

APRIL 2020

VFW

M A G A Z I N E

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MY VOICE'**

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PRODUCE POETRY**

'THE REAL DEAL'

**War vets bring realism to
battle re-enactments**

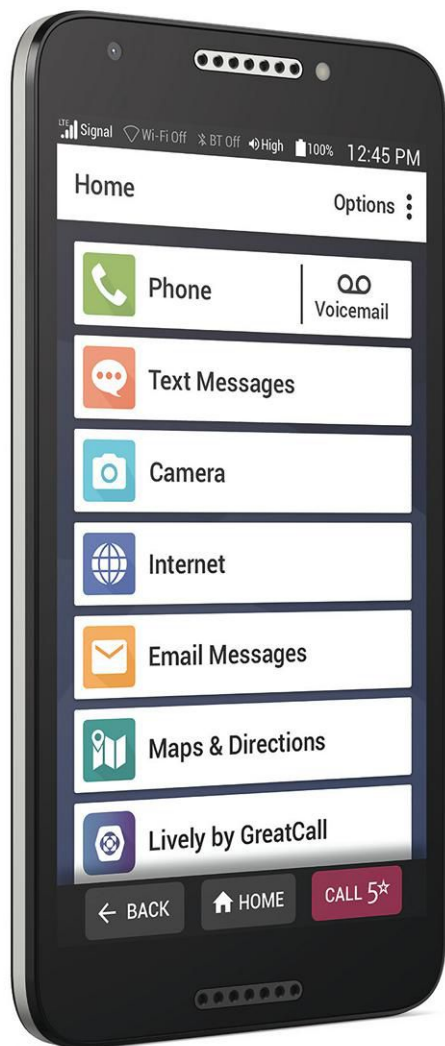
**MARINE RUNS
ACROSS WYOMING
TO REMEMBER
FEMALE KIAS**

**VFW MADE THE
'STAR-SPANGLED BANNER'
THE NATIONAL ANTHEM**



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APRIL 2020

Vol. 107 No. 7

COVER PHOTO: Jared Nichols (seated) portrays a U.S. Army captain (wearing a French helmet) and a French citizen dresses as a non-commissioned French artillery officer in October 2019 during a World War I living history event in Noisseville, France. Nichols, an active-duty U.S. Army major based in Germany, is a member of the Association of the Poilu de la Marne, a French WWI re-enactment group based in Epernay, France. (Photo courtesy of the Association of the Poilu de la Marne)

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14 ADDING REALISM TO BATTLE RE-ENACTMENTS

VFW members in California, Texas, Virginia, New Jersey, New York and even overseas are participating in battle re-enactments and living histories. The organizers say the vets' experiences in real war zones adds authenticity to the presentations. **BY DAVID SEARS**



WAR VETS USE POETRY TO UNDERSTAND

By writing down their own thoughts and reading those of other war veterans, VFW members who served in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan use words to help them make sense of their experiences. **BY HUGH MARTIN**



'ALL I HAD TO DO WAS RUN'

A Marine who served in Iraq wanted to honor the 161 women who were killed while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her 161-mile run across Wyoming last year was physically demanding yet immensely rewarding. **BY KELLY GIBSON**

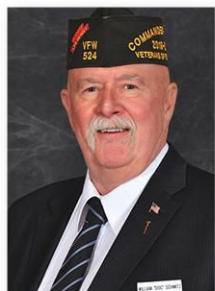


VFW LOBBIED FOR 'STAR-SPANGLED BANNER'

It was VFW's first major legislative victory and one that still endures. Here's the story of how VFW led the charge to make a song from the War of 1812 enshrined as the national anthem. **BY MARC FERRIS**



Justice for 65,000 Military Families



COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
William "Doc" Schmitz

VFW achieved a decades-long goal in December. We helped eliminate the unfair "widow's tax" that targeted the families of veterans who have died from wounds or illnesses caused by their military service.

How this nasty financial burden remained in place for so many years is something I'll never understand. But I am here to tell all veterans advocates that it is now history.

With enactment of *Public Law 116-92* on Dec. 20, 2019, some 65,000 surviving military spouses and families will receive what is rightfully theirs. Specifically, they will get full payments from both the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program.

SBP payments are like life insurance and are paid through the Department of Defense. Military retirees purchase it so that 55 percent of their retirement pay will go to their families after the veteran dies.

DIC payments, administered by VA, are a modest benefit of \$1,319 per month. This benefit is intended for the surviving spouses and families of veterans who die from a service-connected wound or condition.

These are clearly two different compensation programs established for two distinct and different reasons adminis-

tered by two different federal agencies. There never should have been any offset, and military families have suffered needlessly for decades because of that error.

And even though the problem has been

How this nasty financial burden remained in place for so many years is something I'll never understand. But I am here to tell all veterans advocates that it is now history.

rectified, it will take three years before the offset is removed completely. There will be no offset this year. In 2021, one-third of the SBP payments will be restored, and in 2022, two-thirds will be restored. Beginning on Jan. 1, 2023, surviving military spouses and families will finally receive their full deserved payments.

It's been a long time coming. I thank VFW's Washington Office staff for pursuing this goal to victory.

They led the charge last year by hosting a roundtable discussion with other VSOs, congressional staffers and military families that produced a single unified message broadcast on social media. They organized legislative grassroots advocacy strategies that garnered attention in the press and on Capitol Hill.

And in the end, they offered a workable solution to offset the \$5.7 billion cost. It is a prime example of how VFW lives its motto: "No One Does More for Veterans."



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VFW OBJECTIVES

To ensure national security through maximum military strength.

To speed the rehabilitation of the nation's disabled and needy veterans.

To assist the widows and orphans and the dependents of disabled and needy veterans.

To promote Americanism through education in patriotism and constructive service to the communities in which we live.



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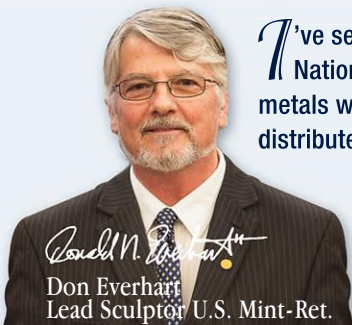
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Black MOH Recipients



It is a great piece of history of which few people are aware. Your article listed 39 African Americans. In addition, my research has identified 59 MOH

recipients who are Mexican Americans/Puerto Ricans, 29 MOH who are Native Americans and 22 recipients being Nisei Americans. I applaud your presentation and request *VFW* magazine include other presentations of this nature to reflect our country's actual diversity.

MARIO LONGORIA
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

I think you did a disservice by stating that Lt. John R. Fox received the Medal of Honor because he "caused the death of about 100 German troops." Actually, he called in an artillery strike on his own position to stop a German attack against outnumbered American troops. Leaving this out belittles his heroism. There is a VFW Post in Lockland, Ohio, named for him. There are currently efforts in Wyoming, Ohio, to erect a plaque noting his heroism.

TODD WILLIAMS
CINCINNATI, OHIO

You referenced Sgt. William H. Carney of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment as the first African American recipient. The action was July 18, 1863, rather than 1864.

PETER BEDROSSIAN
NEW WINDSOR, N.Y.

Valor Medals Review

Unless I am mistaken, Timothy Westcott served with the 3rd Bn., 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division.

VINCE RIOS
HASLET, TEXAS

Joe Orr Turned Away from VFW

Lots of human interest stories in this issue. I liked the one about the black veteran who got turned away from a Post and never went back. Something to be learned there. Something good happened. Good work.

LARRY OLSEN SR.
EL PASO, TEXAS

It's too bad this went on with any veteran. I had friends in the VFW in Davison, Mich., and joined there before 1970. When I retired from GM, I moved near Ludington and was going to transfer my membership to Custer, Mich. The veterans told me that they didn't want Vietnam vets in their hall so I went to Baldwin, Mich. I am not black, but it's too bad for this great nation we live in to have to put up with that.

DAVID HONOMICHL
BRANCH, MICH.

Best Cities for Veterans

I can't believe that San Antonio, Texas, didn't make the list. We have the largest number of military retirees of any city in America. We have a great standard of living and a lower than average cost of living. How can Austin be better with their toll roads and congested highways? Unbelievable.

ED KASSOF
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Spencer Out as Navy Secretary

This throwaway blurb barely mentioned his distinguished career. It said nothing about the reasons he resigned. Over half the article was about his replacement, who deserves his own article. I understand that you might not want to dwell on the Gallagher scandal, but by refusing to acknowledge it, is in itself a political statement.

DENNIS KERR
OMAHA, NEB.

An Officer and a Gentlewoman

How dare you show a woman who is not a veteran of a foreign war. I don't recall a war in 1995 in Korea. There are many black women who served in the foreign wars and yet you pick a woman who was in 1995. Veterans from Korea and Thailand can't call themselves veterans from the Vietnam War. They can't go to a VFW and get membership. I expect more from my VFW than SJW (social justice warrior) BS.

PHIL HIGGS
EULESS, TEXAS

Editor's Note: Members of the U.S. military serving 30 consecutive or 60 non-consecutive days in Korea are eligible for VFW membership.

Celebrating Black History Month

With a very small staff, you put out a very fine magazine. I am a Vietnam veteran, and my father was active in the VFW after WWII. The magazine was terrible back then, but of course, I was just a kid and it didn't interest me. I appreciate the February issue taking on social issues. The photography and the writing are just excellent. Well done.

SAM PLATTS
SYLMAR, CALIF.

Service Dogs

I work at Quinnipiac University and have several students who state they have service dogs. When I see the "service animal" chase a squirrel, or bark at a golf cart on campus or growl at an individual, it's easy to state that they are not service dogs. The term "service dog" has gotten so diluted that the disabled veterans who have legitimate service dogs are being done a disservice. Entities like DAVK-9 are providing emotional support animals, not service dogs.

JASON BURKE
HAMDEN, CONN.



"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.

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Register Now for VFW's National Convention

April is a great time to register for the 121st VFW National Convention, July 18-23, 2020, in Reno, Nev. VFW National Headquarters mailed convention housing and registration forms to all Posts in February with Post election mailings. VFW's bylaws state that each Post must register at least one delegate for the convention.

To make housing reservations, call 1-833-277-7335, fax 801-355-0250, international call (801) 715-4419 from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. MT, Monday through Friday or mail information to:

*Orchid Events
175 S. West Temple, Suite 30
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
Email help@orchid.events*

The housing cut-off is Friday, May 15. However, do not wait until the last minute to make reservations, as there is no guarantee rooms will be available by that time.

Additional information can be found at www.vfw.org. The website also has general convention information, including the registration form, links to other convention-related material and a tentative schedule.



All advance registrations should be mailed to:
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Were you serving on active duty on
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Service Member Suicides on the Rise

New data shows military suicides increased in 2018. The overall rate for suicides in 2017 for military members and veterans was about 20 per day.

BY DAVE SPIVA

A Department of Defense report published last September shows a rise in the rate of military suicides from 2011 to 2018.

In 2018, 541 service men and women, including active-duty, Reserve and National Guard troops, committed suicide, according to the DoD's *2018 Annual Suicide Report*. It states that the rate for active-duty troops had increased in recent years. In 2013, there was an average of 18.5 suicides per 100,000 active-duty troops, while in 2018, there was an average of about 24.8 suicides per 100,000 troops.

The report also states that National Guard suicide rates exceeded active-duty and Reserve troop rates. On average, about 30.6 per 100,000 National Guardsmen committed suicide in 2018. This number is higher than that for active-duty and Reserve troops, which was about 24.8 per 100,000.

By contrast, according to a VA report from last year, almost 17 veterans per day committed suicide in 2017. However, these most recent numbers don't tell the whole story about who is at risk.

The data presented by VA's *2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report* does not include military

members. The number of veterans who took their own life each year also has stayed about the same from 2005 to 2017, even though the veterans population has gone down more than 18 percent over the same time period. The veterans' population decreased from approximately 24.2 million to 19.8 million during this time period, according to the VA's report.

Overall, 2017 saw about 20 veterans and troops per day commit suicide, a number that has stayed consistent since 2005. During this same time period, the women veterans' population increased 6.5 percent.

While male veterans were about 30 percent more likely to commit suicide compared to nonveteran men, women veterans committed suicide at double the rate of nonveteran women in 2017. Almost 17 of 100,000 women veterans committed suicide in 2017, according to VA.

Last year, VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes testified before the House VA Committee about preventing suicides in the veteran population. He said eliminating suicides among veterans has been a "top priority" for VFW.

"Congress must ensure sufficient resources are available and used for

SUICIDE RATE HIGHER AMONG MILITARY FAMILIES

In September 2019, the DoD, for the first time, released data regarding suicides among military family members.

For military spouses, the suicide rate in 2017 was 11.5 per 100,000 spouses, for men and women. The suicide rates for male and female spouses, between 18 and 60 years old, were 29.4 for men and 9.1 for women per 100,000 people of the same gender. The rates among the general U.S. population were a little less. About 28.4 men and 8.4 women per 100,000 people of the same gender committed suicide in 2017, according to VA.

For dependent children 22 years old and younger, the VA reported a rate of about 3.8 per 100,000 dependents.

effective VA suicide prevention efforts, including to identify veterans at increased risk of suicide, adopt new interventions and effectively treat those with previous suicide attempts," Fuentes said.

For those who need help, contact VFW's Member Service Center at 1-833-839-8387. ★

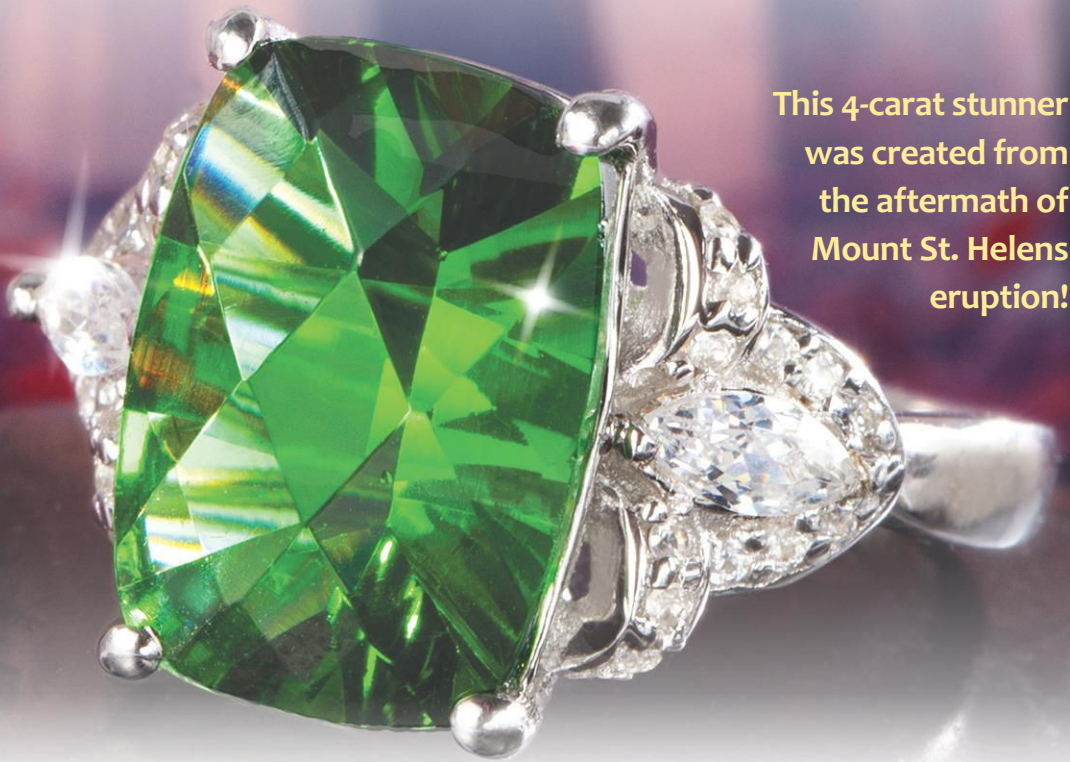
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New Agent Orange Conditions Not Likely Until Later this Year



A provision in the recently enacted *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2020* required VA to explain to Congress by the end of January why there has been a delay in announcing any decisions for adding diseases to the Agent Orange presumptive conditions list.

According to a January *Military Times* report, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie sent a letter to Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.), the ranking member of the Senate VA Committee. Wilkie claimed in the letter that a VA decision on adding Agent Orange presumptive conditions wouldn't be ready until at least "late 2020."

VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz, a Vietnam War veteran, said VA "must do the right thing" by approving additional Agent Orange presumptive conditions.

"We cannot, and will not, stand by and allow another veteran to lose his or her life because of the bureaucracy of Washington," Schmitz said. "The time for waiting is over."

Last year during a Congressional testimony, Richard Stone, the executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, said a decision on

three illnesses potentially connected to Agent Orange exposure were likely to be announced in 2019. However, the VA never announced any additions to the Agent Orange presumptive diseases list.

In November 2018, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine published *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 11 (2018)*. The report linked Agent Orange exposure to hypertension and monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance, a condition with no symptoms that is caused when an abnormal protein is present in the blood stream. The report also recommended that VA add the conditions to the current list of 14 Agent Orange presumptive diseases.

In 2016, the Academies published findings that suggested bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's-like tremors also could have been caused by Agent Orange exposure.

VFW encourages veterans who served in or off the coast of Vietnam or Thailand to contact a VFW service officer to discuss whether they are eligible to file a VA claim for Agent Orange exposure. Visit www.vfw.org/nvs to find a nearby VFW service officer.

ABOVE: Barrels of Agent Orange are stored on the Johnston Atoll, located almost 1,000 miles southwest of Hawaii, in May 1975. VA released a list on Jan. 27 that notes locations outside Vietnam where Agent Orange was used, tested or stored.

14 PRESUMPTIVE AGENT ORANGE CONDITIONS

To qualify for Agent Orange-related benefits, a veteran must have one or more of the 14 conditions VA presumes to have been caused by exposure, which are:

- Chronic B-cell Leukemia.
- Hodgkin's Disease.
- Multiple Myeloma.
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma.
- Prostate Cancer.
- Respiratory Cancers.
- Soft Tissue Sarcomas.
- AL Amyloidosis.
- Chloracne.
- Diabetes Mellitus Type 2.
- Ischemic Heart Disease.
- Parkinson's Disease.
- Early onset Peripheral Neuropathy.
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda.

VA RELEASES LIST OF AGENT ORANGE SITES OUTSIDE OF VIETNAM

A Department of Defense list of sites where veterans were potentially exposed to Agent Orange outside of Vietnam was released by VA on Jan. 27. The list includes sites where the herbicide was stored, tested or used by DoD. U.S. states listed by DoD are:

- Arkansas.
- Florida.
- Georgia.
- Indiana.
- Maryland.
- Mississippi.
- Montana.
- New York.
- Tennessee.
- Texas.
- Utah.

Countries, besides Vietnam, included in the DoD's list are:

- Cambodia.
- Canada.
- India.
- Johnston Atoll.
- Korea.
- Laos.
- Thailand.

The VA press release on the updated site list and more information can be found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel.



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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VA Reports Shortfalls with Women's Treatment at Top Hospital

One of VA's largest regional health care networks has come under scrutiny by the Department's inspector general's office.

The North Texas VA Health Care System reportedly went without a full-time gynecologist for almost two years. Other issues reported includes a lack of privacy and secure spaces for female patients, according to the Jan. 23 report from the VA Office of the Inspector General.

Texas has the largest population of women veterans in the country, according to VA population data.

The report, titled *Deficiencies in the Women Veterans Health Program and Other Quality Management Concerns at the North Texas VA Healthcare System*, said the VA Inspector General determined that the North Texas VA Hospital had a "long-standing deficiency" of resources for women veterans. The shortfalls included a shortage of equipment, supplies and space for "gender-specific care."

VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz said that the lack of resources for women at any VA medical facility is "unacceptable" and something VFW will not tolerate.

"The VFW expects VA to give high-quality health care to all of its patients," Schmitz said. "With these troubling findings being reported, we demand that the North Texas VA and all other VA health care systems work to provide better services for the more than 2 million women veterans across the nation."

In 2017, VA reported that the percentage of women veterans would increase over the next quarter of a century. By 2042, VA estimated that there will be about 2.2 million women out of an estimated total of 12.5 million veterans.

Women veterans who have questions about VA health care can contact VA by calling or texting 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636).



PHOTO BY LANCE CPL PAIGE VERRY/U.S. MARINE CORPS

VFW-Supported Law Allows VA to Award Grants to Memorialize Vets

President Donald Trump signed the VFW-supported *Memorializing Veterans Act* (P.L. 116-107) into law on Jan. 17.

The *Memorializing Veterans Act* was introduced to the House by Rep. Conor Lamb (D-Pa.) and to the Senate by Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.). The law allows VA to award grants to a wider range of groups that can conduct cemetery research and produce educational materials for the Veterans Legacy Program. The program was launched by the National Cemetery Administration and aims to engage students, teachers and others to learn about the stories of veterans from the past.

Before the act was signed into law, the program awarded contracts only to colleges and universities. The intent of the program is to develop educational programs that teach students about the veterans whose remains are placed in cemeteries across the country.

According to a press release from the Senate VA Committee, the law will make grants available to institutions of higher learning, as well as local education agencies and non-profit entities with a history of community engagement, such as VFW.

VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes said transitioning to a grant-based program would broaden the reach of the Veterans Legacy Program beyond large universities to smaller groups that wish to engage with VA in memorializing veterans.

"Perpetuating the memory and history of our dead is one of the VFW's founding principles," Fuentes said. "The Veterans Legacy Program ensures the memories and stories of the brave men and women who have worn our nation's uniform are preserved in perpetuity."

ABOVE: Headstones are shown on Sept. 11, 2019, at the Quantico National Cemetery in Triangle, Va. The newly signed *Memorializing Veterans Act* allows VA to make Veterans Legacy Program grants available to institutions of higher learning, as well as local education agencies and non-profit entities with a history of community engagement, such as VFW.

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'THE REAL

VFW MEMBERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN BATTLE RE-ENACTMENTS GIVE THE EVENTS VALUABLE REALISM, SAY THE ORGANIZERS. WHILE THE VETERANS' PORTRAYALS OFFER VISITORS A MORE AUTHENTIC LOOK AT HISTORY, IT ALSO PROVIDES THE VETS A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THEIR OWN WAR EXPERIENCES.



Bill Sultenfuss simulates an attack on an enemy bunker with a shotgun during a re-enactment of a World War II battle in September 2012 at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Sultenfuss, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel and VFW member, said part of his job as a re-enactor is to show “how a World War II Marine really spoke, acted and performed.”

PHOTO BY JIM HUEPEL/MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

DEAL

BY DAVID SEARS

Sitting astride his horse in November 2019 at the “Tank Farm” in Nokesville, Va., U.S. cavalry enthusiast Ron Bingham explained his passion for bringing American military history to life.

“Any day on horseback is a good day,” said Bingham, a member of VFW Post 9808 in Mechanicsville, Va. “I really love hearing people say: ‘I did not know we still had cavalry in World War II.’”

VFW members such as Bingham play a vital volunteer role in preserving the history of America’s foreign wars. Some are trench-burrowing, boondock-tramping battle re-enactors. Others are museum-based living historians of war.

Some do impressions of particular individuals. Others interpret specific units, vessels, expeditions or conflicts. Many diversify. But, as the following glimpses of VFW member-volunteers illustrate, all share a passion for honoring the past while enabling others, especially young heroes of tomorrow, to “look, listen, and touch history.”

Bingham, 61, a retired Army sergeant and now a museum specialist at the U.S. Army Women’s Museum in Fort Lee, Va., typifies the diverse approach.

“The 26th U.S. Cavalry Philippine Scouts is a commemorative mounted group with a love for both horses and cavalry history,” Bingham said. “About a third of our group own horses and many also belong to the Eastern Seaboard Cavalry Association (ESCA), which stages cavalry competitions.”

The primary focus of Bingham’s contingent is the Philippines-based regiment famed for staging the last horse-mounted cavalry charge in U.S. military history against the Japanese on Luzon in 1942.

“Our unit includes Filipino-Americans whose relatives served in the Philippine Scouts,” Bingham said.

But Bingham’s group doesn’t confine itself to World War II.

“We also interpret units that served



Ron Bingham and his horse, Ranger, attend a 2017 re-enactment at the Americans in Wartime Museum in Fairfax, Va., as an M3 Scout car crew prepares for a simulated combat patrol in the Philippines during World War II. Bingham, a retired Army captain and VFW member, serves as a specialist at the U.S. Army Women's Museum in Fort Lee, Va.

on the Mexican border in 1916 and World War I units in France,” Bingham said.

‘UNDERSTANDING THEIR OWN WAR’

The Great War’s cavalry connection prompted Bingham to join the East Coast Doughboys, originally formed to honor the 100th anniversary of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).

“By getting organized,” said Kevin Fitzpatrick, president of the East Coast Doughboys, “we were able to raise the visibility of the World War I Centennial. So we were very busy throughout 2017 and 2018. But, as we got into 2019, the enthusiasm didn’t die out. We’re growing. It’s a fun organization where the goal is to enjoy the hobby and present living history to the public.”

Fitzgerald, a Marine Corps veteran, explained that the East Coast Doughboys perform living history impressions at parades or commemorative events at schools, parks and monuments.

“For members who want to fire their weapon, to experience the rigors of life in the trenches or during military encampments, there’s the Great War Association (GWA), a re-enactment group with Allied and Central Powers sub-units,” Fitzgerald said.

Army Maj. Jared Nichols, currently stationed in Germany as a U.S. Army Europe staff officer, is active in both liv-

ing history and battle re-enactments.

“I currently belong to the 151e Régiment d’Infanterie de Ligne, and Le Poilu de la Marne, [GWA-affiliated] French World War I units,” the 38-year-old said. “But I’m also with the East Coast Doughboys and, before moving overseas, volunteered at the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Mo.”

‘PERSPECTIVE AND COMFORT’

Nichols, a member of VFW Post 27 in Wiesbaden, Germany, said he got started in battle re-enactments at age 15.

“I started with the American Civil War,” Nichols said. “I met a lot of Vietnam veterans who used living history to better understand their own war experiences.”

Later, after three deployments to Iraq, including his most recent in 2009-10 as commander of C Co., 1st Bn., 12th Cav Regt., Nichols found himself drawn back to the activity.

“I had a hard time transitioning between the military culture and my off-duty life,” he said. “I remembered the Vietnam veterans and thought that if it worked for them, well maybe it could work for me.”

Nichols said that “while every conflict is different,” many things are common throughout the history of warfare.

“That gives perspective and comfort,” he added.

“I serve as a vehicle commander or driver on an armored scout car,” said Clemmons, a 52-year-old police sergeant for the Village of Ocean Beach, N.Y.

A life member of VFW Post 291 in Patchogue, N.Y., Clemmons is a multi-tour Army veteran. In 1988-89, he served in Korea with the 2nd Bn., 61st Air Defense Regt. He also deployed to Iraq in 2004-05 as a medic with the 306th MP Bn., 18th MP Bde.

Once a month, Clemmons and fellow volunteers portray what Kevin Carroll, the Museum of Armor’s community affairs director, likes to call the Armor Experience.

“Visitors are ‘embedded’ in a rifle squad in post-D-Day France,” Carroll said. “Outfitted in helmets and battle jackets, they climb aboard one of our vintage transport vehicles. Then, surrounded by living historians and armored vehicles, they head to ‘France’ [in adjoining parkland] for encounters with the ‘enemy.’ All of it is historically accurate.”

WAR VETS ADD AUTHENTICITY

Immersive World War II history also is the specialty of two Texas-based VFW members. Bill Sultenfuss, 71, is a retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel who belongs to VFW Post 688 in Boerne, Texas, and Kyle Perz, 35, is a member of VFW Post 76 in San Antonio. Both vol-

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Henry Clemmens dons a World War II-vintage Army uniform in May 2019 and displays a scout car he commands during the "Armor Experience" at the Museum of American Armor in Plainview, N.Y. Clemmens, an Iraq War veteran and member of VFW Post 291, is a police officer in nearby Ocean Beach, N.Y.

unteer in 'Company K,' the living history detachment at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas.

"As part of the museum's combat assault team, I show visitors how a World War II Marine really spoke, acted and performed," said Sultenfuss, a Vietnam War veteran and 20-year museum volunteer. "Most people have no clue about lives during World War II and the Depression Era. We send a message about those in the Greatest Generation."

Perz, an Army medic currently serving in the Army Reserve with Ft. Sam Houston's 3rd Medical Training Brigade, has been a living history volunteer for nearly three years.

"I am a flamethrower operator," Perz said. "Aside from a few safety modifications, the equipment is identical to what the Army and Marine Corps used in the Pacific."

Sultenfuss added that "the flamethrower doesn't shoot blanks. It's a 2,000-degree flame."

Jeff Copsetta, the museum's living

history coordinator, said that the facility's living history program doesn't portray particular battles but rather what the battlefields in the Pacific might have been like.

"We use the same type of equipment and vehicles," he said. "We have some of the same vegetation on the battlefield. And we use the same tactics as the Army and Marines."

"When we land on the beach, the Marines come from the visitors' right, and the Army lands from the visitors' left. We take beachhead trenches no more than 15 feet from the front row of our covered amphitheater. The public almost moves with us, looking at the battlefield with the same view."

BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE

While the history portrayed by Bingham, Nichols, Clemmens, Sultenfuss and Perz can be physically demanding, VFW volunteers long retired from marching, flying or sailing remain active.

For example, Rich Koone, 64, a

retired Army captain, understands that Company K, like any military unit, moves on its stomach.

"I develop the menu, purchase and cook the food and serve it to the 60-70 volunteers who participate in weekend programs," said Koone, the Pacific War Museum's education director and member of VFW Post 7105 in Fredericksburg. "Many are veterans and I enjoy their company."

The same enthusiasm and spirit motivate 80-year-old Rudolph "Rudy" Shappee. A retired Navy chief warrant officer and life member of VFW Post 10580 in Warrenton, Ore., Shappee has logged almost 18,000 volunteer hours at San Diego's USS Midway Museum.

"When I first heard that the Midway was coming to San Diego," Shappee said. "I immediately found out what I could do to help bring its story alive for our civilian population."

Shappee keeps busy at the museum. In the past, he has helped restore the ship, maintain aircraft and build exhibits.

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“I met a lot of Vietnam veterans who used living history to better understand their own war experiences.”

— Army Maj. Jared Nichols

Now, calling on expertise from a second career in middle- and high-school education, he develops local school programs in navigation and maritime security.

“I can work when and where needed,” Shappee explained, “then go on vacation.”

Each of these VFW members has a personal take on their volunteer experience.

“We bring Army history alive and close up,” Bingham said.

Perz said his participation is important for his family.

“My grandfathers both fought in the Pacific, one on Guadalcanal, another aboard *USS Essex (CV-9)*,” he noted. “My daughter will never know my grandfathers, but I can say to her, ‘This is why your great-grandfathers volunteered and

where they fought.’”

And, as Shappee said, “Where else can you tell the same sea story and your audience is hanging spellbound?”

Beyond reaping personal satisfaction, these VFW members deliver value, according to the Museum of Armor’s Kevin Carroll.

“Veterans like Hank Clemmens bring organizational skills, maturity and understanding of military traditions,” Carroll said. “They act as models for non-veteran volunteers.”

The National Museum of the Pacific War’s Copsetta, an Army veteran, concurred.

“Veterans like Bill and Kyle are really the backbone,” Copsetta said. “They

know the military atmosphere. They understand how the chain of command works and what it means to take initiative. They are really the driving force within Company K.”

Fitzpatrick particularly admired Nichols’ impact on the East Coast Doughboys.

“When Jared led us, you knew he was the real deal,” Fitzpatrick said. “He just had that gravitas, that carriage. You really felt like you would follow him into the trenches.” ★

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David Sears, a Vietnam War Navy vet and VFW member in New Jersey, is a frequent contributor to VFW magazine.

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VETERANS TURN WAR EXPERIENCES INTO POETRY

Life in a war zone has a long history of producing great authors and great works of literature. Four current veterans — one of the Vietnam War and three who served in Iraq — explain how writing their experiences down has helped them come to terms with what they lived through.

BY HUGH MARTIN

In late March 2003, while standing outside Nasiriyah, Iraq, former Marine Sgt. Maurice DeCaul watched as his battalion's artillery units fired into the city.

"On the outskirts of the city of Nasiriyah, on our right and left flanks, you had Marine battalions bombarding the city," he said. "Hearing the guns going off and then seeing the effect — that's just something I've been thinking about for a very long time."

DeCaul, who joined the Marines in 1997 and deployed to Iraq at the start of the war in 2003, recalled this moment specifically as something that stayed in his memory long after coming home.

"It was a pretty long barrage and it was pretty devastating," he said. "Just trying to express that, grapple with what I knew was happening on the other side."

It wasn't until six years later that he turned to poetry to analyze his experience in the war.

Like many who have served, post-9/11 veterans have turned to poetry as a medium to document, interrogate and understand their war experiences. In the 20th century, particularly, American soldiers have produced some of the starkest and resonant poetry on war.

In "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," WWII Army Sgt. Randall Jarrell wrote about life as an airman.

"Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life, / I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters."

Other WWII military veterans — such as James Dickey, Karl Shapiro and Richard Hugo — also wrote of the war in the Pacific and European theatres.

Richard Wilbur, who served in the Army between 1943-1945 in Europe, considered the snow falling on the dead in "First Snow in Alsace."

"You think: beyond the town a mile / Or two, this snowfall fills the eyes / Of soldiers dead a little while."

Kristi Garboushian, who served with the Army in the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91, wrote in her poem, "The

Former Marine Sgt. Maurice DeCaul says writing and sharing poetry with other veterans at an NYU workshop in 2009 allowed a “catharsis” to happen. He said poetry gave him a chance to express thoughts he was unable to communicate through other means.



Ribbons on Hell’s Tree,” of the ominous desert ground.

“In Iraq the land mines nap like sand dollars,” she wrote.

DeCaul explained that because of poetry’s immediacy and brevity of form, it can sometimes mirror how memory works.

“If you’re writing about the memories of war,” he said, “poetry can give you a space to mimic the way these thoughts might occur.”

In his poem titled “Shush,” where each line begins, “I’ve been talking in my sleep,” DeCaul wrote about recurring nightmares and memories which stayed with him after his service, specifically some of those moments in Nasiriyah.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JESSICA BENTT FAUE

Army Sgt. Jessica (Bentt) Faue heads to a new location in 2005 in Iraq while deployed with the 1071st Maintenance Co. Faue believes that writing and reading poetry helped her transition to the civilian world.

“I’ve been talking in my sleep again, I see the muzzle flash / I’ve been talking in my sleep again, died by gunshot.”

DeCaul said the poem gave him a chance to make sense of his experience.

“It was me just trying to get it out,” he said. “That was me trying to deal with what had just happened.”

DeCaul said a 2009 veterans workshop at New York University allowed him not only to express a sometimes ineffable experience but, maybe more importantly, connect with other veterans who had similar experiences. For DeCaul, writing and sharing poetry gave himself and other veterans “a space to be with each other ... where the catharsis happens.”

‘WAR ... GAVE ME MY VOICE’

Bruce Weigl, who served in 1967-68 in Vietnam as a sergeant with the 1st Cavalry Division, is ambivalent about his war experience and the poetry it produced.

“The paradox of my life as a writer,” he explains in his book *The Circle of Hanh: A Memoir*, “is that the war ruined my life and in return gave me my voice.”

Weigl, the author of more than a dozen poetry collections, translations and a memoir, began writing after the war and has continued over the past 40 years. He said his English teacher at a community college in Ohio urged him to write about his experiences.

“Without that encouragement, I don’t know what would have happened with my life,” said Weigl, a professor at Lorain County Community College in Ohio.

Although Weigl argues that “poetry is not therapy,” its presence in his life has helped sustain him and create a sounding board for his time in Vietnam. Because poetry is often a combination of lived experience and imagination, Weigl tells his student-poets that “we allow our imagination to shape work that is powerful and accessible, so that others can understand this part of who we are.”

‘SONG OF NAPALM’

In one of Weigl’s most well-known poems, “Song of Napalm,” the speaker writes of seeing a young girl “*running from her village, napalm / stuck to her dress like jelly.*”

At the poem’s close, the speaker wants to imagine that the girl survives, that someone can save her, but instead we face the reality of the situation: “*...she is burned behind my eyes / and not your good love and not the rain-swept air / and not the jungle-green / pasture unfolding before us can deny it.*”

This poem, like many of Weigl’s, confronts war without glorification and attempts to acknowledge its horror without blinking. Other veterans, such as former Army Sgt. Jessica Faue, see poetry as



Navy Corpsman Gerardo "Tony" Mena (right) prepares to participate in a diving exercise in 2007 at Okinawa, Japan. Mena wrote a book of poems that he says will ensure that his friends who died during his 2006-2007 deployment to Iraq won't be forgotten.

inextricably linked to the transition into civilian life.

"Writing poetry, for me, is very therapeutic," said Faue. "Poetry helps me process my emotions, which inevitably helps me to adjust. The more I revise a poem about a painful experience, the more I can read it or say it out loud without breaking down, and the more healing I experience."

Faue, who joined the Michigan Army National Guard in 2002 and served in Iraq in 2005 as an automated logistical specialist, speaks of this "healing," or "mending," in her poem titled "Post Traumatic Relationship."

"war / tears apart what arrives / then / sends us home to / try to reconnect and / mend the broken pieces."

Poetry, according to Faue, can sometimes create a cathartic release when a person is finally able to transfer a difficult war experience into language.

"Poetry affects me on all levels. There is an emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual release when you've finally got down the words that have been living inside for so long," said Faue, whose maiden name is 'Bentt'.

Like DeCaul, Faue attended a poetry writers' workshop for veterans after her service. There, she found both solace and friendship.

"Poetry has a way of bringing people together," she said. "I found that I am not alone in my day-to-day struggles with PTSD. I also found that I am not alone in healing and working hard to overcome and persist through traumatic experiences."

'I WAS A COFFIN'

Gerardo ("Tony") Mena, who served with the Marines as a Navy corpsman in Iraq from 2006-2007, cannot emphasize enough how poetry affected and helped him transition into life as a civilian.

"The ability to look at situations that happened from multiple points of view helped desensitize me to a lot of the pain I brought back with me," Mena said.

He also explained how reading other veteran-poets — such as Vietnam War veterans Yusef Komunyakaa and Doug Anderson, along with Brian Turner, an Iraq War veteran — helped him feel less isolated on a college campus.

"The more war writers I read," Mena said, "the more I realized that they went through similar experiences."

In Mena's award-winning poem, "So I Was a Coffin," he personified various objects such as a flag, a spear, a bandage and a coffin, all in order to discuss the death of a friend, Marine Cpl. Kyle Powell, who died in Mena's arms on Nov. 4, 2006, in Iraq's Anbar province.

"They said you are a bandage, so I was a bandage / I jumped on Kyle's chest and wrapped my lace arms together around his torso and pressed my head to his ribcage."

Using various objects, the poem carries us through the soldier's experience, especially the failed attempt to save a dying comrade. Of poetry's form and style, Mena believes it's liberating because "you can create in any form or style or choose any object or thing to be the narrator."

RELEASING PAINFUL MEMORIES

Much like the speaker in "So I Was a Coffin," Mena's poetry helped him to begin "experimenting with narrating scenes and events from the war from other perspectives, even those of the enemy. This helped me become compassionate and understanding."

Mena said his book of poems, *The Shape of Our Faces No Longer Matters*, was inspired by his deployment.

"It was my way of attempting to make sure that my friends who were wounded or KIA were still remembered," he said.

Besides remembering and memorializing the dead, poetry also seems to be one of the most powerful mediums to communicate the experience of war.

"I do think there is power in using poetry to tell veteran stories," Faue said. "The process is transformative and can help release painful and traumatic memories and experiences by writing them down. Sharing helps others bear witness and allows empathy and connection to take place."

Weigl also believes poetry transforms readers and those who write it.

"I think the goal of all poetry is to change our lives," he said. "Our lives are precious because they come to an end. That's the same reason we write poetry." ✦

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Hugh Martin is an Army veteran of the Iraq War. He is the author of two poetry collections and is currently working on a doctoral degree at Ohio University.

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A VFW member and his wife opened a yoga business, which provides free classes for veterans and first responders.



BY JANIE DYHOUSE



YOGA PROVIDES MENTAL STRENGTH

When Army Special Forces vet Brad Whiteman began dabbling in yoga, he did so to support his wife, Eliza, who was teaching yoga classes. But about seven years ago, he “selfishly” began yoga in earnest when he realized his body wasn’t responding to his lifestyle as it once had.

“I really didn’t classify myself as a regular yoga student,” said Whiteman, a member of VFW Post 1827 in Charlottesville, Va. “Rugby has been a huge part of my life for about 25 years. At 36, I found out my body was starting to fail me. It was affecting my ability to play rugby and my quality of life. Selfishly, I began yoga so I could continue playing rugby.”

Whiteman said he began practicing yoga regularly about four to five times a week. He saw a very quick physical

change in terms of his flexibility and stability in his joints and muscles.

Yoga offered Whiteman more than a physical outlet, though. He noticed that over time, he was in a better emotional space.

“The analogy I use is that my fuse was about two inches short before yoga,” said Whiteman who served with the 10th Special Forces Group. “After yoga, that fuse grew longer and longer. People around me noticed the difference, too.”

He was able to deal with his frustrations and anxiety more easily and said it takes a lot to get him upset now that yoga is a regular part of his life.

Eliza knows first-hand the ways in which yoga increases mental strength. She has been doing yoga since she graduated from Alabama’s Auburn University. At first, she used it in addition to her regular workouts

and found it enhanced her stability and balance.

Then, just months after Eliza and Whiteman married in 2003, he was deployed to Iraq for a year.

“Yoga showed me, figuratively and literally, that I could hold myself up on my own,” Eliza said. “This was the height of the war in Iraq, in 2004-2005. Every breath was a prayer, and I was wracked with worry and anxiety. Yoga allowed me to focus on the present moment and gave me tools to use off of the mat when I felt stress and anxiety begin to consume me.”

FLYDOG IS BORN

In 2007, Whiteman transitioned from the military, and the family moved to Charlottesville, Va., where Whiteman was earning his Master of Business Administration at Darden Business School at the University of Virginia.



LEFT: Brad and Eliza Whiteman at their yoga studio FlyDog Yoga last year in Charlottesville, Va. Whiteman, a member of VFW Post 1827 in Charlottesville, finds yoga to be beneficial for veterans coping with a wide range of physical and mental ailments.

RIGHT: Eliza and Brad Whiteman with their children Cara, Ava, Ethan and Dylan. Eliza said the children think of the yoga studio as a second home and the staff there as family.

It was in Virginia that Eliza became a trained yoga instructor. In 2014, she led her first 200-hour yoga teacher training, which meant they needed a space to host it. From there, she began teaching classes, which grew in just a few months' time.

With the community behind them, the Whitmans decided to become small business owners and open their own yoga studio.

"While I was in business school, I liked to write business plans just for fun," Whiteman said. "Early on, I wrote one for a yoga studio because my wife was teaching yoga. In July 2015, we opened FlyDog Yoga."

In its peak season, FlyDog sees 330 people come through in a day with 80 classes per week. The staff of 30 offers Power Vinyasa, Vinyasa, Aerial Yoga, Barre, Power Sculpt and Yin classes.

Eliza leads both 200-Hour Yoga Teacher Trainings and 300-Hour Advanced Teacher Trainings as well as other workshops and programs.

She teaches yoga for the military community and first responders through FlyDog's "Honor Our Heroes Program." The free classes are taught at fire stations around town and also at the studio.

For two years, one of the classes for

veterans was held at Post 1827, which incidentally, is where Whiteman's rugby club meets.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL BENEFITS

Whiteman had read in the March 2017 VFW magazine about a VFW Post offering yoga, so he took that magazine to the Post commander, who agreed it was a good idea.

Whiteman said he has seen vets at class with chronic back pain and even more with invisible wounds such as PTSD. He added that he finds most combat vets feel more comfortable around other combat vets in such situations.

"We want them to work through their challenges by exposing them to yoga and graduating into the public group classes," Whiteman said. "If yoga is something they enjoy, they have something in common right away with non-veterans practicing yoga."

At FlyDog, the staff understands that yoga is a broad term. It ranges from meditation to a rigorous wide spectrum of physical activity. For vets, in particular, the physical practice of yoga is a good introduction.

What follows the physical benefits is an exposure to other aspects of yoga mindfulness such as breath work and the power of the breath in terms of

calming the mind and the nervous system, Whiteman said.

"Being comfortable in stillness is not always a good place for veterans to be," he said. "I ease them into this so that they are more comfortable in that space. Yoga, mindfulness and meditation have such positive impacts on the brain."

In addition to running FlyDog, the Whitmans have four active children — Ava 12, Ethan 10, Cara 8 and Dylan 6.

"Our kiddos are involved in various sports and activities," Eliza said. "Our oldest two attend classes as an opportunity to learn to de-stress and use yoga to complement their athletic endeavors. I taught and took yoga through all of my pregnancies. Our kids have always been around yoga and think of our studio and teachers as another home."

Whiteman said he understands how intimidating yoga can seem, especially for veterans who aren't used to being novices. Nevertheless, he encourages everyone to at least try it.

"I am the perfect ambassador for this," Whiteman said and laughed. "I will never look pretty doing yoga. But hey, if I can do this or make it through this, absolutely anyone can."

Visit www.flydogyoga.com.

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‘All I Had to Do Was Run’

A VFW member ran 161 miles to honor women killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

BY KELLY GIBSON

In 2018, Marine Master Sgt. Pamela Torres was looking for motivation to rekindle her love for running after a bad running season. While browsing a race-curation website, Torres signed up for a half-marathon in Virginia Beach, Va., hosted by a group called Valor Run.

“I misread the description,” Torres said. “I thought it was a run for military women. When I showed up and there were men, women, and children running, I was really confused.”

Torres, who served in Kuwait in 2003 with the Special Mag Task Electronics Maintenance Co., and in Iraq in 2009 with Marine Wing Support Squadron 472, said she started having doubts, but had paid the money to race, so she persevered.

KIAS REMEMBERED

As she alternated between running and walking during the final 10 miles of the race, she started noticing photos posted along the running trail of women she recognized during her time in the Marine Corps. Some of the faces she recognized were women she had trained with in boot camp. She asked one of the other participants why the images were posted. The run was in honor of 161 women killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan since Sept. 11, 2001.

“When they explained it to me, I felt like such a complainer,” Torres said.

It was just the motivation she need-

ed to seek out more information about this race. That evening, she researched everything she could about the race and its origins.

Valor Run, founded in 2014 and based in Norfolk, Va., honors all women who have served since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The group hosts or supports racing events throughout the year in various

locations across the country, including the annual Valor Run in Virginia Beach, as well as a 161-mile honor run. Each mile of the honor run is dedicated to one of the 161 U.S. military women who were KIA during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

‘THIS IS YOUR RACE’

Much like when she signed up for the race in Virginia Beach, Torres said she didn’t know what to expect when she applied to be the 2019 Valor Runner and take on 161 miles.

“Almost instantly [board of directors member], Maggie [Seymour] called me,” Torres recalled. “She said, ‘This is your race.’”

Torres was tasked with picking a time frame and a location to complete her 161 miles consecutively. She knew she wanted to run at home in Wyoming. From May 26 to June 4, 2019, Torres ran approximately 16 miles per day, starting in

Cheyenne and ending in Rollins.

She trained in Virginia, where she is stationed, and used an elevation mask so she could prepare herself for the different oxygen levels in Wyoming compared to Virginia.

Torres said despite rigorous training, nothing could have prepared her for the wild weather she faced during her run.

“I got snowed on, rained on, sun-



Marine Corps Master Sgt. Pamela Torres with her husband, Air Force Master Sgt. Joshua Poberts, pose for a photo last summer in Wyoming during Torres’ 161-mile run. Torres chose to run in honor of the 161 women killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan since Sept. 11, 2001.



ABOVE LEFT: Marine Master Sgt. Pamela Torres runs a segment of her 161-mile journey from Cheyenne to Rollins last summer in Wyoming. Torres ran from May 26 to June 4. She and her team raised \$42,000 of in-kind donations and \$13,000 in cash donations for Valor Run. **RIGHT:** Torres Skypes with her brother, Army Capt. Jorge Torres, in December 2018. Jorge was in Afghanistan and officiated Torres' promotion ceremony via Skype.



burned — typical Wyoming weather,” Torres said. “But my family did the hard part. They did all of the fundraising and advertising. All I had to do was run.”

Torres admits she couldn't have done it without her family.

“My mom was out there every mile, every day,” Torres says. “When I had my low moments, [my family] knew when to hug and when to slap me. [They would]

tell me to tie my shoes a little tighter and get out there.”

All told, Torres and her team raised \$42,000 of in-kind donations and \$13,000 cash for Valor Run, thanks in part to donations from VFW Post 1881 and its Auxiliary in Cheyenne, Wyo.; Post 4280 in Evanston, Wyo.; Post 2673 in Cody, Wyo., Post 4471 in Guernsey, Wyo., and Post 11453 in Cheyenne, Wyo.

“[The run] had nothing to do with me,” Torres said. “I was just an ambassador for these women. It's not just the mission to run, but it gives you internal time to reflect on what you're doing and why. It was an awesome experience and cause.” ★

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Kelly Gibson is a freelance writer in Lawrence, Kan.



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Marine Corps veteran and VFW member Terry Sharpe, center, leads a group of walkers on May 26, 2017, along Pennsylvania Avenue, in Washington, D.C., to raise awareness about veteran suicides. Sharpe walked more than 300 miles from Summerfield, N.C., to Capitol Hill in 23 days.

'IF I CAN SAVE TWO OR THREE... I'VE DONE MY JOB'

This Vietnam War veteran and VFW member has walked more than 2,100 miles to raise awareness for veteran suicides.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Before being dubbed the “Walking Marine” by a slew of media outlets, Terry Sharpe sat in his Summerfield, N.C., home watching TV in 2014.

Scrolling through a few national news channels, he couldn't escape the barrage of coverage on Marine Sgt. Andrew Tahmooressi, whose arrest in Tijuana, Mexico, on March 31, 2014, after making a wrong turn at the border prompted outrage.

Sharpe, an M60 machine gunner during the Vietnam War, felt compelled to get a fellow Marine suffering from PTSD back on U.S. soil. He packed a bag, picked up a walking stick and set out.

“I thought I ought to do something for the young man so he can get help for his PTSD,” said Sharpe, a member of VFW Post 8297 in Reidsville, N.C. “That’s what started my first two walks to Washington, D.C., which were back-to-back.”

After trekking 600 miles and attending two Congressional hearings, Sharpe and fellow Vietnam veteran Allen Brown returned home in the fall of 2014, standing by as Tahmooressi was eventually released

in November — seven months after the younger Marine’s arrest.

But the moral victory didn’t keep Sharpe from calling it quits.

The “Walking Marine,” as Sharpe is now known, has since amassed more than 2,100 miles in six years, occasionally leaving the confines of Summerfield, past the wooded countryside and along the foothills that creep over the highways en route to Washington, D.C.

Flanked often by local media outlets and supporters, Sharpe continues to lead the charge in raising awareness for veteran suicides — one step at a time. (See *Issues Up Front* on p. 8.)

“I’ve suffered from PTSD for almost 50 years,” Sharpe said. “I can’t cure our veterans, but I can serve as a guiding voice. It’s not realistic to think you can save them all, but if I can save two or three down the line, then I’ve done my job.”

At 68 years old, walking about 10 to 14 miles per day for 23 days at a time can wear down the body considerably, but Sharpe refuses to stop. With a walking stick on one hand and both the U.S. and Marine Corps

flags flying over a tattered backpack, the “Walking Marine” treks on.

“It wears down the body, especially for old folks like me,” he said. “But it’s nothing compared to the mental anguish that most of our veterans go through. The pain of the veterans, of their families, that’s much more important than a tired old body.”

Sharpe also has willing companions tagging along for the ride.

Ken Wilson and his wife, Sharon, joined Sharpe in his most recent walk back in May 2019. The Wilsons’ reason for the 300-mile trip stems from the loss of their son, Army Spc. Allen Wilson, to suicide in 2013.

The trio marched from North Carolina to Capitol Hill in the dogged heat, receiving support along the way.

“There are more people that are starting to pick up on what we’re doing,” Sharpe said. “While walking, you always meet people who stop and ask you what you’re doing and why. Most of them have no idea about the suicide rate among veterans and active-duty. Those people are the reason why we walk.” ★

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PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN AHEARN

Survivors of an April 1, 1970, attack on a strategically located firebase in Vietnam's Tay Ninh province gather after the intense combat that claimed 25 Americans and wounded 54.

FIREBASE ILLINGWORTH ILLUMINATED IN A 'TITANIC ROAR'

A makeshift firebase close to the Cambodian border lured the NVA into an attack on April 1, 1970.

Companies of the 8th Cav, 1st Cav Division, as well as parts of six field artillery batteries, persevered, but the American victory came at a steep cost.

BY TIM DYHOUSE

April was the deadliest month of 1970 for U.S. troops in Vietnam with 730 deaths. On the first day alone, North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units shelled some 115 targets throughout the country and launched 13 ground assaults. April 1 turned out to be the single deadliest day of the year when 70 GIs perished.

At the center of that day's carnage stood Fire Support Base (FSB) Illingworth,

where 36 percent of the Americans killed died in a matter of two hours.

FSB Illingworth was a hastily constructed firebase built in a dry pond bed only five miles from the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh province. Its 219-yard-wide perimeter was protected by Claymore mines dug into a low earthen berm surrounding the base and a few bunkers. No concertina or barbed wire was in place.

One GI described it as a "hot, miserable little place." Another said it was "trouble waiting to happen." It was named for Cpl. John James Illingworth of A Co., 2nd Bn., 8th Cav, 1st Cav Div., who was killed March 14, 1970, near Tay Ninh City.

Defending the base were 215 men from the 1st Cavalry Division and attached units. They included C and E companies of the 2nd Bn., 8th Cav; elements of four

THE TOLL

U.S. KIA: 25
U.S. WIA: 54



CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR SOCIETY



Army Spec. 4 Peter Lemon of Recon Plt., E Co., 2nd Bn., 8th Cav, earned the Medal of Honor on April 1, 1970, for his actions in repelling an attack on Fire Support Base Illingworth. Wounded three times, he killed 10 enemy soldiers.

movement, and U.S. commanders were certain the NVA would attack. This would reveal their positions, allowing them to be bombed. Several veterans of the battle have used the word “bait” to describe the reason for the location.

“In the afternoon before the attack, we could hear the enemy about a half-mile away in the tree line getting worked up for a fight,” said Spec. 4 Ron Curry of A Btry., 1st Bn., 30th FA. “I wondered why we didn’t shoot and wipe them out then. We were in enemy territory after all.”

Anticipating an assault, Illingworth was reinforced on March 21 with two self-propelled 8-inch howitzers from A Btry., 2nd Bn., 32nd FA, and tons of ammunition for the big guns.

“From the first day on, we wanted to dig our ammo pits using our 8-inch howitzers as spades,” said Ralph Jones of A Battery. “We were ordered not to, thereby allowing the enemy to view our ammo from the jungle line.”

The decision to leave the ammo stacked above ground would have devastating consequences for the men at the base in Illingworth.

‘ALMOST IMAGINARY, LIKE A MOVIE’

At 2:18 a.m. on April 1, the first of 300 NVA mortar, rocket and recoilless rifle rounds began exploding in a 20-minute barrage inside Illingworth’s perimeter.

The 32nd’s Fire Direction Center (FDC) took a direct hit, killing three off-

shift radiomen sleeping nearby. Likewise, the 77th’s FDC was hit several times; that unit lost seven KIA.

“I directed over 1,000 rounds of artillery fire plus several air strikes and dozens of gunships,” recalled then-Capt. John Ahearn, artillery liaison officer of the 1st Bn., 77th Arty, and fire coordinator for the 2nd Bn., 8th Cav. “Two things in particular stand out in my mind: that everyone was on 100 percent alert thus preventing us from being overrun, and the courage of Cobra helicopter pilot Capt. Joe Hogg, who made possible communication from Illingworth during the desperate times of the battle.”

Immediately thereafter, some 400 soldiers from the 272nd Main Force Regiment of the 9th VC/NVA Division charged the wire in a full frontal assault. They emerged like “ghosts through a mist,” as a GI who was among only 77 infantrymen on the perimeter recalled.

“The dust was so dense you couldn’t see 55 yards in front of you,” said Sgt. Keith McKissick of Gun Sec. 241, 3rd Plt., I Btry., 29th FA, who earned a Silver Star. Still, combat was so close that the enemy was clearly visible. “Very rarely do you see the man who is trying to kill you,” McKissick explained.

As the first wave of communists rushed the earthen wall, Spec. 4 Peter Lemon of Recon Plt., E Co., 2nd Bn., 8th Cav, moved to assist M-60 machine gunner Lou Vaca at the berm. The thick dust, Lemon says, caused Vaca’s gun to jam and also obscured the onrushing NVA troops until they were only 50 feet from the Americans. “They were 40 or 50 across, wave after wave of them,” said Lemon. “It was almost imaginary, like a movie, with all the dust and the flares.”

Lemon was able to kill five NVA with his M-16 until it, too, malfunctioned. He then began throwing grenades at the attackers. Meanwhile, he says Vaca, who was trying to repair the machine gun, was shot three times in the stomach. Lemon describes the 18-20 men of Recon Platoon as “professional soldiers” who kept their nerve during the chaos.

“We knew we were going to get hit, and as they were coming at us, we were blowing off a lot of the Claymores,” said the Medal of Honor recipient. “We were pretty calm. But I equate it to a prize fight. By the time the 10th round comes

field artillery batteries (I of the 29th, A-1-30th, A-2-32nd and B-1-77th) and two Air Defense Artillery batteries (B-5-2nd and D of the 71st). The 2nd Artillery provided dual 40mm anti-aircraft guns (“Dusters”) augmented by D Battery’s .50-caliber quad machine guns.

FSB Illingworth sat astride heavily trafficked NVA infiltration routes in the middle of an area GIs called the Dog’s Head. Patrols disrupted Communist

around and your opponent is still swinging, you say to yourself, ‘This guy is pretty tough.’”

Lemon killed four more NVA advancing on the machine-gun position and then carried Vaca to the battalion aid station. Lemon was wounded a second time returning to Vaca’s machine gun, where he found a group of NVA attempting to turn the gun on the Americans.

He drove them off with more grenades and killed an NVA soldier at the gun. Lemon repaired it and “placed effective fire upon the enemy,” according to his Medal of Honor citation. Wounded a third time, he eventually collapsed from his wounds and exhaustion.

Two of Lemon’s fellow E Company soldiers earned posthumous Distinguished Service Crosses during the firefight. Spec. 4 Casey O. Waller and Spec. 4 Brent Anthony Street tossed hand grenades at the enemy after their weapons jammed because of the overwhelming dust.

Both Street and Waller refused to withdraw when their grenade supply ran out and they resorted to hand-to-hand combat. Waller was killed by exploding



FSB Illingworth was located just five miles from the Cambodian border in the area referred to as the Dog’s Head.

ammunition and Street was eventually killed by a mortar round.

George Hobson, CO of Charlie Company, recalled the role of Silver Star recipient 1st Lt. Gregory Peters. “We were quite alone behind one of the 8-inch howitzers while directing our combined efforts,” he said. “When he lost his rifle, I gave him mine, and started throwing grenades while he used the rifle.”

‘THE EARTH SEEMED TO FAIL US’

The 8-inch howitzer crewmen, armed with M-16s, joined the infantrymen at

the perimeter to fend off the waves of attackers. As Col. Morris J. Brady said, artillerymen “ignored the full fury of the NVA’s fire to answer it with their own.” Behind them, the stacks of howitzer ammo loomed ominously.

“I had never seen so many enemy in the open,” said Spec. 4 Richard Whittier, a platoon radioman.

✦
EMAIL tdyhouse@vfw.org

Editor’s Note: To read the rest of the story, obtain your own copy of *Brutal Battles*. See below for more information.

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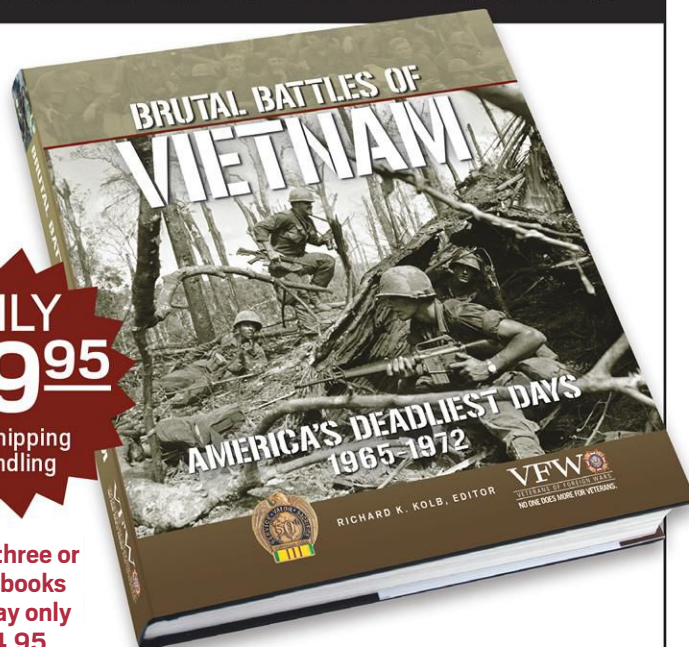
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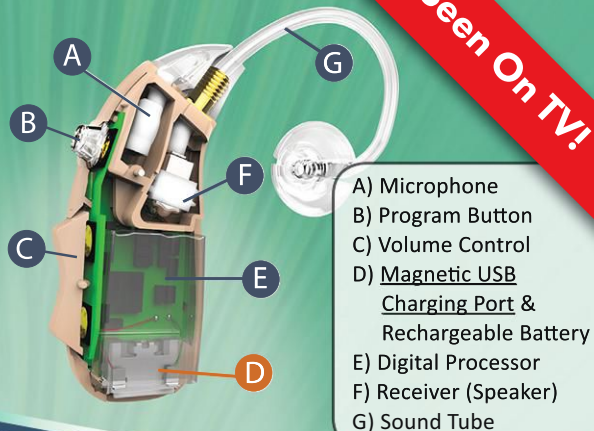
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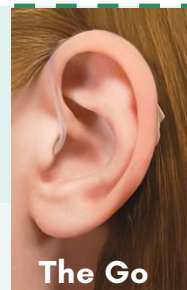
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Civil Air Patrol Lt. Addis A. Alston (left) and Lt. Paul J. Little display a practice bomb inscribed "to Adolf's Subs" in 1942 at CAP Coastal Patrol Base No. 16 in Manteo, N.C. By the fall of that year, CAP aircrews had dropped 70 bombs in 51 attacks on Nazi subs.

'Our Little Effort Contributed So Much'

The U.S. Civil Air Patrol was born in the early days of World War II when German submarines operated brazenly off America's east coast. In an often unheralded role, CAP airmen helped drive the enemy away while losing 68 crew members in the process.

BY STEVE ALVAREZ

In January 1942, most Americans were unaware that Nazi submarines lurked off the eastern seaboard in U.S. waters. The *Kriegsmarine* U-boats were the main weapon in the German offensive known as *Operation Paukenschlag* (Drumbeat). Their mission was to sink American merchant ships and hinder the logistical lifeline to Allied forces.

The Nazis caught the United States unprepared to defend its coastline. The U.S. War and Navy Departments had little resources to devote to merchant vessel escort duty. By its sixth month, the Nazi operation was responsible for sinking three million tons of shipments in the Atlantic, according to Allied naval records.

Weeks prior to the launch of the German naval operation, Gill Robb Wilson, a Pennsylvania Presbyterian minister who had flown planes for the

French in World War I, set in motion a plan that had been years in the making. Wilson, along with other aviation enthusiasts, devised a plan to mobilize America's civilian aviation community for national defense purposes.

Their vision would come to fruition on Dec. 1, 1941, with the founding of the Civil Air Patrol. Several weeks after the Nazis began hunting in Atlantic waters, CAP, as it became known, took on a huge challenge: hunting enemy U-boats.

"For 18 months, from 1942-1943, CAP civilian volunteers flying armed, light private aircraft operated an anti-submarine coastal patrol as part of the American military effort in the Battle of the Atlantic," said Dr. Frank A. Blazich Jr., the curator of military history at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

"The civilian aviation effort represent-

ed a prewar possibility-turned-wartime exigency, and CAP's coastal patrol initiative developed from a critical need to stem the tide of German submarine operations inflicting heavy losses on coastal shipping. Begun as an experiment by the Army Air Forces in March 1942, CAP's effort commenced with meager resources and no practical experience."

'OUR THOUGHTS WERE ... WITH THEM'

Unpaid and underequipped, the pilots improvised and created ways to arm their aircraft to carry bombs or depth charges. By the fall of 1942, CAP aircrews had dropped 70 bombs in 51 submarine attacks, according to CAP. They were operating from 21 bases flying approximately 423 privately-owned aircraft on coastal patrols from Maine to the Texas border.

"The difficult thing was seeing these merchant ships, colliers and freighters

head east, going beyond our range and knowing that they were going into harm's way," said CAP Col. Charles Compton about his anti-submarine missions. "Our thoughts were very much with them."

Compton was assigned to Coastal Patrol Base 1 located in Atlantic City, N.J. The primary mission of his Unit was to follow shipping convoys.

"We were escorting them up and down the coast, from one area to another," Compton said. "Part of the idea was to keep them (Germans) submerged so they couldn't charge their batteries."

German U-boats operated on battery power while submerged. Prior to CAP patrols, the subs brazenly surfaced to recharge their batteries during the day, often attacking ships while they recharged. CAP patrols hindered daytime surfacing.

'GENUINE LOYALTY AND DEVOTION'

The missions, on paper, were simple. When a CAP plane detected a U-boat, it would broadcast the submarine's position to merchant ships in the area and notify the U.S. Navy and Army Air Forces. CAP aircraft would then shadow the U-boat as long as possible to vector in intercepting forces. CAP aircrews also reported ships that had been attacked and were in distress.

"Arguably, the most impactful mission we performed was our anti-submarine patrols," Civil Air Patrol's National Commander Maj. Gen. Mark E. Smith said. "The attrition of these oil tankers was unsustainable, and posed a direct threat to the U.S. ability to sustain its war effort. CAP stepped into the breach. The direct result of CAP's missions was the retreat of German U-boats from U.S. coastal areas."

Blazich said that destruction of submarines was never CAP's primary

objective. The mission was more about detection and deterrence.

"CAP's coastal patrol experience is a noteworthy success story in the history of American civil-military relations," Blazich said. "Volunteers possessed of genuine loyalty and devotion to duty flew their aircraft to the point of critical failure and took considerable risk in service to the military and public."

According to the Air Force, by war's end, more than 80,000 Americans had served in the CAP's anti-submarine effort. CAP aircrews flew more than 86,000 missions covering more than 24 million miles and 750,000 flight hours. Sixty-eight CAP members were killed with more than a third of them missing at sea, along with about 150 aircraft. CAP aircraft reported 91 vessels in distress, 173 suspected submarines, 363 survivors of attacks in the water, 36 dead bodies and 17 floating enemy mines. CAP also flew 5,684 con-

voy escort missions logging almost 42,000 hours of escort flight time, 89,504 hours of patrols and 60,548 hours of reconnaissance. CAP coastal patrols stopped flying on Aug. 31, 1943.

CAP SAVES 100 LIVES EVERY YEAR

In July 1946, President Harry S. Truman signed *Public Law 79-476*, incorporating the organization. Two years later, after the Air Force was made a separate military service, Truman signed *Public Law 80-557*, establishing CAP as the Air Force's civilian auxiliary. Today, CAP continues operations under congressional mandate to provide emergency services, aerospace education, cadet programs and total force support to the U.S. Air Force.

It performs more than 85 percent of the search and rescue missions in the continental United States, according to Smith. Each year, they save an average of 100 lives and they support almost every natural disaster,

providing vital imaging to FEMA and to emergency services personnel as well as other emergency support.

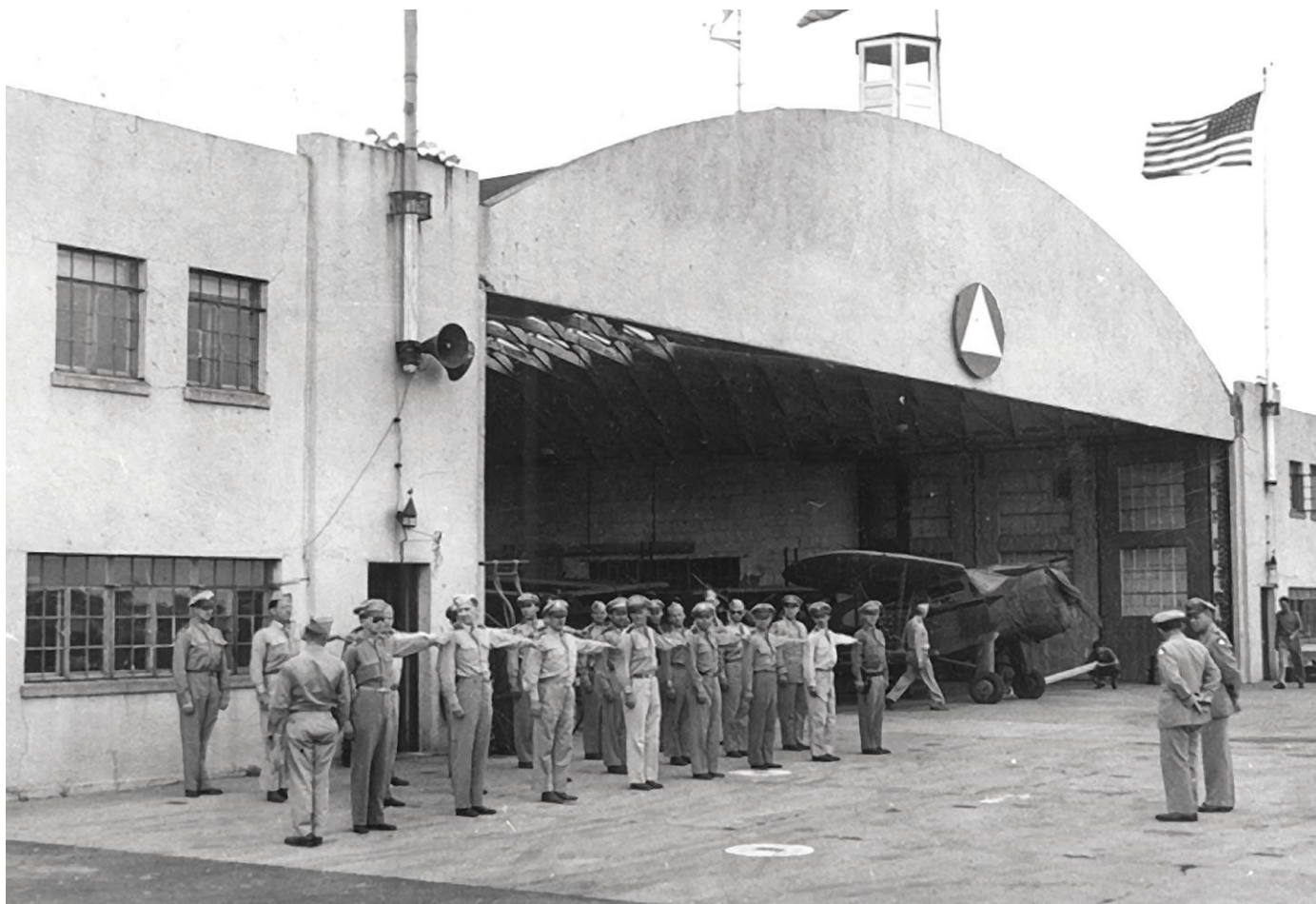
"Most Americans don't know that CAP exists, nor that it was a part of America's World War II war effort," Smith said. "Many people don't realize the sacrifices made, and services performed, by our World War II-era volunteers in actively helping in the defense of our nation."

Congress officially recognized CAP's vital contributions on Dec. 10, 2014. Its members who served during the war — approximately 200,000 — received the Congressional Gold Medal. The award is the country's highest expression of appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions.

The following year, Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, then Air Force chief of staff, announced that CAP was officially a member of the Air Force's Total Force, joining the active-duty, National Air Guard and



This 1943 Civil Air Patrol recruiting poster urged civilians to take an active role in protecting the nation's east coast, which Nazi subs targeted early in the war, sinking 3 million tons of cargo. The poster was designed by V. Clayton Kenney of Cleveland, a member of CAP Squadron 511-3 in Chagrin Falls, Ohio.



Airmen of CAP Coast Patrol Base No. 17 in Riverhead, N.Y., on Long Island, form up outside the base hangar in 1942. Civil Air Patrol units operated out of 21 bases along the U.S. coast from Maine to Texas, flying some 423 privately owned aircraft. In 2019, CAP's ranks included more than 65,000 members.

CAP COVERED MILLIONS OF MILES

More than 80,000 Americans volunteered to serve in the Civil Air Patrol's anti-submarine efforts during World War II. Here are the numbers they compiled.



86,000
missions
conducted



24 million
miles patrolled



750,000
flight hours logged and
150 CAP aircraft lost



5,684
convoys
escorted



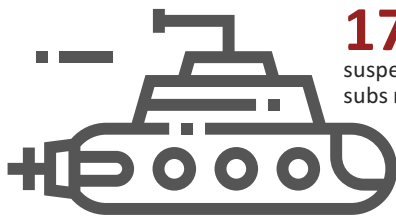
363
survivors
rescued

91 vessels in
distress located

36 dead bodies
found

173

suspected Nazi
subs reported



17
floating mines
detected

68 CAP airmen killed
(more than one-third missing at sea)

Reserve forces as American airmen.

Today, CAP is vastly different from its humble beginnings in 1941. Its inventory includes a fleet of 560 corporate-owned light aircraft, and its ranks include more than 65,000 adult and youth members.

Former U.S. Rep. Lester Wolff (D-N.Y.) commanded a CAP squadron on Long Island, N.Y. In an interview with CAP staff shortly after accepting the Congressional Gold Medal in 2014 on behalf of all CAP World War II-era personnel, Wolff said that hunting U-boats was often a perilous task.

"We did our job every day and asked for nothing," Wolff said. "So many people forget that our little effort contributed so much."

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Steve Alvarez is a Department of Florida VFW life member-at-large. A retired Army Reserve officer and Iraq War veteran, Alvarez is the author of *Selling War: A Critical Look at the Military's PR Machine*.

Source: U.S. Air Force



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VFW led the charge to make “The Star-Spangled Banner” the nation’s official anthem in 1931.

The 10-year effort was VFW’s first major legislative success.

BY MARC FERRIS

Though no organization could have singlehandedly lobbied Congress to enshrine “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the country’s official national anthem, the VFW played a decisive role in the effort.

Within the VFW, moreover, no one worked harder to make it happen than Walter I. Joyce, who established the organization’s Americanism initiatives in 1921 and helped convince Congress to act in 1931.

The first documented call to designate Francis Scott Key’s creation rang out at a Daughters of the American Revolution convention in 1895. But politicians considered anthem legislation to be a political hot potato and deferred to popular custom even as nations around the world declared anthems starting in the 1700s.

In Baltimore, the site of Fort McHenry

— where Key saw the U.S. flag streaming “o’er the ramparts” on Sept. 14, 1814 — local partisans promoted “The Star-Spangled Banner” after 1900. Led at first by the city’s self-appointed patriotic arbiter, Ella V. Holloway, her efforts received a big boost when Baltimore native John Charles Linthicum was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1912.

However, Congress considered the Baltimoreans’ campaign to be too provincial, especially after they submitted a petition signed by 51 individuals and 49 civic and hereditary societies, almost all of them based in Maryland.

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson issued an executive order singling out “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the anthem for the armed forces, but he contended that only Congress could make this official for civilians.

FLAG PASSION REIGNITED

After World War I, patriotic fervor took hold among veterans and their allies, who helped introduce legislation outlining a U.S. flag code in 1923 adopted by dozens of organizations — including VFW. The armed forces and President Warren Harding also endorsed the non-binding recommendations.

The code designated “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the nation’s official anthem, but efforts by the song’s supporters to convince Congress fizzled. Anthem bills, wrote Linthicum in the early 1920s, were “not classed with the vital matters of Congress.”

Enter Joyce, born to a military family in Massachusetts. After serving in the Spanish-American War, he moved to New York City and organized VFW Post 71, the first-ever Post on Manhattan.

ABOVE: U.S. Rep. Leonidas Dyer (R-Mo.), Auxiliary member Elsie Jorss Reilly, U.S. Rep. John C. Linthicum (D-Md.) and Walter Joyce, director of VFW’s Americanization Committee, deliver a petition bearing 5 million signatures to the House Judiciary Committee on Jan. 31, 1930, in Washington, D.C. The petition urged passage of a bill making “The Star-Spangled Banner” the U.S. national anthem. The bill became law in March 1931.



As director of VFW's Americanization Committee, Joyce promoted the commemoration of Flag Day, placed flags in schools, sponsored essay contests and printed 110,000 copies of his pamphlet *Etiquette of the Stars and Stripes*, published in 200 newspapers and magazines across the country.

By 1925, Joyce had recruited U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish III (R-N.Y.) and U.S. Rep. Emanuel Celler (D-N.Y.) in his anthem drive, which broadened the coalition beyond Maryland.

In opposition, educators, women's groups, religious organizations and pacifists scarred by World War I promoted "America the Beautiful" for anthem status, arguing that "The Star-Spangled Banner" glorified militarism.

But the author of "America the Beautiful," Katherine Lee Bates, favored Key's composition, opting to let popular will take its course.

"Urging" or "striving to have it 'supplant' something else," she wrote, was not in her interest.

5 MILLION SIGNATURES

Seizing the moment in 1928, Joyce, who served as VFW's adjutant general (1918-22) and as quartermaster general (1922-23), ramped up his efforts "to the limit." He marshalled the VFW Ladies Auxiliary (today's VFW Auxiliary) and circulated blank forms nationwide to amass 5 million signatures in favor of the resolution, which he called the "50-mile petition."

In addition, Joyce sponsored a caravan of cars painted red, white and blue that traveled from New York City to Washington, D.C., to promote the effort. He also recognized Sept. 10-15 as Star-Spangled Banner Week and reorganized the National Star-Spangled Banner Association, founded in Baltimore during the 1910s.

"I believe that this will be the greatest piece of patriotic publicity that the [VFW] has ever obtained and that its value cannot be counted in dollars and

cents," Joyce wrote about his work on the song's behalf.

Baltimoreans, who knew nothing about Joyce's campaign, expressed astonishment when they learned "of the great amount of work which had been done," Linthicum wrote.

Holloway, who experienced "such a shock from which I never will recover," complained that "our field has been invaded" and accused VFW of stealing her thunder.

After she wrote a public letter downplaying his role, Joyce replied with a pointed private communiqué criticizing the Maryland contingent's limited impact.

"I want to ask you a question," Joyce wrote. "Has any other organization done half of what we have?"

Still, Joyce remained diplomatic, conveying the "utmost respect for you and your sincere efforts" and hoping that "we will have a joint celebration of every patriotic organization" once Congress finally acted.

WIDE SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE NATION

The tipping point arrived in 1929. In addition to Linthicum and Celler, who introduced anthem bills in the House, Sen. Art Robinson (R-Ind.), a WWI Army vet, submitted another proposal in the upper chamber.

National events also influenced the outcome as veterans gained increased clout when the bonus issue erupted on the national stage.

The federal government had promised WWI veterans a cash allowance for their service, to be redeemed in 1945. With the advent of the Great Depression, however, veterans sought immediate payment.

In January 1930, the evening before Congressional hearings on the anthem bill, the VFW sponsored a gathering of sympathetic organizations at the Daughters of the American Revolution headquarters in Washington, D.C.

During the hearing, in a scene reminiscent of the classic film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," Joyce hauled in crate after crate containing the 50-mile petition, including scrolls signed by the American War Mothers of Tucson, Ariz.; housewives and teachers from Boone, Iowa; bus operators in Greenville, S.C.; and the Department of Corrections in Albany, N.Y.

"Previous attempts to secure this recognition have failed because Congress lacked evidence of a general desire among the people for such action," Joyce noted.

VFW'S WORK PAYS OFF

On March 3, 1931, the House and Senate voted unanimously in favor of the anthem resolution, sending the bill to President Herbert Hoover.

Hoover signed the legislation immediately, in part because it cost the government nothing to implement, and it mollified veterans incensed over the bonus issue.

For Joyce, who suffered from health problems and retired from VFW's Americanization Committee in 1935, securing passage of the act served as the crowning achievement of his distinguished career.

In the official proceedings of VFW's 1932 National Convention, which were entered into the Congressional record, VFW singled out Joyce and his effort.

"No greater legislative victory has been won by the VFW in its 32 years of existence," according to the proceedings.

Thanks to Joyce's leadership and the tireless efforts of many veterans advocates, the VFW played a pivotal role establishing "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the nation's official anthem. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Marc Ferris, based in New York, is the author of Star-Spangled Banner: The Unlikely Story of America's National Anthem.

'I'M WHERE I'M AT TODAY BECAUSE OF IT'

Commander of VFW Post 584 in Albany, Ore., and *Unmet Needs* grant recipient Michael Aaron is shown with his wife, Whitney, and children, Laura and Henry. Aaron said receiving the *Unmet Needs* grant was a "turning point" for him and his family, as it allowed them to stay in their home.

With the help of VFW's Unmet Needs program, a Marine Corps veteran was able to get his life back on track. He has since dedicated his time to VFW and has become a Post commander in Oregon.

BY DAVE SPIVA

A Marine Corps veteran received a \$1,500 grant from the VFW *Unmet Needs* program in 2015 after he and his family fell behind on the mortgage for his Lebanon, Ore., home.

Michael Aaron, who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars with 2nd Bn., 3rd Marines, said he had a "rough" transition after leaving the Marine Corps.

"I was struggling pretty bad," said Aaron, a life member of VFW Post 584 in Albany, Ore. "Due to my service-connected PTSD, anxiety and depression, it had become a huge barrier for me to keep employment. I had tried criminal justice, firefighting and electrician school, but I just couldn't keep it together."

After leaving the Marine Corps in 2007, Aaron said he jumped from job to job. In 2015, Aaron said he had to quit working due to his service-connected mental health issues.

"I hit rock bottom," Aaron said. "I

went to get treatment at the American Lake VA Medical Center (in Tacoma, Wash.). I decided to do an inpatient residential program."

During his six weeks at the VA, Aaron started talking with other veterans about VFW and its services to veterans and their families. He visited the VFW's website and came across the *Unmet Needs* program.

"At the time, my house was going into foreclosure, we were behind on our car loan and my bills were piling up," Aaron said. "Everything was tumbling down, and I just didn't know where to go, so I applied for the *Unmet Needs* grant. It was the first time that I had reached out for any kind of financial help."

Aaron said the *Unmet Needs* grant (www.vfw.org/NMS) "meant the world" to him, and he was "in awe" that he didn't have to pay any of the money back.

"At that time, I vowed to give back to VFW in some way," Aaron said. "The *Unmet Needs* grant was so important for

my family's well-being."

Now serving as the commander of VFW Post 584 and a member of the VFW Department of Oregon Finance Committee, Aaron said he will continue to be a part of VFW in some capacity for the foreseeable future.

"I'm invested now," Aaron said. "VFW is the kind of organization that would help someone like me, and I wanted to be a part of that. I felt that if VFW would do this for me, there has got to be more to it and a bigger picture to helping veterans."

Aaron, who was appointed national Aide-de-Camp to VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz last year, said he finally has found something he can do "all day, every day" with VFW.

"I mark the VFW's help through the *Unmet Needs* program as a turning point in a very hard road for my family and me," Aaron said. "I'm where I'm at today because of it."



EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org



PALMETTO STATE POST NOW RUNNING ON CLEAN ENERGY

BY DAVE SPIVA

South Carolina VFW members worked with a team of Coastal Carolina University students to install solar panels at their Post. A past commander of the Post said the project is helping save money and the environment.

VFW Post 10804 received more than \$57,000 in donated funds to purchase and install solar panels at its Little River, S.C., location.

Members of the Post and a team of students from Coastal Carolina University in Conway, S.C., unveiled a set of newly installed solar panels on Oct. 13, 2018, at the Post. The Post commander at the time, Nick Camera, said the bills were “getting out of hand” for the building’s maintenance and utilities.

“But since installing these solar panels, we have seen a big change,” Camera said. “Our electricity bill has been about 20 percent less than what it used to be.”

Camera is a retired Army lieutenant colonel who served from 1971 to 1992. He earned his VFW eligibility from his service in South Korea in 1986-87.

According to Camera, Post 10804 saved almost \$2,500 on their electricity bill in 2019 compared to the previous year. The average monthly savings was about \$200.

“It exceeded even the estimate presented by the students,” Camera said. “We are very happy with the outcome.”

A TWO-YEAR PROCESS

The students were a part of the university’s Solar Ambassadors group. The program is a year-long fellowship for students who

want to help non-profit organizations reduce carbon emissions by installing solar panels.

There was no up-front cost of the project for the Post. Coastal Solar Ambassadors helped raised the funds needed for the project, which the students called “Volts4Vets.” The total also included a matching grant from the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation.

“The students were very eager to help out veterans,” Camera said. “They did all the fundraising that made everything a great success.”

Camera said that he and other Post members were amazed at how much money the Post saved on its electricity bill.

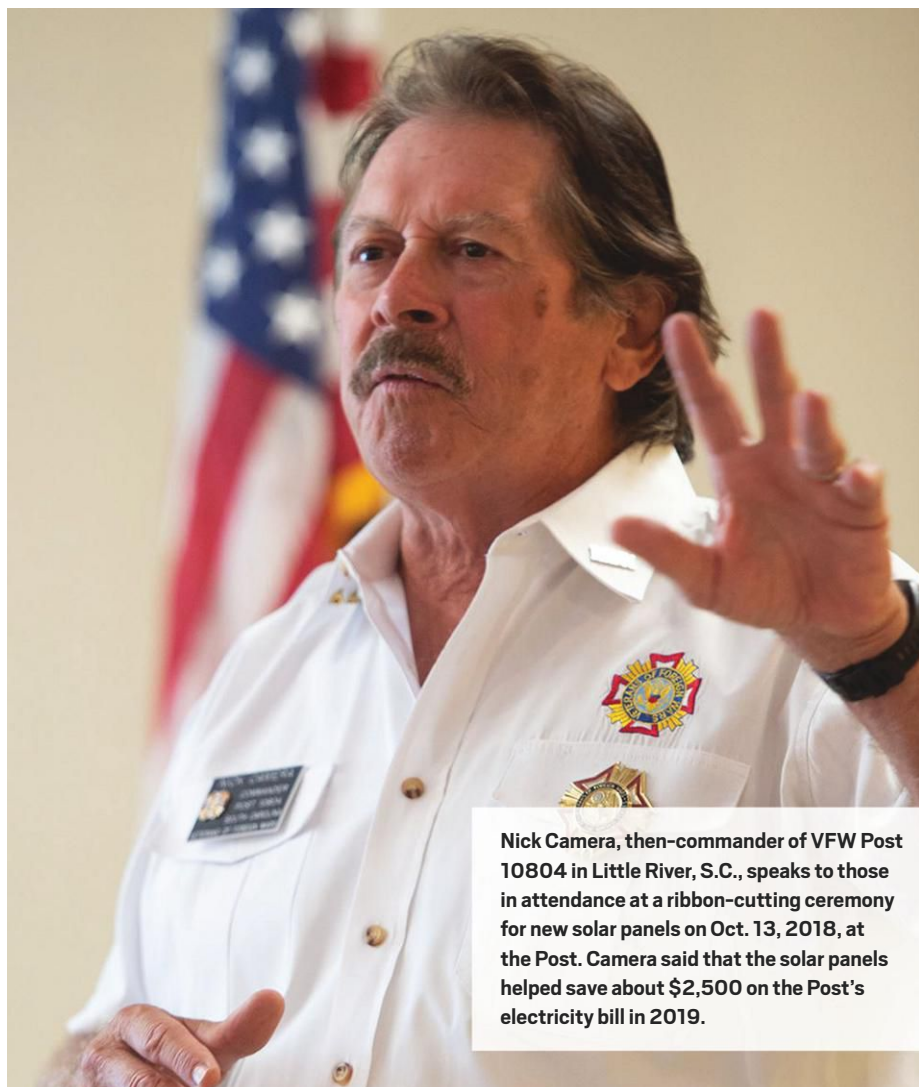
“Years ago, our Post did an energy audit, and we found that we were losing a lot of money paying for our utilities,” Camera said. “So we started looking at ways to save money, and solar energy seemed like a possible solution.”

Camera said the “Volts4Vets” project took almost two years to come to fruition. After its completion, the project was set to be unveiled in September 2018.

“We actually had to postpone the ribbon-cutting ceremony because of *Hurricane Florence* (Aug. 31-Sept. 18, 2018),” Camera said. “Hurricanes were one of the main issues members of the Post were concerned with. They questioned whether or not the panels could survive a hurricane.”



Members of VFW Post 10804 and students from the Coastal Carolina University Solar Ambassadors program cut the ribbon for a new solar panel on Oct. 13, 2018, at the Little River, S.C., Post. The students helped raise more than \$57,000 for the project, named "Volts4Vets."



Nick Camera, then-commander of VFW Post 10804 in Little River, S.C., speaks to those in attendance at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for new solar panels on Oct. 13, 2018, at the Post. Camera said that the solar panels helped save about \$2,500 on the Post's electricity bill in 2019.

Camera said the solar panels fared well against the storms and flooding caused by the hurricane, which "satisfied" those skeptical of the solar panels structural integrity.

"After that, I think they were more accepting of what these panels' could do for us through the future," Camera said. "I think our members just wanted a bargain and to make sure that the panels weren't going to blow away in a storm."

HELPING THE ENVIRONMENT

The Coastal Solar Ambassadors estimated that the solar panel installation will prevent more than 690,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from emitting into the atmosphere during the panels' 30-year lifespan.

The Solar Ambassador program is a part of RE-volv, a San Francisco nonprofit organization that uses crowdfunding campaigns as a way to install solar panels across the country. Solar Ambassadors works with local nonprofit organizations, such as VFW, to install solar panels at their facilities.

"We couldn't have done this without the help of these students and other organizations involved," Camera said. "The students were very involved. They were into the idea of helping the environment by installing these solar panels."

Camera said that Post 10804 has a 20-year lease on its solar

panels with RE-volv. He added that at the end of the 20-year period, the organization will transfer the ownership of the panel system to the Post at no cost.

"As we pay our monthly payments toward the system, those payments are going to go toward some other organization," Camera said. "We see it as a way of giving back to an organization that helped us."

OPERATION SUNSHINE

Post 10804's project did not go unnoticed. VFW Post 10420 in Murrells Inlet, S.C., also worked with the Coastal Solar Ambassadors shortly after "Volts4Vets" was completed.

In a campaign dubbed "Operation Sunshine," the Coastal Solar Ambassadors raised more than \$35,000 through another crowdfunding campaign for Post 10420. The students claim the panels will prevent an additional 456,000 pounds' worth of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

"Since following our lead, the panels at Post 10804 in Murrells Inlet are now operational," Camera said. "We hope other VFW Posts consider looking into solar power to help save money. It's also good for the environment. It's a win-win." ★

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

Rachael Garcia, an Iraq War veteran and member of VFW Post 152 in North Kingstown, R.I., attends a National Veterans Service course in January in Annapolis, Md. Garcia helps veterans in southern Rhode Island file disability claims and advises student veterans at the University of Rhode Island.

A VFW SERVICE OFFICER IS DOING 'AMAZING' WORK

VFW hosted a week of training and education for its accredited service officers in January. The VA-required course has taught a Rhode Island service officer how to help veterans transition out of military service.

BY DAVE SPIVA

Dozens of VFW-accredited service officers from around the world attended a week-long course in January in Annapolis, Md. Service officers attended the training conference to develop the skills necessary to help veterans obtain their earned VA benefits.

VA requires service officers to spend at least 40 hours each year in the classroom. However, VFW requires its service officers to spend 80 hours in training each year.

One such VFW service officer at the training was Rachael Garcia, a member of VFW Post 152 in North Kingstown, R.I. She is an Air Force veteran who served in the Iraq War in 2006 with the 407th Security Forces Squadron as a gunner and squad leader.

Garcia, who spent most of her enlistment with the 435th Security Forces Squadron in Ramstein, Germany, said it was her second time at the VFW event in Annapolis.

"This training was very unique," Garcia said. "It was very involved because the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-182) had just become law. I had to learn a lot about the new regulations. The training was very detailed, and in the process, I learned a lot

about what's new at the VA."

As an accredited VFW service officer, Garcia spends time at VFW Post 916 in Wakefield, R.I., helping veterans in the southern part of the state file disability claims. When Garcia isn't performing duties as a service officer, she's working with student veterans at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston.

As the assistant director of veteran affairs and military programs, Garcia helps students obtain housing on campus and GI Bill benefits. But as a VFW service officer, she also can help students file VA claims.

Garcia said she started working as a service officer while attending Oregon's Portland State University in 2015.

"While obtaining my master's degree, I went to a VA service office at the VA medical center in Vancouver (Wash.) to see if I could work there for my work-study," Garcia said. "There, I started to learn more about how to work with veterans."

After completing her college credit, Garcia continued her work at the VA facility as a part-time employee. She said she "fell in love" with the work.

"I maintained my accreditation as a service officer when I moved on to work for the University of Rhode Island," Garcia

said. "I wanted to be a service officer so that I could continue to file claims and stay privy to a lot of information and benefits that I could relay to my students."

Garcia said that being available as a service officer at a university is a "huge benefit" to students who are transitioning to civilian life. She noted that she can help file claims just after they leave the military.

During the 2020 Student Veterans of America (SVA) National Conference in January in Los Angeles, Garcia was honored as one of the finalists for the SVA Chapter Advisor of the Year. A Washington, D.C.-based organization, SVA advocates for the improvement of student veteran benefits. SVA chapters across the country also help student veterans navigate life as a college student.

VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci said that he is impressed with the work Garcia and other service officers do in their respective communities.

"She is doing some amazing work at the University of Rhode Island," Gallucci said. "Her work with veterans could very well serve as a model for assisting student veterans nationwide." ★

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Early Detection is Key in Beating Prostate Cancer

Awareness and screenings are vital efforts in the campaign to put an end to this cancer, which affects one in nine men.

BY JANICE PHELAN



Encouraging men to get regular screenings for prostate cancer is the goal of Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness (VPCa), in Washington, D.C. The nonprofit is dedicated to awareness, research, advocacy and support regarding prostate cancer, with a goal of putting an end to the disease.

“All men are at risk of prostate cancer, so it is important to talk to your doctor, get screened and make an informed decision,” said Mike “Bing” Crosby, a founder of VPCa and a VFW member. “Detecting prostate cancer early gives you the most options for treatment and the best chance of living longer. In fact, when it is caught early, the five-year survival rate is more than 99 percent.”

One in nine American men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer within his lifetime, Crosby said. Some of the risk factors include:

- Age, since most prostate cancer occurs in men 50 and older.
- Race, as African American men are 1.7 times more likely to be diagnosed.
- Family history such as a father, brother or son with a diagnosis.
- A diet including high amounts of animal fat.
- Environmental/occupational haz-

ards such as radiation and chemical exposure including Agent Orange and other pesticides.

“In November 2019, a VHA (Veterans Health Administration) and Prostate Cancer Foundation study concluded there are more than 489,000 veterans with prostate cancer in the VHA system today,” Crosby said. “The rate of discovery of metastatic disease on the first diagnosis within the VHA system is 14 percent, as compared to 7 percent in the general public.”

Screenings may be conducted by a general practitioner or urologist and include a PSA (prostate specific antigen) blood test and digital rectal exam that allows a doctor to estimate the size of the prostate and check for lumps or any other abnormalities.

Free screenings are available, Crosby said, and VPCa has partnered with ZERO — The End of Prostate Cancer to provide a testing map at <https://zerocancer.org/test-centers>. The nonprofit’s webpage also includes information about screenings, resources for diagnosed patients and families as well as how to advocate for research and patient support.

“If caught early, prostate cancer is a very treatable and curable cancer with few side effects,” said Crosby, a prostate cancer survivor diagnosed in 2015. “If

left to the point where it metastasizes, the treatment is complex and can significantly affect your quality of life.”

Veterans are encouraged to participate in the organization’s survey, available at www.zerocancer.org/vetssurvey, to help the nonprofit better meet educational and awareness needs, Crosby said.

ZERO Prostate Cancer Veterans’ patient support includes a live assistance line called ZERO360 at 1-844-244-1309, peer-to-peer support, and a closed Facebook group for patients, caregivers, family and friends.

The group’s “chapters provide the boots on the ground to involve local communities in the fight for the one in nine men diagnosed with prostate cancer,” Crosby added.

The organization will be an exhibitor at the VFW National Convention, July 18-23 in Reno, Nev., and will offer free PSA blood testing for VFW members.

Throughout the year, ZERO Prostate Cancer Veterans organizes 48 run/walk fundraisers as well as numerous other outreach events. For more information about these events or the organization itself, visit <https://zerocancer.org>. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Janice Phelan is a freelance writer based in Lee’s Summit, Mo.

PCF and the VA have Joined Forces to Provide Extraordinary Care



Prostate Cancer
Foundation
Curing Together.



PCF-funded researcher, Dr. Julie Graff leads a study at the Portland VA to directly benefit patients.

In 2016, the Prostate Cancer Foundation (PCF) committed \$50 million to partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to create centers of excellence that deliver innovative, best in class prostate cancer care to Veterans. More than half of the funds have already been used to stand up ten centers of excellence working together nationally to speed the development of precision treatments and cures for Veterans with prostate cancer.

Visit [PCF.org/VA](https://www.pcf.org/va) or call 1-800-757-CURE to learn more about the research and care offered through the PCF-VA partnership.

REUNIONS AND CLAIMS

To publicize your unit's reunion, email magazine@vfw.org. Submit at least four months in advance of reunion date. VFW members only.

AIR FORCE

Air Security Police, K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Mich.: Warren Everett (989) 984-7004; mi.sasquatch@gmail.com
Wildwood Air Force Station, Kenai, Alaska, 5074th Air Base Sqdn./1935th Communications Sqdn.: Jim Fetrow (616) 443-1946; fetrowj590@gmail.com

ARMY

1st Bn., 83rd Arty, Vietnam, 1966-71: Bill Taggart (856) 228-5614; artillery_83rd@yahoo.com
7/17 Air Cav, Ruthless Riders & Palehorse: Joe Wirth (201) 390-5350; joseph.wirth@yahoo.com
11th Armored Cav Veterans, Vietnam & Cambodia: Frank Church (386) 365-0487; fcchurch4@aol.com
46th Eng. Bn.: Vern Nelson (715) 886-3290; jvnels2@solarus.net
76 Eng. Const. Bn.: Richard Cerone (615) 443-0027
94th Inf. Div., Historical Society: John Clyburn Jr. (908) 781-1406; 94thhistsociety@comcast.net
272 MP Vietnam Veterans: Jim Walker (404) 372-1369; jimwalker@aol.com
Dusters, Quads, Searchlights, Vulcans, and Hawks, Vietnam: Bruce Geiger (914) 576-1050; bmgeiger@aol.com
Echo Co., 1/5 1st Air Cav, Vietnam, 1968-70: Terry Fauquher (317) 501-0287; tfauquher@aol.com
Vinh Long Outlaw Assn., 62nd Aviation Co., Co. A, 502nd Aviation Bn., 175th Assault Helicopter Co. and all attached units: Bert Rice (410) 507-3366; bert07@comcast.net

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1st, 3rd, & 5th Amtrac Bn., Vietnam: Ronald Stogner (601) 569-9456; ronstogner1948@gmail.com
Naval Cryptologic Veterans Assn., Great Lakes Chapter: <https://usncva.org/reunions/2020-gathering-by-the-waters.html>

NAVY

Navy Sqdns., VF-11 and VW-4, 1962-66: A. J. "Tony" DePalmer (702) 324-1199
OM-IM Assn.: John Bryan (706) 339-5905; bigjohn767@yahoo.com
TACAMO Community Veterans Assn.: Cheryl Vos (859) 609-4624 tcva.reunions@gmail.com
USS Carpenter DD-825: Gary Hogenmiller (903) 360-7359
USS Conserver ARS-39: Dale E. Hower (619) 449-4499; dcwoodworking1@yahoo.com
USS Franklin D. Roosevelt CVB/CVA/CV-42 & Sqdns.: Bill Solt (321) 362-5806; sisbill@aol.com
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USS Salisbury Sound AV-13: Victor Fischer (630) 257-2710; duffer664@sbcglobal.net
USS Southland DD/DDR-743: Gary Schweizer (574) 276-9539; sweenie04@comcast.net
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36th Annual Nebraska Vietnam Veterans Reunion, All Services: Jaime Obrecht (402) 435-0454; roy-suzie74@inebraska.com
TBM Avenger & Salute to Veterans: www.tbmareunion.org

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 email your claim to magazine@vfw.org.

Air Force

Clark AFB, Philippines, 1997-98 – Seeking anyone who can substantiate exposure to Agent Orange claim. Sgt. William O. Kansanke, who was mentioned in a first-hand statement as to giving orders to use Agent Orange at the 6922nd Security Wing. Michael E. Wagner (209) 985-6702; mikewagner@fire2wire.com

Army

41st Civil Affairs, Team 9, Nha Trang, Vietnam, Nov. 1966-67 – Seeking Lt. Stewart and Capt. Jones, Washington, D.C., to substantiate a Jeep wreck. Vehicle turned over causing injury to the driver, Lt. Stewart and myself-treated at field hospital. Charles R. Monday (304) 901-2893

Camp Pickett, Virginia, 1953 – Seeking anyone to substantiate an accident causing scars on my lips, neck and chin. All my records were destroyed by fire. Donald Wheeler Sr. (203) 843-8004; donkathywheeler@hotmail.com

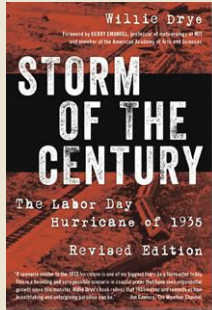
Marines

K Co., 3rd Bn., 5th Regt., 1st Marine Div., An Hoa Combat Base, Vietnam, 1969-70 – Seeking Corpsman Paul Schabel Jr. to substantiate a claim. Leo Guzman (860) 232-0279

Navy

USS Saint Paul CA-73, Vietnam, 1969-70 – Seeking anyone who can substantiate a claim. Les L. Chadwick (413) 489-3079-1127 Tomhawk Trail, Shelburne Falls, MA 01370

STAFF PICK

**Storm of the Century**

By Willie Drye

The book chronicles the Labor Day hurricane of 1935, a catastrophe that hit a remote section of the Florida Keys where a group of WWI veterans were building a highway that connected Miami to Key West. The book also captures the transition of these veterans into civilian life with genuine help from the Roosevelt Administration. The hurricane that struck the upper Florida Keys on the evening of Sept. 2, 1935, is still the most powerful hurricane to make landfall in the U.S. As a result, about 400 veterans were left unprotected in flimsy work camps. Around 260 of those veterans were killed. This is their story, with newly discovered photos that capture the calamity in full. *Lyons Press*

The Hand of the Wicked

By Bob Young, life member, VFW Department of Georgia

Young captures a tragically true murder story during the chaos of Reconstruction in the weeks and months following the Civil War. At the time, the South was under martial law, and the military commissions administered their own brand of justice, with the President having final reviewing authority. *Eagle Veterans Services LLC*

General Harry J. Collins: The General of the Children

By Mike Chapman, VFW Department of Wisconsin

The book is based on the recollections of those who knew Harry J. Collins (1895-1963), and includes excerpts from the general's own diary to which the author was given exclusive rights. Collins was best known for his command of the 42nd Infantry Division during World War II. *Royal Fireworks Press*

Loss of Innocence

By Stephen Cone, life member, VFW Post 10076, Mount Airy, Md.

The book covers 15 years of official document research, taped interviews and meetings with those who served within the ranks of Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines during the Vietnam War. *Friesen Press*

A Time to Remember

By V.G. Gallagher, VFW Department of Pennsylvania

This memoir captures the author's life as it goes from his enlistment in the New York Army National Guard to active duty in Korea from 1952-1953. The book also includes the author's additional six years with an on-site, full-time Air Defense National Guard unit before receiving an honorable discharge in 1962. *Blue Spruce Publishing Company*

Lost in Dalat — The Courage of a Family Torn by War

By James Luger, life member, VFW Post 425, Hopkins, Minn.

This novel tracks Meggan Mondae, who travels to the exotic mountain city of Dalat, Vietnam, to find the battlefield where her father was long-ago reported

MIA. While searching for the place where her father was last seen alive, Mondae uncovers shocking secrets about him — secrets that now threaten her. *High Flight Publishing*

The War on Mental Illness

By Bob Frisby, life member, VFW Post 5630, St. Charles, Minn.

The book chronicles 40 years of the author's work with people who have thoughts of hurting themselves or others, which includes soldiers suffering from PTSD. It also describes the necessary services needed to help ease the pain and lead healthy lives. *Self-Published*

Nightmare

By Robert E. Ford Jr., life member, VFW Post 9462, Absecon, N.J.

Based on the author's real-life experiences during and after the Vietnam War, the novel follows enlisted man Jack Butler on a mission into dangerous territory with enemy fighters on the move. As a staff sergeant, Butler tries desperately against the odds to accomplish the mission and keep his men alive. *Dorrance Publishing Co.*

ABCs of the Air Force

By Richard Lee Marsh, life member, VFW Department of Virginia

This non-fiction book provides readers with various insights into the U.S. Air Force, depicting one insight for each letter of the alphabet from A to Z with a short paragraph and artistic illustration for each letter. *MASCOT Books*

Uncommon Bond

By John House, VFW Post 1187, Winder, Ga.

The book presents a fictionalized account of the POW experience of a doctor taken captive when his helicopter goes down in South Vietnam. The story describes his capture, treatment by the Viet Cong and the friendship he develops with an NVA surgeon who later saves his life. *W & B Publishers*

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

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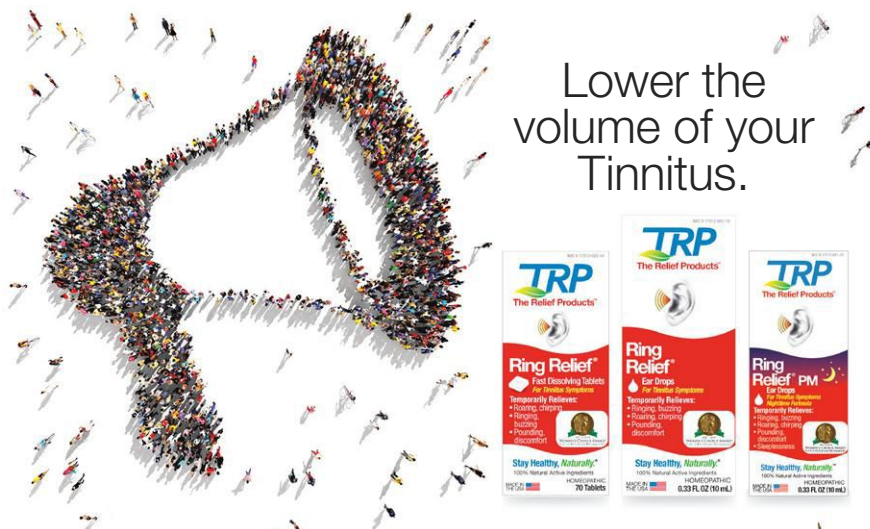
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Auxiliary Baby Shower Brings ‘Smiles’

An Illinois VFW Auxiliary hosted its first-ever baby shower for 35 moms-to-be in September 2019. The event for veterans and military spouses could become an annual affair.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

VFW Post 4308's Auxiliary in Lake Villa, Ill., celebrated the coming of life with its inaugural “Veterans Baby Shower” event in September 2019.

The Auxiliary showered 35 expecting mothers, classified as either veteran, active duty or military spouse, with a blazon of gifts donated by local businesses and nearby VFW Posts and Auxiliaries.

Each of the mothers received an array of items that included a case of diapers, a formula starter pack, a mini bathtub, crocheted blankets and sets of clothes for their babies. The moms-to-be also received printed shirts reading ‘Home of the Free Because my Mommy is Brave,’ a ‘Celebration Diaper Cake,’ a bottle of champagne and a donated portable crib.

“Words will never be enough to thank you for everything,” one of the attendees wrote. “I have been having a rough time with this pregnancy, and your amazing team brought a full day of smiles and love to me and my unborn daughter.”

The woman added that it “meant the world” to her. “My two boys were so shocked when I returned home, saying, ‘Mom, they must love you,’” she recalled.

The particular impact of the veterans baby shower, captured in this attendee’s email to the Auxiliary, presented the VFW’s Auxiliary President Anne Simons with the kind of motivation necessary in continuing what may become a yearly tradition at the Post.

“The feelings expressed in this message is why we do what we do,” Simons said of the event, an initiative that took 14 months to prepare following a vote by the Auxiliary in August 2018.

Some of the Lake Villa Auxiliary members had originally considered adopting a veterans baby shower event after attending one at nearby VFW Post



TOP: One of the baby shower attendees grabs a gift basket during VFW Post 4308 Auxiliary’s “Veterans Baby Shower” event in Lake Villa, Ill., in September 2019.

BOTTOM: All the attendees, which includes veterans, active-duty and military spouses, pose in September during the Auxiliary’s first-ever baby shower at the Post in Lake Villa, Ill. The Auxiliary gifted 35 moms-to-be with essentials that included diapers, formula starter packs and clothes.

2298’s Auxiliary in West Dundee, Ill., every January for several years, according to Simons. (See the May 2018 issue of VFW magazine.)

The members eventually voted for and received a majority approval during one of its last Auxiliary meetings of 2018, which then set the initiative in motion at the start of 2019.

By the end of January, 250 invitations had been printed and sent to the Obstetrics Department at Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago. The invitations came with instructions, asking the department to only pass them along to eligible mothers-to-be.

With help from the healthcare center, and later the Hines VA Hospital in Chicago, the first wave of responses yielded 20 applicants by August. And just before the event’s Sept. 15 launching, Post 4308’s Auxiliary capped its number at 35 attendees in order to accommodate them with ample space and gifts.

Invited guests to the Auxiliary’s baby shower included VFW Department of Illinois Auxiliary President Billie Guthals, Chief of Staff Jerriann Boyd and Illinois District 5 Commander Christine Pawley, the 2018 Miss Veteran America runner-up.

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org

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Incentives Reward Recruiting Efforts

Leaders at the Post and District levels can win trips based on their successful recruiting. Here is a look at two such trips.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE



PHOTO BY BOB KNUDSEN



PHOTO BY RICK MCKENNA

TOP: Former VFW Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence testifies before Congress in March 2019 during VFW's Legislative Conference in the nation's capital. Top Post and District leaders in membership are awarded a stipend to attend this conference and testimony.

BELOW: Winners of VFW's Kansas City Spree last May visit with Buffalo Soldier re-enactors at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. The trip is an incentive for the top two Post commanders and the top two District commanders in each division in membership by April 1 each year.

Successful recruiting and retention is vital to the longevity of VFW's membership. To encourage leaders at all levels to give it their all, VFW offers numerous incentives each year.

According to VFW Membership Deputy Director Rick McKenna, leaders at the Post level are largely responsible for membership growth.

"By offering rewards at this level, it's our way of saying 'thank you,'" McKenna said. "These folks are very deserving of the incentives we have in place. Without their hard work, where would we be as an organization?"

Recognizing 78 VFW members, the Early Bird Award — VFW Legislative Conference is one such incentive. The top three Post commanders and quartermasters as well as the top two District commanders in each division in membership as of Jan. 1 each year receive a stipend to be used toward attending the VFW Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

"This is a really great opportunity for our Post and District leaders to see VFW in action on Capitol Hill," McKenna said. "It's not every day you have the opportunity to see VFW's Commander-in-Chief testify before Congress. Plus, VFW awards the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen winners at this time."

In May, the top two Post commanders and the top two District commanders in each division in membership as of April 1 will each be awarded the Kansas City Spree.

The trip includes round-trip airfare to Kansas City, Mo., from the airport nearest the awardee's home. McKenna said the "fun-filled" weekend includes tours of numerous sites, such as the Truman Library in Independence, Mo.; the Cavalry Museum at nearby Fort Leavenworth, Kan.; and the National WWI Museum near VFW's National Headquarters building.

"The best part of the Kansas City Spree is the extensive tour of VFW National Headquarters," McKenna said. "It gives these winners a chance to see how we do business every day on behalf of all VFW members. Each winner also gets to bring a guest."

As the membership year is winding to a close in the next few months, McKenna said to keep these incentives in mind for next year. To review all of the current awards, log into MyVFW and go to Membership Quick Links, then 2019-2020 VFW National Membership Program.

"Above all else, keep up the hard work," McKenna said. "Get out there and recruit and strive to boost your retention. National Headquarters has so many resources to help in these endeavors, so please reach out to us."

To learn more about membership recruiting tools, call VFW's Membership Department at 1-888-564-6839.

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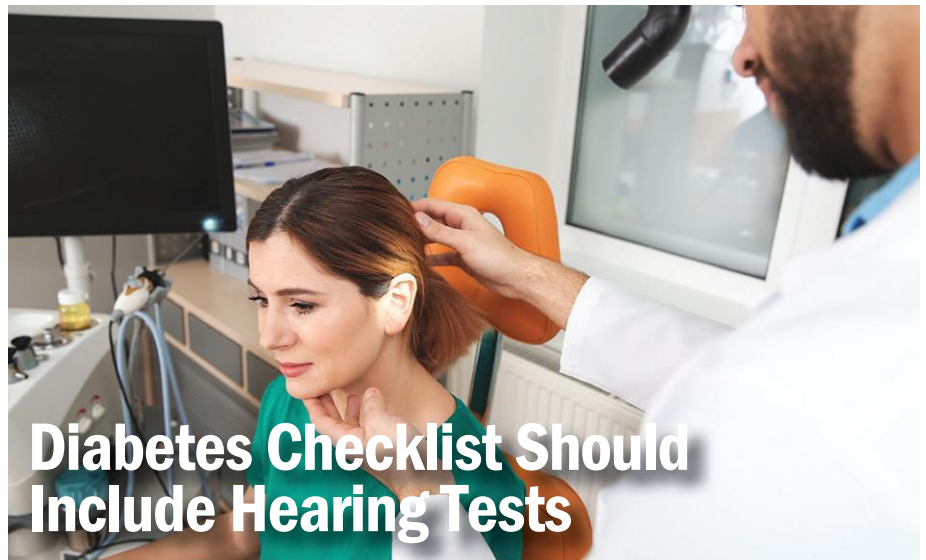
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Diabetes Checklist Should Include Hearing Tests

It should come as no surprise that diabetes is tied to hearing loss. This is why regular hearing screenings should be included in your diabetes care checklist.

Here is a checklist of essential tips for managing diabetes:

- **Monitor weight:** Weight control is the key for keeping type 2 diabetes under control. Though it can seem overwhelming and challenging, losing 10 or 15 pounds can make a big difference.
- **Eat healthy:** Maintain a balanced meal plan when managing diabetes. That doesn't mean you have to completely give up your favorite foods, but make it a goal to find a balance that works for you.
- **Exercise:** Move for at least one hour a day to stay in shape. Whether it's taking your dog for a walk, dancing around your house or playing tag with your kids, exercising is an essential element of a healthy lifestyle.
- **Get your hearing checked:** People who have diabetes may be at a higher risk for hearing loss. According to the National Institutes of Health, hearing loss is twice as common in adults with diabetes compared to adults who don't have diabetes. Adults with pre-diabetes have a 30 percent higher rate of hearing loss compared to those with normal blood sugar.

Also, be on the lookout for symptoms of diabetic nerve damage such as pain

and numbness, commonly felt in legs and feet.

HOW ARE DIABETES AND HEARING LOSS RELATED?

The connection is not entirely clear, but diabetes is a condition that happens when the body doesn't properly process food to use as energy. Most food is turned into glucose, or sugar, for our bodies to use for energy.

The pancreas makes a hormone called insulin that helps glucose get into our cells.

When you have diabetes, your body doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should, and this causes sugars to build up in the blood.

Chronic high blood sugar takes its toll on the small blood vessels throughout your body, including your ears, which can result in nerve damage.

"The cochlea (inner ear) is very small, and the effects of diabetes can have a big impact on hearing nerves," said Carrie Meyer, Au.D., Amplifon Hearing Health Care's Director of Clinical Programs. "Low blood flow and higher cholesterol levels common with diabetes have potential to cause damage."

Diabetics should have their hearing tested annually to address any changes early. If the nerves in your ears get damaged, you'll most likely experience signs of hearing loss.

For more information, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-833-VFW-VETS (1-833-839-8387), option 3.

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. Otherwise, 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. VFW's reunion coordinator will run a reunion notice only **ONCE** in the magazine.

Reunion Listing in Magazine

☐ Planned reunion

(Reunion arrangements have already been made)

☐ Proposed reunion

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☐ Coast Guard

☐ Army

☐ Marine Corps

☐ Army Air Forces (WWII)

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

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VFW Post no.: _____ 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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'Renegade' Renneke: A Veteran and Stuntman

This VFW life member and Vietnam vet befriended an American icon on his way to a successful stuntman career in Hollywood.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Bob Renneke found himself under the blistering heat of a summer's day in South Florida, but he didn't mind. For a kid fresh out of high school in 1966, the novelty of parking cars at the renowned Fontainebleau Miami Beach often invited an intimate look at the glamour and celebrity lifestyle that didn't exist in his hometown of St. Paul, Minn.

Renneke met many high-profile celebrities as a valet in Miami Beach during that time, but none had taken a keen interest in him until the day he ushered a short, sharp-dressed man named Frank Sinatra back to his car.

Sinatra, then 51 years old, had achieved prominence as one of the best-selling music artists in history, and transitioned into an influential leading man in Hollywood. But his real gift, as Renneke would come to find out, was his kindness and absolute loyalty toward all his friends.

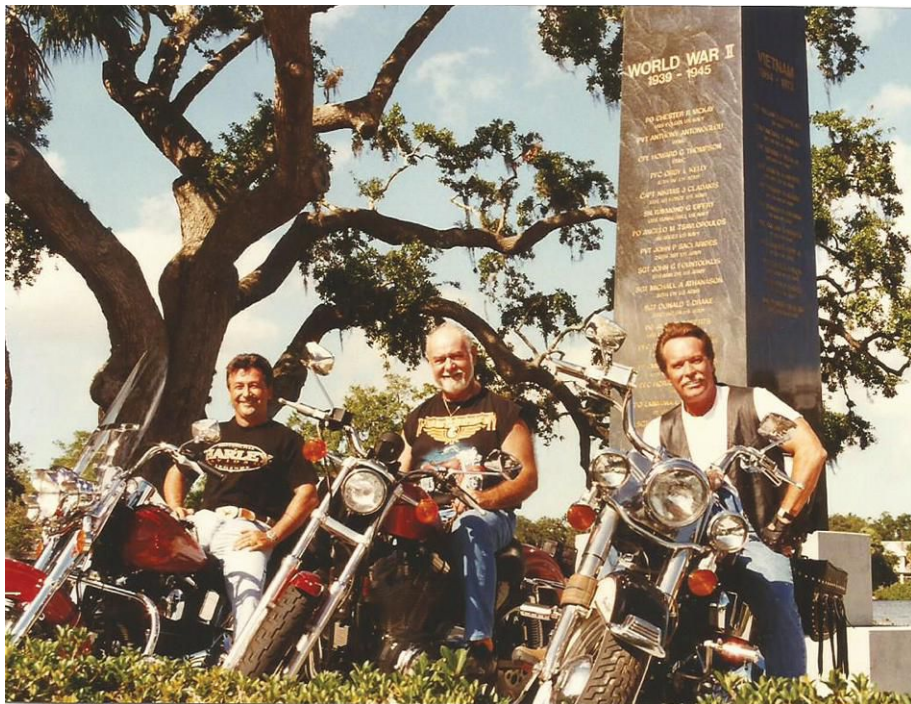
He plucked Renneke out of valet duties and hired him as his personal steward aboard the Fontainebleau Yacht, a 140-foot vessel with naval stabilizers owned by Sinatra and Fontainebleau hotel owner Ben Novack.

"That's how it started for me," Renneke said. "I wasn't yet a stuntman, but with Sinatra's blessing, they let me be an extra in [the 1967 film] 'Tony Rome,' which took place at the Fontainebleau."

Sinatra then helped Renneke get in touch with a good friend of his named Paul Stader, who could show him the ropes of the stuntman business. Stader owned a stuntman school in Santa Monica, Calif., and had been a stunt double for many leading men in Hollywood that included Gregory Peck, Johnny Weissmuller and John Wayne.

Renneke's aspirations as a stuntman,

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB RENNEKE



Bob "Renegade" Renneke, left, poses on his Harley Davidson motorcycle alongside fellow veterans Jim Pochurek, center, and Tim Stephens in front of a war memorial in Tarpon Springs, Fla., that Renneke himself helped build in 1991. Renneke is a member of the Stuntman Hall of Fame.

however, had to wait. His country needed him immediately.

In early 1968, he packed his bags and reported for basic training instead.

"I remember my mother calling near the end of 1967 to tell me that I had been drafted," said Renneke, a life member of VFW Post 6570 in Blue Ridge, Ga. "I reported for boot camp instead, and I honestly have no regrets about it."

Renneke deployed to Vietnam in 1969 with the Army's 75th Infantry Regiment, a Ranger unit specializing in long-range reconnaissance patrols (LRRPs). His unit was one of the first infantry outfits to get pulled out of Vietnam by the Richard Nixon Administration in 1970.

Upon his return to the U.S., Renneke quickly contacted Sinatra's road manager and picked up where he had left off a few years prior. He got on his motorcycle and rode roughly the 802 miles from El Paso, Texas, to Los Angeles.

"I worked on one of Sinatra's boats there, and while working there, I started going to stuntman school," Renneke said. "Stader was my mentor, but it was Sinatra that put me through that school

once I got back from Vietnam. I don't remember how much it cost, but Sinatra had paid in full."

"Renegade" Renneke got his first stuntman gig in a cult-classic called "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" in 1970, and the roles flowed consistently over the next 12 years. He worked on such acclaimed films as "Magnum Force" (1972) and "Towering Inferno" (1973), alongside A-listers that included Clint Eastwood and Steve McQueen.

"I enjoyed my time working in the movies," Renneke said. "It was an honor to be inducted into the Stuntman Hall of Fame [2017] in Moab, Utah, alongside many greats, but for me it has always been about the thrill and the friends I made along the way."

Renneke currently remains an advocate for the veteran community, serving as an active member of Post 6570, the Combat Veterans Motorcycle chapter of Georgia and the Patriot Guard Riders.

He also presides over an advertising company in Blue Ridge, which he's operated as CEO for 23 years and counting. ➔

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