of life,” he said. “We all share the common ground of military service. We’re here to help all vets, young and old, male and female. Everyone has something to offer.”
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Since 1990, the U.S. military has burned thousands of tons of waste at bases used in the Persian Gulf War, the Afghanistan War, the Iraq War and other overseas sites. Veterans who were possibly exposed to toxic fumes from these open-air pits want to know if they were adversely affected.

In response, VA created a Burn Pit Registry in 2014 for veterans who believe they are sick from exposure to burn pits. The registry is open to all Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, anyone who served in Djibouti after Sept. 11, 2001, those who served in Operation Desert Shield or Operation Desert Storm in 1990-91, and vets who logged duty in Southwest Asia after Aug. 2, 1990. VA says that so far, more than 141,000 veterans have signed up for the registry.

VA officials say they are continuing to study the health effects of burn pits, but that could take years. In the meantime, two young VFW members are pursuing a legislative solution. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii), who served with the Hawaii National Guard in Iraq and is a life member of VFW Post 2875 in Honolulu, and Rep. Brian Mast (R-Fla.), a double amputee wounded while serving in Afghanistan as an Army explosive ordnance disposal specialist and a member of VFW Post 9610 in Lake Park, Fla., introduced H.R. 5671, also known as the Burn Pits Accountability Act.

The VFW supports this legislation and in 2015 approved Res. 619 on toxic exposures that urges Congress “to invest adequate resources to study, diagnose, and treat conditions and illnesses associated with toxic exposures.”

The legislation would require the Department of Defense to conduct periodic health assessments for U.S. troops who were “based or stationed at a location where an open burn pit was used.” The bill also would automatically enroll those troops into VA’s Burn Pit Registry, unless they opt out.

**Long-Term Health Effects?**

The House Veterans Affairs Committee’s Subcommittee on Health held its first hearing on burn pits June 7. Ken Wiseman, former associate director of VFW’s National Legislative Service in Washington, D.C., testified at the hear-
The risks on the battlefield.

URGE THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF BURN PITS. He also urged the VA to do more to assess the health effects of burn pits. He also urged the Pentagon to regularly assess troops who were based at locations where open burn pits were used and automatically enroll them in VA’s Burn Pit Registry.

Wiseman, a life member of VFW, effective treatments identifying causes specifically for burn pits and creating a congressionally directed medical research program (CDMRP) for burn pits.

“The CDMRP has shown progress in identifying causes, effective treatments and biomarkers for Gulf War illness,” said Wiseman, a life member of VFW Post 1503 in Dale City, Va. “The VFW is committed to outreach and research on potential adverse health effects associated with exposure during deployment to open-air burn pits and airborne hazards.”

GET RECORDS AND GET DIAGNOSED Ryan Gallucci, director of VFW’s National Veterans Service, advises any veteran who suspects he or she is sick from exposure to burn pits or other toxic exposure to contact the VFW for assistance.

“Veterans should gather any medical records — both military and civilian — that document conditions they believe resulted from exposure to burn pits,” Gallucci said.

“Those are usually respiratory or gastrointestinal conditions, cancer or related body systems, and so on. We also would ask if they have anything that could easily link these diagnoses to their time in the military.”

Gallucci said that VA doesn’t currently acknowledge any presumptive conditions related to burn pits, but added that benefit claims still can be granted on a direct basis if a service connection can be established. Some conditions for troops who served in Southwest Asia already are considered presumptive, such as functional gastrointestinal disorders, chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia.

“The VFW is helping to make sure that this generation isn’t behind, but some of this is going to rest with VA and Congress to expand presumptive conditions,” said Gallucci, who is in the registry as an Iraq War veteran.

VFW Resolution 619 Urges Congress “to invest adequate resources to study, diagnose and treat conditions and illnesses associated with toxic exposures.”

“To date, we succeeded in creating the Burn Pit and Airborne Hazards Registry, and we encourage veterans to register to give VA the mechanism to track health care conditions and do the research necessary to identify trends.”

Gallucci added that he and his staff are seeing these trends emerge in the civilian workforce. He cited a recent Department of Labor decision that allows private contractors who worked on open-air burn pits to seek health care for resultant health problems.

“The next step is making sure Congress moves quickly in approving any new presumptive conditions,” Gallucci said.

In the meantime, he added, VFW wants to help service members get into the VA benefits system even before they separate from the military.

“If you’re still on active duty and believe you have a health care condition related to burn pit exposure, get it checked out and get diagnosed,” Gallucci advised. “At that point, we’re filing for your benefits and documenting these conditions as soon as possible.”

Carlos Fuentes, VFW’s director of National Legislative Service, said he saw first-hand the effects of burn pits when he served with the Marine Corps Reserves in Afghanistan in 2009.

“When I went to the doctor and complained about chest pains, she told me ‘Well, you’re too young to have any type of chest complications,’” Fuentes said. “We can’t wait decades like our Vietnam vets waited when it comes to Agent Orange conditions. Congress and VA and DoD must improve research.”

EMAIL sgaskell@vfw.org
For 30 minutes in the early morning darkness of Sept. 6, 1968, the 187th Infantry’s Alpha Company (96 men) fended off more than 600 communists, losing 28 percent of its men killed.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

What occurred in the early morning hours of Sept. 6, 1968, in the village of Ap Trang Dau can only be described as “a living hell.” The bloody battle there took place three miles east of Trang Bang in Hau Nghia province of III Corps Tactical Zone.

Just hours earlier, on Sept. 5, 96 men of A Co., 3rd Bn., 187th Inf. (“Rakkasans”), 101st Abn. Div., were flown in near the village, which was located close to Highway 101 some 26 miles north of Saigon.

Their orders were to assist B Co., 2nd Bn., 506th Inf., 101st Abn. Div., in cordoning off the village. Some believed high-ranking Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) officials were in the area, while intelligence reports claimed that two VC battalions were based there. The American intent was to secure the area and prevent the enemy from breaking through.

What awaited Alpha Company was almost unimaginable. Hitting the landing zone in the late afternoon of Sept. 5, the men were greeted by heavy enemy fire from the village. Some troops were wounded before the choppers even hit the ground, and one was killed.

The company spread out in the rice paddies fronting the village while taking fire. Capt. Kenneth B. Jenkins set up the company command post (CP) on the main road running through a field and into the village. Air and artillery support could not be used before or during the battle because there were too many U.S. units close to the village.

Along the far left front of the perimeter were 2nd Platoon members Spec. 4 Joseph Fuscone and Sgt. Joseph Nugent. Fuscone recalls setting up three-man defensive positions about 100 feet apart. 1st, 2nd and 3rd platoons were placed as the front line to block any enemy retreat by way of the main road, while the 4th Platoon was in position to act as rear guard.

Due to heavy automatic weapons fire from the village, Nugent said his men were unable to move very far. And when they did move, they were not able to link up with any friendly units, as had been the original plan.

After getting into position around nightfall, things seemed to settle down, Fuscone said. Not wanting to stick around until daybreak, the communists did try to break through the back side of the village. Elements of the 25th Infantry Division prevented their escape.

But around 2:15 a.m., things changed. The eerie calm quickly turned into a deadly storm of steel.

A ‘MASSIVE HUMAN WAVE ATTACK’

“All hell broke loose,” Nugent said. “We had been shot at off and on all night, but this was the most unbelievable volume of fire I had ever seen. They came out of the village in several waves. In the first wave, they had women and children in front of them.”

Spec. 4 Bob Rummel, of 3rd Platoon, described the firefight as a “massive human wave attack.” “A living hell began,” he said. “There were so many VC and NVA coming that it was complete chaos. Had they wanted to, they could have killed us all. They just wanted to get out of there, and we just happened to be blocking their way.”

During the up-to-30-minute battle, Sgt. 1st Class Thomas E. Warren noticed that several of his men holding a position about 82 yards on the far right flank were greatly outnumbered. He began firing his weapon and hurling grenades to draw enemy fire on himself, allowing the soldiers to get back with the main force. Later, harassed

READ VFW’S OFFICIAL VIETNAM WAR BOOK

VFW’s official account of the Vietnam War’s deadliest confrontations — Brutal Battles of Vietnam — gives readers a “grunt’s-eye view” of the most significant land battles of the eight-year conflict. The 480-page book covers the war’s famous fights, as well as lesser-known battles that had enormous impact on the course of the war.

In the excerpt printed here, the 187th Infantry’s Alpha Company lost nearly a third of its 96 men while fighting communists in the village of Ap Trang Dau.

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas E. Warren earned the Distinguished Service Cross for his valorous actions during the battle, which was described as “a living hell.”

Praised by veterans who served in Vietnam, as well as military historians, for its research and first-hand accounts, Brutal Battles of Vietnam commemorates the war’s 50th anniversary and the troops who fought it. As Vietnam War and NFL veteran Rocky Bleier wrote in the book’s forward, it is “a monumental work.” Make it part of your library.
by sniper fire, Warren stood exposed in a rice paddy to guide in evacuation helicopters with a strobe light. Wounded several times, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Meanwhile, Fuscone was positioned with four other men at the platoon CP, which was the last position on the left flank. They were all severely wounded, with Fuscone being the only one able to defend the position, despite his chest wound.

He radioed Nugent for help, telling him everyone was either wounded or dead. Before Nugent could get there, three NVA soldiers ran directly into Fuscone and his fellow wounded GIs. He told his buddies to lay still and play dead. Right before the enemy reached him, Fuscone threw a grenade and killed the communists. For his actions that night, Fuscone was awarded a Bronze Star for valor. Due to heavy enemy fire, it took Nugent several tries to get to the CP, his squad “firing as fast as they could” to cover him.

“When I got to the CP, I jumped over the dike and saw the bodies of my friends lying mangled and bleeding,” Nugent said. “I went to Joe [Fuscone] first. He had been shot through the lung. Before I could go any further, I had to shoot more of the VC who were coming toward us from the village.”

Human waves continued as hundreds of enemy troops fled the village, overrunning A Company’s position. After about a half-hour of intense fighting, it suddenly stopped. The only sounds were the cries of the wounded, Nugent said.

THE TOLL

U.S. KIA: 32

U.S. WIA: 42
He made his way through the bodies trying to help those still clinging to life.

“I did what I could for the wounded,” he said. “I saw that many of our KIA had been shot at close range in the center of their foreheads.”

In fact, 23 of the Americans were shot at close range. Jenkins and his men at the company CP also were killed, as the VC overran them, too.

**AFTERMATH OF AP TRANG DAU**

The 187th’s C Company was on standby in nearby Cu Chi when it got word that A Company was taking heavy fire. The men hopped on choppers, fully expecting to be engaged at the landing zone.

To the surprise of C Company members like Spec. 4 Gary Foster, of 3rd Platoon, there was no resistance.

“At first light, as we went into position to where A Company was supposed to be, I could see bodies everywhere I looked,” Foster said. “Then I was put on what I believe was the worst detail I have ever had to do — bagging the bodies of A Company’s KIAs.”

Foster said that during his “grisly task,” the bodies were stiff and cold as they had lain there all night. One he vividly recalls, however, was folded in half beneath the poncho when he picked it up. The soldier’s chest was gone, as if he had tried to smash a grenade, Foster said.

“A Company losses were losses to us,” said Jon Lambie, of C Company. “Many of us trained together in the States, and we knew each other personally.”

Capt. James Bond, C Company commander, said his men spent the greater part of the morning separating the KIA from their gear and placing them in body bags to be evacuated. They also found a small wounded child and patched her up before getting her out of the field and to a hospital.

“I don’t know quite how to describe the situation,” Bond said. “Like many things in Vietnam, it was somewhat of a paradox.”

Members of A Company looked back to that small window of time and think the situation might have been avoided. “I asked myself, ‘Where was the air and artillery support?’” former Spec 4 Mitchell Wnek reminisced. “A lot of good men died that morning because we were overpowred. Air or artillery would have changed things for us.”

Jimmy Searle agreed. “I’ve often wondered what would have happened if they would have sent air strikes when Capt. Jenkins wanted them to,” Searle said. “I have to think that some of those guys might still be alive today.”

Nugent’s bravery and quick thinking earned him the Silver Star. Fuscone credits him with saving his life. “Sgt. Nugent and his squad helped save the lives of a lot of men that night during and after the battle,” Fuscone said. “In between fighting and tending to the wounded, Sgt. Nugent called for Medevac choppers and coordinated with the battalion to get much-needed support and help take command of the situation.”

All told, 32 GIs were KIA and 42 WIA in the Battle of Ap Trang Dau. On Sept. 5, two members of the 506th Infantry were killed along with one man from Alpha Company.

The remaining 29 died on Sept. 6 — 27 from Alpha (including four attached medics), as well as one each from B Company (a clerk-typist) and E Company (a recon scout).

Also, an infantryman from C Co., 1st Bn., 27th Inf. — part of the 25th Infantry Division’s blocking force — lost his life. Gunfire caused 72 percent of the fatalities; shrapnel the remainder. Not surprisingly, being an airborne unit, more than 60 percent (20) of those killed were volunteers and 12 were draftees.

“Sept. 6: There isn’t hardly a day that goes by when something doesn’t trigger a thought about that day,” said Ron Salme, who was shot three times and peppered with shrapnel at the village, and spent nearly six months recuperating in a hospital in Japan.

**IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIETNAM WAR**

**‘BRUTAL BATTLES OF VIETNAM’**

Genuinely a one-of-a-kind work, *Brutal Battles of Vietnam* provides the most comprehensive battle history of the war yet published in a single volume. Brimming with compelling stories, the book focuses exclusively on the perspective of the fighting man. Virtually all of the deadliest engagements are covered concisely. The high drama of the battlefield is felt through words on 480 pages and in 700 pictures, many rarely seen before, covering some 100 military actions.

While ensuring the legacy of those who served, it also makes a wonderful family keepsake.

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The village of Ap Trang Dau was located between Trang Bang and Cu Chi, just off Highway QL-1.

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**30 • vfw • SEPTEMBER 2018**
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The Zinger folds to a mere 10 Inches.
For the second year in a row, VFW Post 4113, in St. Johns, Mich., hosted Combo Con, an event that brings together gamers and fans of cosplay, movies and comics to raise money for the Post. This year’s event collected more than $2,500.

BY KARI WILLIAMS

Repetitive keyboard clicks and sudden, synchronized shouts of awe echo through a Michigan VFW Post as video gamers wage war against one another while others, some dressed as characters from gamer culture, gather around a large display monitor to watch the action unfold — all in an effort to raise money for veterans.

More than 250 people converged this summer at VFW Post 4113 in St. Johns, Mich., roughly 25 miles north of Lansing, for its second Combo Con — a two-day fundraiser featuring video game competitions, cosplay (dressing up as characters from popular culture) and special guests from the fighter-game community. It raised more than $2,500 for the Post.

Hunter DeSander, the 25-year-old commander of VFW Post 4113, is the brainchild behind Combo Con. A fan of gaming since his youth, DeSander’s passion continued during his military service, and he saw that gaming was “still a predominant thing” that brought people together.

While there are similar, nationally recognized events in the state, DeSander said he wanted to bring that “thrill of competition” to St. Johns. DeSander said he presented the idea for Combo Con to the Post because he likes to “go outside the norms.” While he said events like honor guard services and flag-raising ceremonies are “amazing,” there is not a big correlation between VFW and video gaming.

“I thought, let’s try and branch out, see if we can make something happen, and, in the long run, we did,” said DeSander, who served in Afghanistan in 2013 with the 2nd Bn., 506th Inf., 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Abn. Div., as an infantryman.

‘A CHANCE TO BRIDGE THE GAP’

Most of the volunteers assisting gamers at the event, according to DeSander, were VFW members, and, as Post commander, he said he was able to bring the two communities together.

“As sort of the liaison between the veteran community and the fighter game community, I had a chance to bridge the gap,” DeSander said. “We are willing to explore boundaries and defy expectations, and we recognize you guys as a community and in turn when you think of gaming, Combo Con [is] the place that helps veterans.”

Post 4113 trustee Gary Price, who served during the Vietnam War from 1967-68 on the USS Colleton ABP-36 with the Mobile Riverine Force, was a volunteer at this year’s event. He said he liked the idea of Combo Con and that DeSander “has a way of getting things together for fundraisers.”

One draw for attendees was having special guests from the gaming community. This year, DeSander brought in Kenny O’Brien, known as Unrooolie in
the fighter-game community, and Woolie Madden. O’Brien, who has been involved with gaming since the mid-1990s, said DeSander reached out to him online about appearing at Combo Con.

That Combo Con raises money to help veterans is one of the “main reasons” O’Brien wanted to be involved. Friends of his — and members of the fighter-game community — have served in the military.

“We get a lot of messages from community members that are like, ‘Hey, I’m stationed over here, and we watch your [online video] streams and we watch you play fighting games, and it’s helped us get through tough times,’” O’Brien said.

Additionally, Madden said because Combo Con is “half tournament, half convention,” the format is unique.

“This is a combination of both of those things, and furthermore, you add a cause on top of it, and it just becomes a good event that’s absolutely worth supporting,” Madden said.

Having a cause connected to the event also sets Combo Con apart, according to Madden.

“It’s a very unique thing in the fighting-game community to see these sort of events having any sort of charity associated [with them],” Madden said. “And in this case, it’s all the reason to do the things that you love, the things you have fun with and are passionate about, and you know that it’s going toward a worthy cause. That’s the best.”

Stephen Parker, of Davison, Mich., attended Combo Con for the first time this year. He said he heard about the event through a podcast Madden was on. Parker, whose hometown is St. Johns, drove the roughly 60 miles with his stepbrother for the two-day event.

“It’s a good cause, of course,” said Parker, whose father, stepfather and grandfather all have served in the military. “It’s a great way to both have fun and raise money for charity.”
‘PHENOMENAL’ DINNERS ACCELERATE THE HEALING PROCESS

During a cool March evening at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., service members and veterans were able to take a break. They were laughing, relaxing and, even for a couple of hours, not thinking about the treatment they were receiving at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in nearby Bethesda, Md.

Since 2003, wounded warriors from Walter Reed have gathered for the Aleethia Foundation’s Friday Night Dinners. Foundation founder and executive director Hal Koster, a life member of VFW Post 2562 in Silver Spring, Md., said these dinners are an important part of the healing process.

“In the beginning, we saw mostly combat injured service members at the dinner,” said Koster, a Vietnam War Army veteran who served as a helicopter door gunner with the 174th Assault Helicopter Company. “We have now transitioned into providing a night away from the hospital to patients who have cancer, [traumatic brain injuries] and other illnesses.”

GETTING AWAY TO ‘FEEL HUMAN AGAIN’

Retired Marine Corps Maj. Richard Burkett, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, said he has attended about 50 dinners since first arriving as a patient at Walter Reed in 2012.

“This dinner is always something to look forward to,” Burkett said. “It’s great to get out of the hospital and having some phenomenal food. They made it really easy to leave the hospital to get away for a few hours and feel human again.”

Burkett, a former Osprey pilot, was injured when his aircraft crashed in northwest Africa. He needed to have his right leg amputated because of his injuries.

Burkett said he has been getting treatment for an infection in his left leg that developed after the right-leg amputation.

Since 2010, VFW National Headquarters has supported the Aleethia Foundation and has sponsored 17 Friday Night Dinners. In total, VFW has donated more than $72,000 to the wounded warrior dinners.

‘THERE IS SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO’

The VFW-sponsored Friday Night Dinners also give VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Patrick Murray a chance to connect with some of the wounded warriors.

In 2006, Murray, a former Marine Corps machine gunner, also was being treated at Walter Reed after a blast from an improvised explosive device caused his right leg to be amputated.

“I learned about the Friday Night Dinners while recovering at Walter Reed,” said Murray, who was wounded in Fallujah, Iraq. “The dinner was a really great opportunity to get out of the hospital for an evening. It was always a great escape.”

Murray, a life member of VFW Post 3150 in Arlington, Va., said it’s “rewarding” to go to the dinners, as well as spend time with and talk to men and women who are recovering from a wound, injury or illness.

“They might feel down in the dumps and that things are getting over their head, but I try to let them know there is a future and there is something to look forward to,” Murray said. “I get to go back and tell them that I was where they were a decade ago, and now, I’m here working for VFW. I let them know to keep their heads up and not let their bad situation overtake them.”

Koster said he originally didn’t plan for the dinners to go this long.

“We expected to quit these dinners as soon as the combat-injured troops stopped coming in,” Koster said. “But we learned that patients who are at Walter Reed for other than combat injuries also want a night out from the hospital and a chance to get away.”

Koster, who is retired, said he plans to organize dinners with the Aleethia Foundation for the “foreseeable future.” The next VFW-sponsored dinner will be Dec. 14.
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Veterans are three times more likely to develop a breathing disease that affects millions of Americans. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), is the third leading cause of U.S. deaths, according to the COPD Foundation. But a new program from a top U.S. health insurance company might help alleviate symptoms of the disease.

Humana offers “Harmonicas for Health” classes at its 17 Humana “neighborhoods” in 11 states nationwide. The program was developed by the COPD Foundation, and Humana purchases materials and kits from the foundation, according to Ben Kennedy, who teaches the classes for Humana.

Kennedy said Humana is a company “driven by health and well-being,” and, that being the case, the harmonica class was “particularly interesting” because there was a need for it.

COPD is the fourth “most prevalent” disease among veterans and affects roughly 15 percent of VA patients, according to the COPD Foundation. Humana’s classes are offered at no cost to the community.

“It’s just a good testimony to the fact that Humana is trying to improve the lives of people,” Kennedy said.

Participants, according to Kennedy, are taught the pursed-lip breathing technique, which also is used during pulmonary rehab. The technique requires inhaling through the nose, then exhaling, with lips pursed, through the mouth.

“That’s a technique that people can still utilize whether they’re playing the harmonica or not,” Kennedy said. “Playing the harmonica actually provides some resistance and, therefore, through that resistance they hopefully strengthen their lungs, strengthen their diaphragm, and that allows them to breathe easier.”

John Melito, of Kansas City, Mo., has played the guitar, mandolin and accordion, but he hadn’t picked up the harmonica until his first Harmonicas for Health class in March at the Kansas City Humana neighborhood. He discovered the classes through Humana’s newsletters and thought it would be fun to learn how to play the harmonica.

Melito said he has enjoyed the lessons so far, and the breathing techniques are part of the reason he decided to participate.

“It’s just a lot of fun,” Melito said. “It is
There are four main benefits to playing the harmonica, according to Kennedy, but the “overarching” reason is improved breathing. Second is the intellectual component of learning a new skill.

“There’s also an emotional component as well,” Kennedy said. “Because as you’re doing something you like, [that] releases these feel-good chemicals in your brain — endorphins.”

Last is the social component of meeting new people, something that Kennedy said helps “ward off” cognitive decline.

Kennedy said the classes have been offered at Humana’s neighborhood locations since August 2016. The classes started in Kentucky and Tennessee after Humana learned about the program through the COPD Foundation.

“Unfortunately, Kentucky and Tennessee have some of the highest rates of COPD in the nation,” Kennedy said. “And so when we wrote the programs out, they were so successful that Humana wound up rolling them out to all of their markets.”

While Kennedy said it is “hard to gauge” how many people attend the classes for the health benefits, he believes the “overwhelming majority” of participants have “some sort of breathing condition.”

“The good thing about the program is that even people who don’t have a breathing condition, hopefully we still strengthen their diaphragm muscles,” Kennedy said, “and even from my own perspective, I don’t have any breathing problems. But when I first learned how to play, I could really tell a difference.”

Harmonicas for Health classes are open to anyone in the community, not just those with breathing issues. For more information, or to see if there is a Humana neighborhood in your city, visit https://www.humana.com/about/humana-in-your-community/.

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Dedicated to collecting the first-hand accounts of all veterans from World War I to present day, the Library of Congress’ Veterans History Project (VHP) was created to preserve the memories of wartime veterans. VHP makes those personal accounts accessible to the public, which allows future generations to hear directly from veterans and better understand a veteran’s service.

Established in 2000, VHP has more than 105,000 collections already archived and still is accepting new collections every day. VHP Director Karen Lloyd, a retired colonel who served 28 years in the Army, said VHP is proud of that number. “But it’s only because of volunteers across the nation that reached out to the veterans in their lives and listen to their stories,” Lloyd said. “That has enabled us to have so many collections, so far.”

Participating in the program is simple. Veterans can tell their stories through personal narratives, artwork inspired by their service, photographs and journals. The Library of Congress only will accept original copies of photographs and journals, but Lloyd said all collections are preserved and become a “permanent fixture” of the Library of Congress.

“Veterans also get the commitment that their collections will be accessible for not only your family but for future generations of Americans,” Lloyd said. “The Library of Congress is everyone’s library.”

Lloyd said it’s important for veterans to share their stories and that every veteran has an interesting story to tell. “Think about all the movies, books, documentaries and TV shows that use war as a backdrop — it’s not the war that gets people’s interest, it’s the individual stories,” Lloyd said. “And we won’t know peoples’ stories if they don’t tell them. We would not have known about the Navajo Code talkers of World War II if they hadn’t have chosen to tell their stories.”

Anyone can help. Veterans, interviewers or someone donating a veteran’s collection can participate in VHP. Students that are in at least the 10th grade are espe-

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**Tell Your Story to the Library of Congress**

With more than 105,000 collections already archived, the Library of Congress’ Veterans History Project has been collecting the memories of veterans for nearly 20 years. By participating, you can ensure your personal accounts will live forever.

**Obtain a Field Kit**

The Veterans History Project (VHP) field kit is a source to learn how to compile and submit a veteran’s collection to the Library of Congress. Its checklist and instructions ensure that a collection submission meets all requirements. Field kits also provide information about accepted media formats for interviews.

The field kit can be downloaded at [http://www.loc.gov/vets/kitmenu.html](http://www.loc.gov/vets/kitmenu.html). There, visitors also can download sample questions to help interview veterans.

Those who do not have internet access can call VHP’s toll-free information line at 1-888-371-5848.

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**By Dave Spiva**

**RIGHT:** Nazim Abdul-Kariem, a World War II Army veteran who fought in Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge, speaks to Lyndon Bilal in September 2015 for a Veterans History Project (VHP) interview. Abdul-Kariem served under the name John Chandler, but he changed his name when he converted to Islam. VHP was created in 2000 to collect and preserve first-hand accounts of wartime veterans. These interviews allow future generations to hear from veterans giving a first-hand account of their service.
cally encouraged to conduct interviews with veterans in their community. (See sidebar on VHP information for youth.)

“When a veteran has someone who will listen, they may realize that their service was meaningful and they did make a difference,” Lloyd said. “I think it’s very important that volunteers help veterans understand that they do have meaningful stories.”

Participation in VHP gives an opportunity for those who haven’t served to get a sense of the camaraderie and the deep friendships made in the military during war, Lloyd said. “I encourage people to reach out to the veterans that they know in their community, listening to their stories and donate their work to the Library of Congress,” Lloyd said. “I also suggest to every veteran to think about their story and tell someone.”

For more information on how to participate in the Library of Congress’ Veterans History Project, visit https://www.loc.gov/vets/kit.html.

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

FOLLOW THE 30-20-10 RULE

To ensure a collection meets requirements, contributors are asked to send:
• At least a 30-minute or longer recorded interview, and/or
• At least a 20-page memoir, and/or
• At least 10 original photographs, letters, military documents or pieces of two-dimensional artwork.

GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS AVAILABLE

Veterans History Project provides background resources on past wars, collection samples from other school and youth organizations and guidelines to help students and educators. For more information, visit http://www.loc.gov/vets/youth-resources.html.

HOW TO CONTACT VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Phone: (202) 707-4916
Toll-Free Message Line: 1-888-371-5848
Fax: 202-252-2046
Email: vohp@loc.gov
Website: www.loc.gov/vets
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/vethistoryproject/
Blog: https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/category/veterans-history-project/

WHERE TO SEND A COLLECTION

VHP asks for submissions to be sent through commercial delivery services, such as UPS or FedEx, because U.S. Postal Service mail is subject to security screening and may cause damage to the collection.

Collectors who live in the area also may drop off a collection in person at:
VHP Information Center, Room LJ-G51, Jefferson Building, Library of Congress

VIEW VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTIONS

VHP’s website — www.loc.gov/vets — has a record of all veterans who contribute to the project. Some collections include digital content that can be viewed by the public.

Those interested also can view collections in person at the Library of Congress. To set up an appointment, email vohp@loc.gov or call (202) 707-4916. Appointments must be made at least 10 working days before a visit.
A
n Army veteran received a $1,500 grant from VFW’s Unmet Needs program for living expenses because he is unable to work.

Jesse Thorsen, a member of VFW Post 5789 in Lee’s Summit, Mo., served two deployments in Afghanistan. During the first in 2009-10, Thorsen was an infantryman with 2nd Bn., 509th Regt., 25th Inf. Div. He later served as a combat engineer with the 402nd Engineer Company (Sapper) while in Afghanistan in 2012-13.

Thorsen, of Lee’s Summit, Mo., said that he suffers from epilepsy and had to separate from the Army after 14 years of service in August 2016. He is rated 70 percent disabled by VA due to his service-connected disabilities. After his discharge, he applied for social security disability due to having seizures.

"Originally, I was denied on my social security disability," Thorsen said. "So I figured I would work to try to make some money for my family."

Working as a bricklayer, Thorsen suffered a seizure on a job site and was unable to keep his job because of the episode.

"I understood why I had to be let go," Thorsen said. "I thought I was going to eventually kill myself one day by working if I kept trying to work."

Because he is epileptic, Thorsen is unable to work, and his wife, Susan, can’t work because she is his VA caretaker. Thorsen, again, applied for social security disability after losing his job. His claim was eventually approved, but in the meantime, Thorsen and his family needed money for rent. That’s when Thorsen found out about the Unmet Needs program through the Kansas City (Mo.) VA Medical Center.

Thorsen applied for the Unmet Needs grant in February, which he said was an “easy” process. He said the program paid his landlord directly.

“We were very happy about that,” Thorsen said. “Our landlord was very understanding and good to us. It was nice to be caught up.”

After receiving the grant, Thorsen said he and his family were able to financially get back on track. He said that he thanks VFW for helping him and his family during a “hard time.”

“VFW has helped me so much,” Thorsen said. “The Unmet Needs program really helped out our family in a time that we needed it. We appreciate everything the VFW does for not only disabled vets but also for veterans of foreign wars and all veterans alike.”

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1-800-947-2966
The Bronze Star Medal: Vietnam War
By James T. Born, VFW Post 3848, Henderson, Nev.


Interestingly, the book contains 58,220 words — the same amount of U.S. service members who were killed during the Vietnam War. Each word represents a man's or a woman's life.

Saints & Sinners
By Jack Dalton, VFW Post 2433, Union, N.J.

From helicopters in Vietnam to Harleys on the home front, Saints & Sinners is a fictional account of one man's survival as he battles the demons of war. Haunted by vivid dreams of his Vietnam tour as a teenage paratrooper, Luke Gavin immersed himself in the wild lifestyle of an outlaw motorcycle club.

While others chased wealth by dealing drugs, Luke pursued beautiful women. With his close friend Casey, a powerful Marine veteran, and an assortment of other young men at similar loose ends, Dalton chronicles how the Pagan motorcycle club wreaked havoc on the streets of New Jersey after the war. And while Luke struggled with his memories, his surprising survival continued to plague his mind.

a. Puzzled Existence: A 60-Year Autobiographical Portrait of the Artist
By Jason P. Goodman, VFW Post 1463, Lititz, Pa.

This book is an autobiography by the artist, Jason Goodman. During the Vietnam War, he served with the Navy’s Riverine Forces on the Mekong River and Delta, a place where life expectancy was measured in days. Jason established Alchemy Studio Inc., in 1970, a few months after returning from combat. Within a week, he sold two metal sculptures, which placed him on the path of professional artist. He has followed this path for more than 40 years. In 2012, his career was recognized by the prestigious, international organization, Worldwide Who’s Who, honoring Jason with the distinction of “Professional of the Year in Fine Art,” a fitting accomplishment that quantifies Jason’s unwavering dedication to his work.

To Any Soldier: A Novel of Vietnam Letters
By G.C. Hendricks, VFW Post 4042, Bigfork, Mont., & Kathryn Watson Quigg

In this novel set in 1968, a young Marine attack pilot in Vietnam and a college freshman in North Carolina met each other through letters. Ashley Beth Justice, naive and separated from the war, begins her letter-writing as a way to contribute to the war effort. Jay Fox, in the midst of bombing runs each evening, has distanced himself from any close relationships, but there’s something about Ashley Beth’s innocent and forthright manner that compels him to answer her letters. Even amid the bloodshed and unrest, the two dreamed of a life together while struggling to understand the war and themselves.

Back From the Front: PTSD (Military Edition) Understanding You and Your Caregivers
By Don Pearsall, VFW Post 12167, Merritt Island, Fla.

This is a book for the military’s post-traumatic stress sufferers. It was written by Don Pearsall, a Vietnam War veteran. Pearsall offers and explains self-help methods for service members and veterans who have post-traumatic stress and how caregivers cope with their own post-traumatic stress caused by their loved ones’ military service.

VFW magazine’s “Book Corner” features select books written by VFW members. If you have written a book or an e-book bearing an ISBN or ASIN, contact the magazine for guidelines at magazine@vfw.org or by mail at: VFW magazine, Book Corner, 406 W. 34th Street, Suite 523, Kansas City, MO, 64111. The subject of the book must relate to the military or veterans.
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Walgreens Offers No-Cost Flu Shots for Veterans

BY KARI WILLIAMS

Everyone should get a flu shot, even babies older than six months, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And a partnership between Walgreens and VA gives veterans more access to do so.

Walgreens formed a relationship in 2013 offering veterans in the VA system no-cost flu shots at Walgreens locations. VA provides the shots to its patients. Veterans not enrolled with the VA are not eligible. Family members of veterans also are not eligible for the no-cost shots.

James Wood, vice president of federal markets at Walgreens and a veteran himself, said he questioned why he had to drive 25 miles to the nearest VA facility for a flu shot when there was a Walgreens two miles away.

Because influenza is a “serious disease,” it is important for people to get a flu shot, according to Wood.

“Every year people die from flu or complications of the flu,” said Wood, a VFW member at-large with the Department of Florida.

Since 2010, hospitalizations related to influenza have ranged from 140,000 to 710,000, according to the CDC, and “flu-related deaths are estimated to have ranged from 12,000 to 56,000.”

Valerie Creswell, an infectious disease doctor with the Kansas City VA Medical Center, said the best time to get the flu shot is as soon as it is available.

The influenza virus, according to Creswell, changes throughout the season, so, in developing vaccines, researchers look at what the viruses “predominantly” were in March. It then takes roughly six months to create the vaccine itself, she said.

Creswell said generally there are four strains that the flu virus protects against — two for influenza A and two for influenza B.

“Some years match better than others,” Creswell said. “That’s why we always struggle with people saying the flu shot doesn’t work.”

Even if the vaccines are not a “perfect match,” Creswell said it still offers “some protection.”

Walgreens introduced vaccines for the 2018-19 season in August. As a component of VA’s eHealth Exchange project, Walgreens immunization records can be added to a veteran’s health care files electronically. The records, according to VA, should be available at VA clinics within 24 hours of vaccination.

Side effects of the vaccine are “mild and short-lasting,” according to the CDC, and could include soreness/redness at the injection site, low fever or aches.

The CDC’s age recommendation for receiving the vaccine has been in place since 2010. But age, health and allergies factor into whether an individual should get a flu shot, according to the CDC.

It is “vitaly” important for the older population to receive the flu shot because, according to Creswell, that demographic is more likely to have “chronic illnesses,” making them more at risk for contracting the flu.

Between the availability of the vaccine at VA facilities and pharmacies, Creswell said that “influenza A definitely should be preventable.” She said getting the flu shot also protects others.

“Anything you can do to prevent an illness is much better than dealing with the side effects with it,” Creswell said.

EMAIL kwilliams@vfw.org

MORE THAN 100,000 NO-COST FLU SHOTS ISSUED

The Walgreens-VA partnership began in 2013 with a pilot program in Florida. The program provided more than 2,000 flu shots that year, according to James Wood, of Walgreens, who served during Operation Desert Storm from December 1990 to April 1991 with the Air Force Reserve’s 711th Special Operations Sqdn., as an electronic warfare officer. The nationwide program provided 100,000 shots in 2017, he said.
We’re ready to serve you

Flu shots for VA-enrolled veterans

• No cost to you*
• Records updated with VA
• Just walk into your local Walgreens

*This wellness benefit is only for veterans enrolled in the VA Health Care system. Family members and Tricare members are not eligible. No-cost flu shot option is for quadrivalent vaccine only, available now through March 31, 2019. Vaccines subject to availability. State-, age- and health-related restrictions may apply. Vaccine may be in limited supply after March 1, 2019. This does not constitute an endorsement of Walgreens or Walgreens products. Patients will also be asked to complete a vaccine consent form at time of service.
For its hurricane relief efforts, Sinton’s Post 12160 earned VFW’s Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

VFW Post 12160 in Sinton, Texas, chartered in May 2017. Its members planned to open a full-time cantina and restaurant to bring in income to work on behalf of veterans and youth.

But according to Post Commander Todd Richardson, everything changed when Hurricane Harvey made landfall on Aug. 25, 2017.

“It’s been a wild and crazy year,” he said. “We immediately began using our new building to store non-perishable goods for distribution to the local population in need.”

Members set up distribution points in the affected towns of Rockport, Refugio, Woodsboro and Aransas Pass. Richardson said Post members also took their barbecue grills to those towns and served hot meals to more than 2,500 people.

Additionally, the Post purchased school supplies for several hundred children displaced by the hurricane.

In a thank-you letter to the Post, Sinton Elementary Assistant Principal Diane Mireles wrote that the school took in 35 students whose school had been destroyed.

“Many of these children lost everything,” Mireles wrote. “Your gift of school supplies filled a need that many parents simply could not afford to.”

Later, when Hurricane Irma hit Puerto Rico and Florida, Post 12160 teamed up with Corpus Christi’s Club Rio to donate the rest of the goods.

Members loaded more than 500 cases of water, several boxes of clothing and thousands of pounds of food items onto trailers to deliver to Club Rio for distribution to Puerto Ricans.

For its efforts in hurricane relief, the Post received the Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award in July at VFW’s national convention in Kansas City, Mo.

Post 12160 is named after Marine Cpl. Mark R. Goyet. A mortarman, Goyet served in Iraq and later in Afghanistan with the 3rd Bn., 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Div. With just eight months left on his enlistment, he volunteered to go to Afghanistan in 2011. The 22-year-old former high school football player was killed during combat operations on June 28, 2011, in Afghanistan’s Helmand Province.

Exceptional community service efforts among VFW Posts. The late Fred C. Hall was a VFW life member. Throughout his adult life, he was a great proponent of VFW Posts taking an active role in the community. He is credited with starting the VFW Post Insurance program.

Richardson said the Post and Auxiliary hurricane relief efforts were supported by Boy Scout Troop 450, Venture Crews 5857 and 1216, Sinton EMS and the Sinton Volunteer Fire Department.

“Be honest, we have been very blessed by awards this past year,” Richardson said. “We didn’t even know about the Fred C. Hall award. We just did what we thought needed to be done.”

Once hurricane season ended, the Post opened its restaurant on Veterans Day, with the bar opening in February. Richardson said the Post is ready for whatever happens next.
Quartermasters Eligible for Membership Awards

Department Quartermasters can earn tribute rifles as part of the new membership program this year.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

When Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence developed his national membership program for the year, he decided to include Department Quartermasters in his recognition.

“Department Quartermasters are an important driving force for our accomplishments and successes,” Lawrence said. “I feel it is important to recognize our Department Quartermasters and give them an opportunity to participate in an awards program as well.”

To that end, Lawrence implemented the Department Quartermaster Early Bird Incentive.

For every Department achieving 92 percent in membership by Jan. 1, 2019, the Department Quartermaster will receive either a Henry Repeating Arms 30-30 caliber rifle or a Veterans Travel Services credit voucher of equal value.

“Year after year, I’ve witnessed our Department Commanders have the opportunity to excel in their leadership positions and receive awards for their accomplishments, but not the Department Quartermasters,” Lawrence said. “The Henry rifle award incentive is an excellent opportunity to recognize these hard-working professionals for their contributions to our great organization.”

VFW’s relationship with Henry dates back to its national convention in 2015. It was there that the company’s president and CEO Anthony Imperato presented Henry Military Service Tribute rifles to several veterans.

Imperato said he was “moved” to make an impromptu $50,000 donation to VFW.

“I looked out at the audience of veterans from all walks of life, all races and creeds, all parts of the country, all wars from WWII to Afghanistan, and felt compelled to do so in memory of my father,” Imperato later told VFW magazine. “He served in the Korean War.”

At VFW’s national convention last year in New Orleans, Imperato made a second $50,000 donation to VFW.

The gun company also created two VFW Tribute Edition Golden Boy rifles so that Posts, Districts or Departments could purchase and raffle them off as fundraisers.

VFW Post 7560 in Hawk Point, Mo., bought a VFW Post Tribute Edition rifle, and Post Quartermaster Charles Rohrbacher said raffle ticket sales were good, bringing in nearly $1,000.

“Everybody kind of fell in love with it,” Rohrbacher said.


The VFW Tribute Edition Golden Boys feature a waving U.S. flag on the right side of the receiver and 50 stars in its upper-left corner. The flag is surrounded by a leafy-scroll design that extends to the front of the receiver and surrounds the VFW logo.

Further, “Veterans of Foreign Wars” is spelled out, and VFW’s motto, “No One Does More For Veterans,” also is engraved on the weapon.

The VFW Tribute Edition is a salute to the nation’s largest and oldest non-profit combat veterans’ service organization as a whole, while the VFW Post Tribute Edition allows a more customized approach by highlighting an individual Post.

The fore end of the VFW Tribute Edition states “VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS” with the organization’s slogan directly underneath, all of which is framed with a gold painted stylized rectangle.

The fore end of the VFW Post Tribute Edition also includes the words “VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.” The space underneath can be customized with a specific Post number, city and state.

Michael Linster, of VFW Post 9760, in Berryville, Va., said his Post raffled one of each rifle in November 2016 and sold about 500 tickets per raffle.

“I thought they were fantastic weapons,” Linster said. “It’s a great opportunity to purchase one, especially with the VFW logo on it. I thought it was fantastic.”

VFW Membership Director Rick Butler said he’s encouraged by the addition of the Quartermaster incentive.

“Recognizing Department Quartermasters who achieve 92 percent by Jan. 1 is a really good motivator,” Butler said. “Commander-in-Chief Lawrence has a good slate of membership objectives and incentives, and we are confident it will be a great year.”

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* Every patient is given a Patient Satisfaction Survey shortly after treatment. Responses to the 11-question survey are aggregated to determine patient satisfaction with the delivery of treatment.
^ Quality of Life Survey data measured the patient’s self-assessed quality of life and measurable quality of improvement at three months.
Confront Your Hearing Loss with Captioned Phone Service

Talking on the phone with friends and family can be a great source of happiness. Even the most mundane, task-oriented calls give us a sense of connection and control over our lives.

But for those with hearing loss, this isn’t always the case. Without this daily social connection, people with hearing loss can be at risk for chronic sadness or a depression diagnosis.

Here are three reasons talking on the phone can help people with hearing loss live happier, more connected lives.

**CONNECTION VS. ISOLATION**

Imagine if you had to wait until conditions were just right to take or make a call — or worse, had to wait until a friend or family member could assist you. Communication difficulties, if not addressed appropriately, can lead to social withdrawal and self-defeating thoughts such as, “They can’t understand me, so I might as well quit trying.”

**CONFIDENCE VS. ANXIETY**

We all want to feel confident in our abilities and decisions, but struggling to communicate can be a real confidence killer. For example, older adults with hearing loss might feel as if they are to blame for misunderstandings. Many feel apologetic about repeatedly asking for help to understand what is being said. They lose confidence in their abilities, face anxiety in social situations and worry about personal relationships. This often leads to physical symptoms such as tension, exhaustion and weakened immune systems.

**CAPABLE VS. INEFFECTIVE**

Disability does not mean inability. But to many people, not being able to hear and discern messages and meaning can result in feelings of shame, humiliation and inadequacy.

They worry about being seen as incompetent or stupid. The feeling of shame linked to hearing loss also can be linked to misunderstanding and the resulting social embarrassment of giving the wrong response.

Captioned telephone services — and the simple joy of talking on the phone again without special conditions or assistance — might have a positive impact on a person’s relationships with family and friends, their happiness and overall mental health.

If you know someone who struggles to communicate on the telephone, learn more about captioned telephone service by calling the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-800-821-2606, option 1.
VFW Membership Mail-In Application

Mail form to: Membership Department, VFW National Headquarters, 406 W. 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111
Questions? Call (888) JOIN-VFW (888-564-6839) or email us at membership@vfw.org

☐ Yes! I want to join the VFW as a member-at-large and continue serving my country, my community and my fellow man.

PLEASE ENTER YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION:

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Last First M.I.

Address: ____________________________________________

Street City State Zip

E-mail: ____________________________________________ Phone: _______________

Birthdate: ________________________________ Social Security #: __________________

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Eligibility (choose all that apply)

☐ WWII ☐ Korean War ☐ Vietnam ☐ Persian Gulf War

☐ Afghanistan ☐ Iraq ☐ Korean Service (7/1/49 to present) ☐ Kosovo

☐ Combat Action Ribbon ☐ SSBN Deterrent Patrol Insignia ☐ Expeditionary Medal

☐ Occupation Medal ☐ Inherent Resolve ☐ Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay

☐ Other:

Dates of Service: ___________________________ to ___________________________

Service Location: ___________________________

Name of Campaign Ribbon or Medal: ___________________________

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☐ Please bill me annually for my membership.

☐ I would like to enroll in the Automatic Payment Plan.

☐ LIFE MEMBERSHIP (one-time)

☐ LIFE MEMBERSHIP (installment plan)

☐ Please send me an invoice for my 11 monthly installments towards Life Membership.

☐ I would like to enroll in the Automatic Payment Plan.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP FEE SCHEDULE

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Automatic Payment Plan Terms and Conditions: You authorize the VFW to initiate electronic debit entries or affect a charge by any other commercially acceptable practice to your account set forth above for the payment of dues reflected on this application. You understand such charges may be made in 2-3 business days of payment due date. For installment payments, charges will be made on or around the 1st or the 15th day of the month. The authorization will remain in full force until VFW has received notification from you of its termination or upon completion of the installment payments. Annual dues are subject to change. By completing this authorization, you acknowledge that you will only receive notice when the payment would differ by more than $10.00 from the most recent payment. Call VFW Customer Service at 1-800-963-3180 or write to VFW at: VFW, P.O. Box 119028, Kansas City, MO 64171 to inquire about or cancel a payment, or to report problems such as bank closures, lost or stolen account numbers, closed accounts, or unauthorized transactions. Cancellation requests must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. Central Time ten business days prior to the scheduled payment date. If you are unaware of the charge date for your account, please contact VFW. If a payment is returned by your financial institution (e.g., due to insufficient funds, incorrect account information, closed account, etc.) the VFW will contact you at the address we have on file for you, explaining why the payment could not be processed, and providing alternate payment options. The privilege of making payments under this agreement may be revoked by VFW if any item is not paid upon presentation. You may have additional rights and responsibilities under the Electronic Funds Transfer Act.

Life Membership Installment Plan Terms and Conditions: The VFW Life Membership installment plan allows any VFW member/applicant to purchase a Life Membership by making an initial payment of $45.00 and (11) monthly payments. The member will be issued an Annual membership card at the time of enrollment. The member may elect to receive a monthly statement by mail or may set up a payment profile to make the monthly payment automatically using a credit/debit card or bank account. A payoff amount will be printed on each monthly invoice, allowing the member the option to pay in full. A permanent Life Membership card will be issued upon the completion of payments. The Life Membership fee is determined from the schedule used by the applicant's age on December 31 of the year in which the application is submitted. Delinquencies will be handled as follows:

- Up to 30 days – continue to bill
- 31 to 120 days – delinquency can be corrected through make up payment(s) or plan end date pushed forward

More than 120 days – member is dropped from the Installment Plan, all monthly payments made to date, are applied to future years annual dues.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

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Cardholder’s Name: ____________________________________________

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VERIFICATION & SIGNATURE

I attest that by forwarding this application that I am a citizen of the United States of America and that I have confirmed my eligibility for membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. I further give authority to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to verify my eligibility for membership.

Signature of Applicant: ____________________________ Date: ________________

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12 dozen $165.60

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Shipping & Handling

| Up to $10.00 | $0.40 |
| $10.01 to $25.00 | $0.70 |
| $25.01 to $50.00 | $0.90 |
| $50.01 to $75.00 | $1.10 |
| $75.01 to $100.00 | $1.30 |
| $100.01 to $200.00 | $1.50 |
| $200.01 to $300.00 | $1.70 |
| $300.01 & Over | $2.00 |

MO Residents only add 8.6% sales tax

Product Total $

Shipping & Handling

Total $
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 it’s 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.

Diabasens is shown to provide relief from:

- Burning
- Swelling
- Tingling
- Heaviness
- Numbness
- Cold extremities

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 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 feel again in my feet,” raves Marsha A. from Texas

Key To Effective, Long Lasting Relief

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

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.

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

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444th Engineer Battalion (Broken Heart): Kenneth Cox (636) 794-1310, md11@warne.net
95th Evacuation Hospital 1966–73: Terry M. Caseley (820) 464-2101, nickmee@charter.net
317th Airborne & 263rd LEM: Jack McCabe (847) 778-3473, jmccabe57@gmail.com
739th Military Police BN Association: Diane De Rosa (312) 615-6698, kiashula@aol.com
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D Company, V/89th Infantry, 108th LB, Americal Division, Chu Lai, RVN: Lynn D. Baker (801) 253-1591, ddbhistory@yahoo.com
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TACMO Squadrons VO-3, VO-4: Cheryl Voss, tcma_reunions@bti95.wisconsin.com
US Navy Abraham Lincoln SSB (N) 502: Dennis H. Grinn (262) 909-6828, dlh_grinn@outlook.com
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USN Westchester County, LST-1167: Peter Lowe (516) 381-3064; peter @huntervalton.com
USN West Virginia BB-48: Tony Reiter (651) 483-6867; mikes@westvirginia.org
USN Willis Keith DD-775: Mike McHenry (757) 813-5320; mmcherry@tmng.us

REUNION AND CLAIMS

PROPOSED
HMB, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, ROK March 1967–March 1968: David L. Rowell (319) 331-3853, gvtmartinee@gmail.com
Pasir Island, MCPO Platoon 3013, 1967: Harry Hopwood (352) 543-6897; usmarine4kct@att.net
Florida USMC/USCG CP2 Full Fling: Carl R. Bennett (863) 230-9009; cbennet4@yahoo.com

CLAIMS
Readers are urged to help these vets seeking claim substantiation statements. Respond directly to the person listed at the end of the claim assistance request. This service is provided for VFW members who are in the process of filing a VA claim. Please submit your claim online at www.vfw.org/forms/vfw-claim-form.

Army:
173rd Airborne Vietnam 1966–68 Seeking anyone to substantiate PTED and migraine appeal claim. – Michael T. McConnell (352) 561-4948 Miermcconnell7@gmail.com

561st Company Construction U-Tapao or Kanachanaburi or Udorn Thailand Feb. 1969–Mar. 1969 Seeking anyone to substantiate exposure to herbicides or Agent Orange. – Charles Allen Smith (540) 465-5688 smithb1950@gmail.com

Marines:
Pioneer Battalion 3rd Marine Division Thailand January–July 1962 Seeking anyone to substantiate that I was in Thailand serving as a medic. VA says there was no record of this, denied for Agent Orange claim. – Edward Scott (724) 589-0081 edscott412@gmail.com

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New Arthritis Painkiller Works on Contact and Numbs the Pain in Minutes

New cream works faster and is more targeted than oral medications. Key ingredients penetrate the skin within minutes to relieve joint arthritis pain. Users report significant immediate relief.

By Robert Ward
Associated Health Press

BOSTON – Innovus Pharmaceuticals has introduced a new arthritis pain relief treatment that works in minutes.

Sold under the brand name Apeaz™, the new pain relief cream numbs the nerves right below the skin.

When applied to an arthritic joint, or a painful area on the body, it delivers immediate relief that lasts for hours and hours.

The powerful painkilling effect is created by the creams active ingredients, three special medical compounds.

Anesthetics are used in hospitals during surgery. They block nerve signals from the brain so that patients don’t feel pain and they work fast.

The anesthetic found in Apeaz™ is the strongest available without a prescription.

The cream form allows users to directly target their area of pain. It works where it is applied. The company says this is why the product is so effective and fast acting.

“Users can expect to start feeling relief immediately after applying,” explains Dr. Bassam Damaj, President of Innovus Pharmaceuticals.

“There will be a pleasant warming sensation that is followed by a cool, soothing one. This is how you know that the active ingredients have reached the affected joint and tissue.”

Works In Minutes

For arthritis suffers, Apeaz™ offers impressive advantages over traditional medications. The most obvious is how quickly it relieves pain discomfort.

The cream contains the maximum approved OTC dose of a top anesthetic, which penetrates the skin in a matter of minutes to numb the area that’s in pain. This relief lasts for several hours.

Published pre-clinical animal studies have shown that the ingredients in Apeaz™ can also prevent further bone and cartilage destruction.

There are also no negative side effects like from oral medication. Apeaz™ delivers its ingredients through the skin. Oral medications are absorbed in the digestive tract. Overtime, the chemicals in pills can tear the delicate lining of the stomach, causing ulcers and bleeding.

When compared to other arthritis medications, Apeaz™ is a fraction of the cost. At less than $2 a day, the cream quickly is becoming a household name.

Those with terrible arthritis in their hands and fingers, love how easy Apeaz™ is to open. The jar fits in the palm of the hand, which makes it much easier to use.

Instant Pain Relief Without a Prescription

Many Apeaz™ users report significant improvements in daily aches and pain. Many more report increased flexibility and less stiffness. They are moving with less pain for the first time in years, like Henry Esber, an early user of Apeaz™.

“I’ve tried more pills than I can count. I’ve also had a handful of cortisone shots. Nothing is as effective as this product. With Apeaz™, I get relief right away. I rub a little on my hands. It keeps the pain away. It also prevents the pain from getting really bad. It’s completely changed my life.”

How It Works

Apeaz™ contains the highest, non-prescription OTC dose of a medical compound that fights pain on contact. When applied to the skin it goes to work within minutes by penetrating right to the source of your pain, numbing the nerve endings.

“This is why Apeaz™ is so effective for people with arthritis pain. It reduces pain while adding an additional potential layer of joint support,” explains Damaj.

A New Way to Treat Pain

Although Dr. Damaj and his team say that their cream is the fastest and most effective way to relieve arthritis pain, they believe there is still a reason to take joint pills. The most effective are those which help to further lubricate, strengthen and support the joints.

That’s why every container of Apeaz™ comes with ArthriVarx™, a breakthrough supplement that’s taking on joint support in an entirely new way.

ArthriVarx™ works on your joints, making it the perfect companion to Apeaz™.

Apeaz™ is an FDA drug with approved claims for the pain relief of the following conditions:

- Arthritis pain
- Simple back pain
- Sprains
- Muscle stiffness/ pain
- Athletic injuries
- Wrist, elbow, shoulder, hip, knee, ankle, foot, muscle or joint pain

How to Get Apeaz™

This is the first official public release of Apeaz™. In order to get the word out about Apeaz™, the manufacturer, Innovus Pharmaceuticals, is offering special introductory discounts while supplies last.

A special phone hotline has been set up to take advantage of deep discounts during this ordering opportunity. The discounts will automatically be applied to all callers.

Your Toll-Free Hotline number is 1-800-457-9555 and will only be open while supplies last. Experience the guaranteed Apeaz™ relief already enjoyed by thousands of consumers. Don’t miss out, call 1-800-457-9555 today.
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ATTENTION VETERANS!
1 in 4 seniors will fall this year.*

VFW Magazine Reunion Form
The listing of military reunions is a free service provided to VFW members ONLY. The contact person or the coordinator MUST be a VFW member or the notice will not appear in the magazine. Illegible or incorrectly completed forms will be discarded without notification. Reunions must be submitted at least four months in advance of the reunion date and will run only ONCE in the magazine.

Reunion Listing in Magazine

- **Planned reunion**: Reunion arrangements have already been made
- **Proposed reunion**: Determining interest in organizing a reunion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military service (check one):</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Army Air Forces (WWII)</th>
<th>Coast Guard</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How reunion will appear in magazine: (Please Print Clearly)

Specify which unit level will be holding the reunion. Sample listing: 1st Infantry Division, 16th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, A Company.

Contact name, phone & e-mail:

Date of reunion: ________________  City/state reunion will be held: ________________

Size of reunion:  
- 0-50  
- 51-100  
- 101-500  
- 501-1,000  
- Over 1,000

Coordinator name & phone:

Check the box that best describes the category of feature stories you find of greatest interest in VFW magazine. (Choose only one.)
- Military history of wars and battles.
- Current events on defense and foreign policy.
- VA benefits and services.
- VFW internal matters and activities.

Please return completed reunion forms to: REUNIONS, VFW Magazine, 406 W. 34th St., Suite 523, Kansas City, MO 64111

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VFW magazine • SEPTEMBER 2018 • 58
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The military has always been a part of Belinda Daywalt’s life. So keeping VetJobs — VFW’s online job board for service members and their spouses — active after the death of her husband, Ted, was a no-brainer.

“Ted was the face, the figure, the political side of VetJobs,” Belinda said, “but it was what we did for veterans and what is being done every day for veterans. We just felt everyone that’s part of the VetJobs team is very committed to what [VetJobs does].”

Ted, a retired Navy reserve captain, died Oct. 1, 2017, at 68 years old from service-connected interstitial pulmonary disease. He was a Gold Legacy life member of VFW Post 5408 in Roswell, Ga. He was commissioned in the Navy in 1971 and served aboard the USS Yosemite and the USS Tattnall as a surface warfare officer.

He started VetJobs in 1999 after seeing the need for a veteran-specific job board that offered its services at no cost to the veteran.

“Our money is made from companies, and our jobs will range from a part-time hourly person to university presidents,” Belinda said.

VFW became the partial owner and exclusive sponsor of VetJobs in 2000. VFW continues to support the organization and its mission to help employ veterans, transitioning military members and their families.

Belinda said VetJobs has an “incredible” staff that sees its role in the company as a mission. There currently is one full-time employee and three part-time sales positions.

“We’re very small, guerilla marketing, but our people are passionate about what they do,” Belinda said. “That stems from the top all the way down.”

Melanie Crowder, whose husband, Christopher, served in the Marine Corps Reserve, worked for VetJobs for two-and-a-half years. She was looking for work in 2011, shortly after Christopher returned from a deployment, and applied for a position with VetJobs.

She said what helped veterans seeking jobs was that Ted assisted in translating their military experience to the civilian world. The job seekers also, according to Crowder, “loved that they could actually get a real person” on the phone.

The importance of a veteran-specific job board, to Crowder, is that it makes veterans feel comfortable putting their information on the site.

“It kind of [gives] them a more trusted site to look for legitimate jobs,” Crowder said.

Debby Adkins, who served in Korea with the 2nd Infantry Division from 1996-97 and Kuwait with the 1st Cavalry Division during the summer of 1998 as an automated logistical specialist, discovered VetJobs through Military.com in August 2017. When she realized the VetJobs headquarters was 20 minutes from her house, she reached out directly about working there.

Now a VetJobs employee, Adkins said the company has been “crucial” for her family.

“It’s provided additional money to our family,” Adkins said. “My husband’s not a veteran, but for me, myself, it helped me get back into the workforce and find employment within my own hours and own schedule.”

The companies that VetJobs works with are vetted, according to Belinda, and nobody sees resumes beyond the office staff and the companies that pay to see them.

Belinda said that VetJobs does not keep statistics on the number of hires made through the site out of respect for its users’ privacy. However, site visitors average between 500,000 and 900,000 per month. The number of jobs listed varies daily, but 249,000 jobs were listed as of late June.
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