

JUNE/JULY 2020

# VFW

M A G A Z I N E

**KOREAN WAR  
BEGAN  
70 YEARS AGO**

**3 DOORS DOWN  
HONORS VFW  
MEMBER**

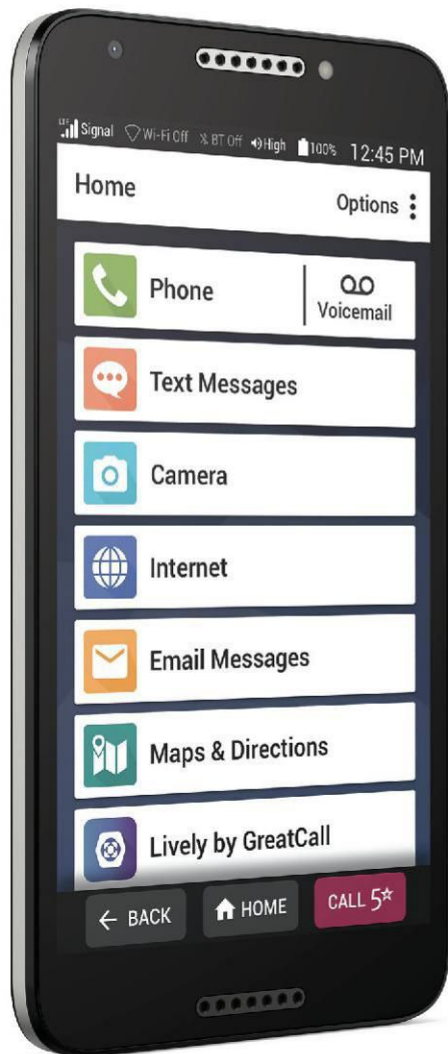
**MARINE SETS  
WORLD RECORD  
IN PLANKING**

## T-WALL ART: TROOPS LEFT THEIR MARKS IN THE WAR ZONES



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**JUNE/JULY 2020**

Vol. 107 No. 9

**COVER PHOTO:** Navy helicopter pilot Lt. Cmdr. Don Johnson Jr., pauses while working on a mural in 2011 in Baghdad's Green Zone. Johnson, now an attorney in New Mexico, serves on the board of directors for a non-profit veterans art program in his state.  
*Photo courtesy of WarMurals.com*

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# 16 TURNING T-WALLS INTO WORKS OF ART

Acres of blank concrete barrier walls proved too much to resist for would-be artists stationed at bases throughout the Middle East during the Iraq War. One veteran began documenting the resulting artwork on a website he created. **BY JANIE DYHOUSE**

## 'MAKING ME FEEL LIKE PART OF THE BAND'

A VFW Post leader and breast cancer survivor was honored by the musical group Three Doors Down last year. The lead singer says Angela Darnell, an Afghanistan War vet, is the band's "new hero."

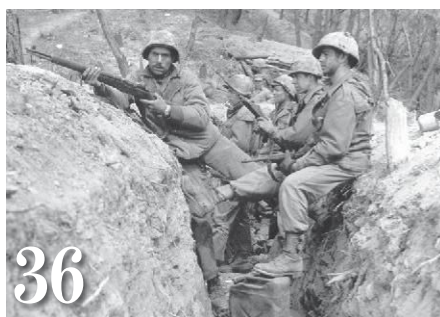
**BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.**



## KOREAN WAR 70TH ANNIVERSARY

On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, igniting a three-year-long war that technically is still going on today. VFW salutes all U.S. troops who fought in the "Land of the Morning Calm" between 1950-53.

**BY THE VFW MAGAZINE STAFF**



## PLANKING, MARINE CORPS STYLE

A 62-year-old Marine Corps veteran set a Guinness World Record for the longest-held plank earlier this year.

In doing so, the former NCIS and DEA special agent also raised nearly \$10,000 for a worthy cause.

**BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.**



# VFW Posts Assist During COVID-19 Pandemic



COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
William "Doc" Schmitz

**A**s I write this in early April, the country is battling an invisible enemy called the COVID-19 virus. Areas of the country are in various stages of lockdown as we self-quarantine and practice a new, hopefully temporary, way of life called social distancing.

At VFW, we ordered all staff in our Washington, D.C., Office and National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., to work from home. I want all of our members to know that, while this situation is unprecedented, we will continue to carry out the business of this great organization.

Our VFW employees are living a phrase that many of us are familiar with: "Adapt, Survive, Overcome." I am proud of their dedication, commitment and service to our organization and to you.

Meanwhile, our members across the country are doing what they always do in times of crisis: they are helping others.

Let me stress that this is an extremely fluid situation. The examples I have here are only the beginning. You will read more in-depth stories in *VFW* magazine and *Checkpoint*, on our website, our social media channels and our other communication vehicles as we gather more information.

For now, here is what some of our Posts and members have done to assist in their communities:

- Post 170 in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., acted as a drop-off point for food and clothes for area students.
- Post 8452 in Gainesville, Ga., offered its facility as a drop-off for goods such as meals, water and children's books. Members then distributed the items in drive-thru fashion to their fellow citizens.
- Post 3762 in Washington Court House, Ohio, helped the elderly and disabled by purchasing food and supplies and delivering them to those in need.
- Post 2704 in Ralston, Neb., notified all its members 75 and older that it would help with grocery shopping.
- Post 793 in St. Johnsbury, Vt., hosted blood drives on March 19 and April 1; contacted all its members over the age of 65 to check on their well-being; and publicized its contact information on social media, in newspapers and on local radio stations for all area veterans, their families and all community members who were in need.
- Former VFW Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy and his wife, Jean, constructed surgical masks for medical professionals.

If you, your Post, District or Department are contributing to assist others in need during this pandemic, let *VFW* magazine know at [magazine@vfw.org](mailto:magazine@vfw.org).

We will get through this, and we will be stronger because of it. We're learning important ways to keep our nation healthy, and we're learning new ways to conduct business. Thank you to all who are helping. Stay safe and healthy.

## VFW NATIONAL CONVENTION CANCELED

Immediately prior to press time for this issue, VFW officially canceled its 121st National Convention due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The convention had been scheduled for July 18-23 in Reno, Nev. Please check [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org) for more information.



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[mse@vfw.org](mailto:mse@vfw.org) 1-833-839-8387

Forward address changes to:

**Member Service Center, VFW,**

**406 W. 34th St., Kansas City, MO 64111.**

Be sure to furnish your old address, also your Post number, when requesting change to new address. To ensure accuracy, please clip and enclose your present address as printed on a recent copy of *VFW* magazine.

#### NON-MEMBER SUBSCRIPTIONS

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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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# ***It's not a power chair... It's better!***

## **Introducing *ZOOMER!***

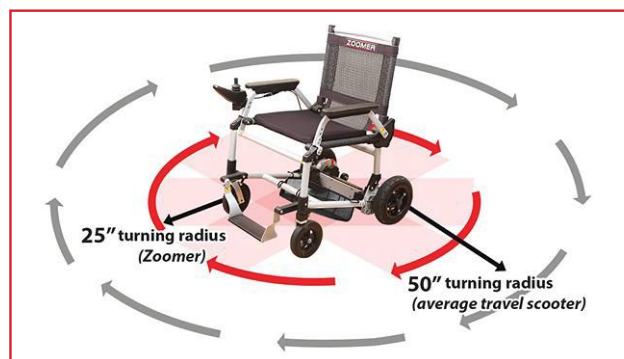
The portable, folding, battery-powered chair that offers easy one-handed operation

If you are one of the countless Americans who need a little help getting around, there is a safe, simple and easy-to-use solution... the Zoomer. It is propelled by small yet powerful dual motors for speeds of 3.7 miles per hour over a variety of terrains, on up to a 10 degree incline. Its innovative airline-safe Lithium Ion battery enables you to go 8 miles on a single charge, and the automatic electromagnetic brakes let you stop on a dime.



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## War Re-enactors

I have had the pleasure to attend a few of these here in Ohio, and the time and dedication spent on getting it as correct and life-like as possible must be commended. Without the dedication and awesome effort put forth by these people, you would not have the authenticity and realism that these stalwarts strive to preserve.

**JOHN HARDING**  
STERLING, OHIO

In September 2010, my wife and I were traveling through Texas and the museum in Fredericksburg was a must-see for this Polaris Submarine veteran. Mr. Sultenfuss and the others put on one hell of a realistic battle. I was appreciative that he took the time to sit and visit with me.

**PAUL HOBBS**  
COLUMBIA, MO.

It was disgraceful and disrespectful for our magazine to publish a cover story like this. We are not a weekend militia organization. If our mission is to speed the rehabilitation of veterans who have endured prolonged exposure in mortal combat, then we must be vigilant and demonstrate awareness and prayerful sensitivity.

**JOSEPH MARCOTTE**  
BANDON, ORE.

Re-enactors trivialize war. Kids watch these and at the end of the day see the “casualties” get up and go home. There is none of the fear, horror, pain and death. If they have to re-enact, do so of an amputee ward in a military hospital or graves registration.

**MIKE KLINGER**  
ALBION, IND.



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE U.S. OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## Civil Air Patrol

Great story! In addition to its coastal patrols, it conducted training programs through its cadet program. High school students received some instruction in the military basics and in aeronautics, navigation, meteorology, etc. It actively recruited for the Army Air Corps Enlisted Reserve for call-up after high school graduation, for what we hoped would be aviation cadet or some kind of aircrew training. For many of us, it was too late in the war for that. The volunteer service of the CAP personnel will always be appreciated. Thank you for your good work.

**THOMAS KEEL**  
LAKEWAY, TEXAS

## Star-Spangled Banner

I'm probably in the minority with my comments, but it has long been my opinion that the National Anthem does not do this country justice. It is about a single battle in a war which I would guess 90 percent of our population could not name. It's worth noting that at that time, the entire country consisted of only 15 states.

If you listen to Canada's national anthem, it speaks volumes about their country, what it stands for and the people's loyalty devoted to it. “America the Beautiful” says the same about our country and encompasses the whole country. Clearly, it should be our national anthem.

**GARY BRYDGES**  
MASON, MICH.



# SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest—but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and snatched it up for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features

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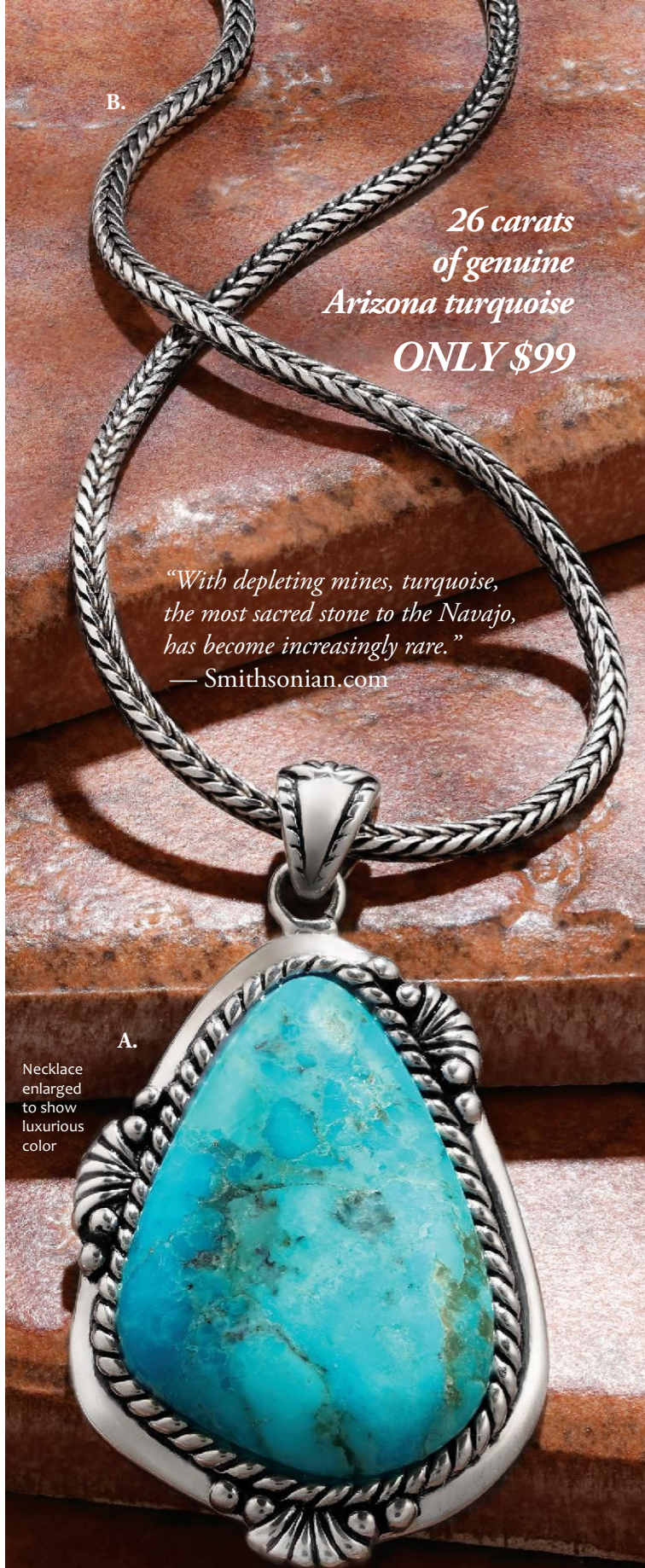
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PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN A HEARN



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

## Vietnam's Fire Support Base Illingworth

This article incorrectly states, more than once, that medals awarded for bravery were "earned." This is not the first time that articles in *VFW* incorrectly stated that such awards were "earned."

The Medal of Honor and other medals are awarded for acts of bravery by those carrying out their duties under duress and extreme situations. Words matter.

**TERRY S. BOWMAN**  
CARBONDALE, ILL.

I was there on April 1 at the FSB. I was assigned to Company A, 8th Engineer Battalion. We had two squads supporting the 2/8. I had returned to the base on March 31, after returning from the field. I wasn't present during the attack.

I was on the first helicopter arriving in the morning. My brother and the remain-

der of my squad were manning two bunkers during the fight. I recall concertina wire was surrounding part of the base.

I didn't know where my squad was located as I jumped from the helicopter and ran toward the berm. The ground was black, bodies were laying on the field, and I will never forget the "gook" hanging on the wire, cut in half by fire.

We were charged with cleaning the field of fire with the help of dozers. The dozers dug a hole and buried the bodies in the hole. Our next assignment was replacing the concertina wire around the FSB.

The 8th Engineers were involved in most actions conducted by the grunt units. Yet, never have I read of our involvement in Vietnam or Cambodia.

**RICHARD ESQUIVEL**  
LINCOLN, NEB.

## Run Across Wyoming

Thank you for the story of Marine Corps Master Sgt. Pamela Torres' run across Wyoming to honor women killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The first woman killed in action in Afghanistan was Army Sgt. 1st Class Merideth L. Howard. We served together in the 91st Division (TNG), 6333rd RTU. She was an excellent soldier willing to do tasks others may shy from. She was KIA Sept. 8, 2006, in Kabul.

**STEVE SPATOLA**  
STOCKTON, CALIF.

I noticed one glaring error. Did the author mean Rawlins? She kept referring to Rollins.

**JOHN EWING**  
CASPER, WYO.

**Editor's Note:** Pamela Torres' destination was incorrectly identified. It should have read "Rawlins."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELIZA WHITEMAN

## Yoga Vet

I wanted to tell you that I absolutely love the article you wrote about our studio, FlyDog Yoga, and our Honor our Heroes program. I couldn't have written a more accurate and complete article if I had taken the time to write it myself. If even just one veteran considers trying yoga after reading your article, then it is a win for everyone.

**BRAD WHITEMAN**  
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.



"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](mailto: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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# Navy Chief Receives Silver Star

A Navy chief received a Silver Star in February for his courageous actions last year during the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Chief Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician Matthew O'Connor was recognized for his efforts in a nighttime assault on April 18-19, 2019, as part of *Operation Inherent Resolve*.

On that evening, O'Connor, a member of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 11, and his team targeted a facility suspected of making improvised explosive devices in an enemy-held village. The Navy declined to identify exactly where the action took place.

According to O'Connor's Silver Star citation, his team took fire from eight enemy fighters and sustained "a number" of casualties. It noted that he confronted enemy fire to retrieve two wounded teammates, rendered lifesaving medical treatment and coordinated suppressive fire.

"He then carried the first teammate under continuous enemy fire through difficult terrain to the casualty collection point," the citation noted. "Chief O'Connor returned to the target area, conducted post-assault procedures and guided the remaining combined task force through difficult terrain laden with



**Navy Vice Adm. Scott D. Conn presents the Silver Star to Navy Chief Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician Matt O'Connor on Feb. 13 at Naval Base Point Loma in San Diego. O'Connor risked his life to save two members of his team during a firefight in April 2019 during the anti-Islamic State campaign in Iraq and Syria.**

improvised explosive devices to reach the vehicle pickup location."

The *Navy Times* reported that O'Connor declined interview requests but did issue a prepared statement.

"I want people to know that it took a whole group of guys to ensure everyone returned safely," he wrote. "I was not the only one out there, and this is reflective of a team effort."

According to the Pentagon, O'Connor's Silver Star was the ninth awarded for service in *Operation Inherent Resolve*, the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria that began on June 15, 2014. Here are the others:

## INHERENT RESOLVE SILVER STARS

Service	Rank/Name
Army	Chief Warrant Officer 4 Mark W. Crane
Army	Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Floerchinger
Air Force	Staff Sgt. Christopher F. Lewis
Marine Corps	Staff Sgt. Dane S. Osthoff
Army	Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael J. Siler
Navy	EOD Tech. 1st Class Jeffrey M. Thomas
Army	Master Sgt. Joshua L. Wheeler*
Army	Master Sgt. Zachary B. Whitt

\*Received the Silver Star posthumously

# Apply for South Dakota Pheasant Hunt

VFW Post 8530 in Gettysburg, S.D., again will serve as host of a pheasant hunt this fall. This year's event is scheduled to take place Nov. 6-12.

Selected participants is scheduled to enjoy an all-inclusive hunt that includes travel, lodging, meals, ammo, bird cleaning services and camaraderie.

To qualify for the hunt, participants must provide a DD-214 with Purple Heart award designation and an honorable discharge.

Participants also must be able to lift and use a shotgun, which can be provided upon request. Amputees and wheelchair-bound veterans are encouraged to apply as the Post will make accommodations for all participants' needs.

If you would like to be considered for the 2020 hunt, please submit your DD-214, VA disability rating documentation and personal contact information by July 30 to:

*SD Decorated Veterans Pheasant Hunt, c/o Isaac Full, 406 W. King Ave., Gettysburg SD 57442. Phone: (817) 701-6707.*



**Participants at last year's South Dakota Decorated Veterans Pheasant Hunt display some of their quarry. Apply by July 30 to participate in this year's event.**



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### YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

During the immense chaos of the Vietnam War, nearly 2,500 American soldiers were unaccounted for. About half of those soldiers were believed to have been killed in the line of duty, while the other half were listed as “Missing in Action” or “Prisoner of War.” When the Paris Peace Accords of 1973 were signed, 591 American POWs were released to return home, but the fate of countless missing soldiers remains unknown to this day. Still, the sacrifice of these brave members of the Armed Forces will never be forgotten.

Available exclusively from American Mint, the *POW-MIA Military Knife* pays tribute to the soldiers who never made it home. Designed by master artisans, the rugged military knife features a stainless steel blade with a matte black finish and laser-marked writing on both sides. The colorful 3D-printed bar representing the Vietnam Veteran service ribbon and the 24k gold-layered replica of the Vietnam Service Medallion set in the pommel honor our fallen soldiers as we vow to never forget the ultimate sacrifice they made in the name of freedom.

- 6.625"-long\* polished flatground blade crafted in 420 stainless steel with a rugged matte black finish
- Rugged plastic handle with crosshatch pattern and sturdy steel gun-sight guard
- 24k gold-layered replica of the Vietnam Service Medallion set into the pommel (shown at right)
- Colorful 3D-printed bar representing the Vietnam Veteran service ribbon

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Staff Sgt. Robert Gill of 1st Bn., 5th Cav Regt., 2nd Armd. BCT, 1st Cav Div., calibrates, or zeroes, his M1 Abrams tank before conducting a live fire exercise on Feb. 17 in Galati, Romania. A RAND study published in February found that heavy ground units, such as armored brigade combat teams, are a better deterrent to enemy forces than more mobile units.

## Armored Units Are the Most Intimidating Overseas Presence

*A recent study shows that heavy ground forces, such as armored units, are more likely to deter an opposing force than more mobile units.*

BY DAVE SPIVA

**H**heavy, ground-based troops garrisoned overseas with tanks and artillery are said to be better at preventing conflicts than their infantry units, according to a study published in February.

In a report, titled *Understanding the Deterrent Impact of U.S. Overseas Deployments*, RAND Corp., examined almost 60 years of military deployments to determine what types of units, including infantry, air and naval forces, best deterred an opposing force.

“In the average case,” the study states, “heavier ground forces and those deployed near, but not directly bordering, potential adversaries may be most likely to reduce the risk of conflict.”

It’s no surprise, then, that U.S. armored units, about 6,000 troops total, are garrisoned across eastern Europe as

part of *Operation Atlantic Resolve*. It followed Russian aggression in Ukraine, including the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. (Learn more about armored units in Eastern Europe in the June/July 2019 issue of *VFW* magazine.)

The RAND study found that the more mobile or light the forces are, the less likely they deter an opposing force.

The study suggested that it possibly could be because lighter forces “represent a lesser degree” of commitment by the United States.

The study also states that it’s possible that mobile forces are less likely to deter an opposing force because it can be “more difficult” to measure or evaluate mobile units’ effects compared to a heavy ground force.

RAND found that when the U.S. deploys force to an international crisis,

there is a “large decline” in the possibility of a war starting.

“Although approximately two-thirds of all crises escalate to major clashes or outright wars,” the RAND study stated, “little more than one-quarter of crises escalate when the U.S. deploys forces into a crisis.”

The study found that the effects are even stronger when it comes to armored units. RAND claims that there has never been a crisis that has escalated to a major confrontation or war when heavy ground forces are involved in deterring an enemy.

“We found the clearest evidence for the deterrent impact of heavy ground forces and little, if any, evidence for the deterrent impact of air and naval forces,” the study stated.



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# VFW Pushes Congress to Pass Agent Orange Conditions Bill

Some 35 senators introduced a bill that would add new conditions to the Agent Orange presumptive conditions list.

About one-third of all U.S. senators are backing the *Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2020 (S. 3444)*, which could add four conditions to the Agent Orange conditions list, including:

- Bladder cancer.
- Hypothyroidism.
- Parkinson-like symptoms, or parkinsonism.
- Hypertension.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine in recent years has published two studies linking Agent Orange exposure to these four health conditions.

Sen. John Tester (D-Mont.), the ranking member of the Senate VA committee and a backer of the bill, said it is “long overdue” for these conditions to be added to the presumptive conditions list.

“Since VA isn’t willing to do its job, Congress is stepping in and requiring them to do it by law,” Tester said.

VFW Commander-in-Chief William “Doc” Schmitz said VFW is “proud” to support S. 3444 and that it’s “unaccept-



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

**A UH-1D helicopter from the Army's 336th Aviation Company sprays a defoliation agent on a jungle area in Vietnam's Mekong delta. About one-third of all U.S. senators are backing the *Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2020 (S. 3444)*, which could add four conditions to the Agent Orange conditions list.**

able” that the list of conditions doesn’t already include the four symptoms.

“Vietnam veterans did our part,” said Schmitz, who served in the Vietnam War as a Navy corpsman. “After winning every battle they fought while they were in Vietnam, many of them have lost their fight to the horrible health conditions they received from Agent Orange exposure.”

## 14 PRESUMPTIVE AGENT ORANGE CONDITIONS

As of April 1, 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.

VFW asks veterans who served in or off the coast of Vietnam or Thailand to contact a VFW-accredited service officer to discuss whether they are eligible to file a VA claim for Agent Orange exposure. Visit [www.vfw.org/nvs](http://www.vfw.org/nvs) to find a nearby service officer.

## GI-Bill Benefits to Continue through COVID-19 Pandemic

Student veterans using the *Forever GI Bill* don’t have to worry about housing pay reductions through the uncertainty brought by the COVID-19 virus.

In March, President Donald Trump signed *P.L. 116-128*. The law, which doesn’t have an official name, authorizes VA Secretary Robert Wilkie to allow GI Bill-approved education programs that were converted from classroom- to online-based programs be treated as classroom-based programs.

Many colleges were closed as a precaution to slow the spreading of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which caused most classes to convert to online-only classes.

With how the *Forever GI Bill* is structured, student veterans and dependents using the benefit to take classes on campuses typically receive more in monthly housing allowances than students who participate in online-based classes. The



new law ensures students who were taking classes on campus will be able to afford rent and other costs for their higher education.

This temporary change in policy will continue to the end of 2020, meaning it will go through this year’s traditional summer and fall semesters.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about specific legislation or VA benefits, contact VFW’s Washington Office at [vfw@vfw.org](mailto:vfw@vfw.org). A member of VFW’s National Veterans Service staff will respond as soon as possible.



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## VA Repeals Service Officer Review Period

VA is changing a long-standing policy that could affect the accuracy of disability ratings for veterans.

Starting on April 30, VA eliminated the 48-hour disability rating review period for veterans service officers, a period VFW believes is vital to ensure the accuracy of VA decisions. The review, according to VFW, allows service officers to give the claim an independent quality control check before it goes through VA's review process.

VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz said it is "despicable" and "inconceivable" that VA

"Making this change is extremely troublesome and is just the latest example of distrust and lack of confidence in our VA to make our veterans its number one priority."

— VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz

ensure that their rating decisions are correct the first time," Schmitz said.

Schmitz added that VA's decision to suspend the review period will only continue to "further erode" veterans' representation in VA claims.

"The VA has had a difficult history of earning and maintaining the trust of its veterans, service members and families," Schmitz said. "Making this change is extremely troublesome and is just the latest example of distrust and lack of confidence in our VA to make our veterans its number one priority."

VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci said VFW will remain "committed" to the organization's veterans' advocacy mission, which he noted "predates" VA's existence.

"The VFW compels Dr. Lawrence to reconsider his directive to eliminate the 48-hour review," Gallucci said. "Absent Dr. Lawrence's reconsideration, the VFW will exercise all avenues of redress to include proposing legislative remedies and pursuing litigation."

Undersecretary of Benefits Dr. Paul Lawrence intends to eliminate the veterans service officer review period for claims.

"The VFW strongly opposes the repeal of the 48-hour review period in reviewing VA decisions for accuracy, as this is a final quality control check that we perform on behalf of our veterans to

## VFW Supports the Maj. Richard Star Act

As members of the House and Senate pushed forward in April on compiling the annual *National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA), VFW was advocating for the passage of a bill that would correct the offsetting of retirement pay and VA disability compensation for some combat-wounded veterans.

The *Maj. Richard Star Act* could provide retired combat-wounded veterans who served less than 20 years in the

military with full retirement and disability compensation.

VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Kyle Kalman said that veterans are "most vulnerable" during this period of economic turmoil.

"The *Maj. Richard Star Act* (H.R. 5995) addresses the offset issue for just one segment of the impacted veteran population," Kalman said. "Authorizing full concurrent receipt for other categories of veterans with these types of bills will help us reach the goal



Army Maj. Richard Star (shown above) retired from his military career early when he was diagnosed with service-connected terminal lung cancer. Star served in the Army as a combat engineer in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. A bill named for him, the *Maj. Richard Star Act*, could provide retired combat-wounded veterans who served less than 20 years in the military with full retirement and disability compensation.

of total repeal of the dollar-for-dollar retirement and disability pay offset for all retirees."

On behalf of VFW, Kalman thanked Sen. John Tester (D-Mont.) and Sen. Mark Crapo (R-Idaho), who introduced the bill to the Senate, for their "continued commitment" to veterans.

On average, a combat-injured, medically retired veteran receives an offset of \$494.11 per month, which is almost \$6,000 per year, according to Kalman.

The bill is named after Army Maj. Richard Star, who had to retire early due to terminal lung cancer caused by his service. He served in the Army as a combat engineer in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Currently, Star and his family will suffer a financial penalty for medically retiring," Kalman said. "VFW wants to ensure Maj. Star's distinguished service to our country is lauded, not punished, due to this unnecessary dollar-for-dollar offset."





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Don Johnson Jr. stands next to one of many murals he created in 2011 in Baghdad, Iraq, while serving there. Johnson, now a lawyer and artist in New Mexico, is included in an online gallery called *WarMurals.com*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DON JOHNSON JR.

*WarMurals.com* is like an online museum dedicated to preserving the artwork that troops painted on boundary walls during the Global War on Terrorism. Here's the story of one such veteran artist and the vet who launched the site.

**BY JANIE DYHOUSE**

**W**hile serving in Baghdad, Iraq, in 2011, Don Johnson Jr. discovered the perfect canvas for his artistic passion. Using art chalk, Johnson created masterpieces on the cement T-walls surrounding the container housing. Under the cover of night, he first created a Picasso reproduction and waited for the fallout. When there was none, his creative endeavors continued. Now, photos of his art in the war zone are included in an online gallery created by Eric Strand, a former soldier with the Minnesota National Guard. *WarMurals.com* fea-





Service members with the 5th Expeditionary Air Mobility Squadron (5 EAMS Jokers) relax in front of a mural they painted in late 2012 or early 2013 at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait. The mural is part of an online gallery called *WarMurals.com*. The gallery includes hundreds of photos from places such as Camp Buehring in Kuwait as well as locations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

tures hundreds of photos from places such as Camp Buehring in Kuwait, where Strand was stationed with the 147th Financial Management Support Detachment.

The website shows art from bases in Iraq such as Sather Air Base in Baghdad and Forward Operating Base Warhorse near Baqubah, about 45 miles northeast of Baghdad, to name just two.

For Johnson, who has been an artist since he was 7 years old, turning the bare walls into works of art was his way to liven up the walk to the dining facility.

Johnson recalled that toward the end of his time in Baghdad, the curator of the British Museum in London was visiting. Someone told Johnson that she was looking at his wall art, so he went to meet her.

“We got to one of my drawings and it was a Degas piece with the ballerinas, and she said, ‘This is hideous,’” Johnson recalled, laughing. “She was a real critic. She didn’t hold anything back.”

## PRESERVING MURALS FROM THE WAR ZONE

While Strand is not an artist, he said he does have an appreciation for art and military history. He said that *WarMurals* is a

combination of the two.

“There are not too many Global War on Terrorism museums and memorials out there,” he said. “There are years and years of murals in various states of disrepair. This is one way to preserve them.”

“These serve as snapshots of the units at that time and place. *WarMurals* also tells the stories of service members’ deployments.”

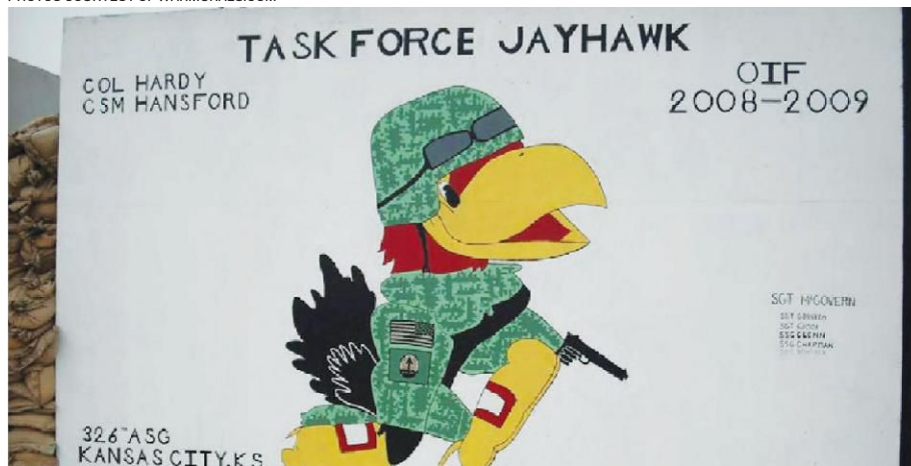
Eric Strand, founder of *WarMurals.com*

Toward the end of his deployment in Kuwait last year, Strand said he began documenting the murals by taking photographs. He joked that it was a way to combat his boredom.

He also has photos on the website from military photographers in the public domain. Vets have submitted photos to the site as well. He hopes vets see the site as a platform for re-connecting and sharing stories from their time overseas.

Strand has collaborated with Army Maj. Loren Hutsell, a





**LEFT:** Murals such as these adorn the T-walls surrounding military bases throughout the Middle East. Eric Strand, a former soldier with the Minnesota National Guard, aims to preserve these murals created by troops in the war zone through an online gallery called *WarMurals.com*. Strand said the gallery is a combination of art and military history.



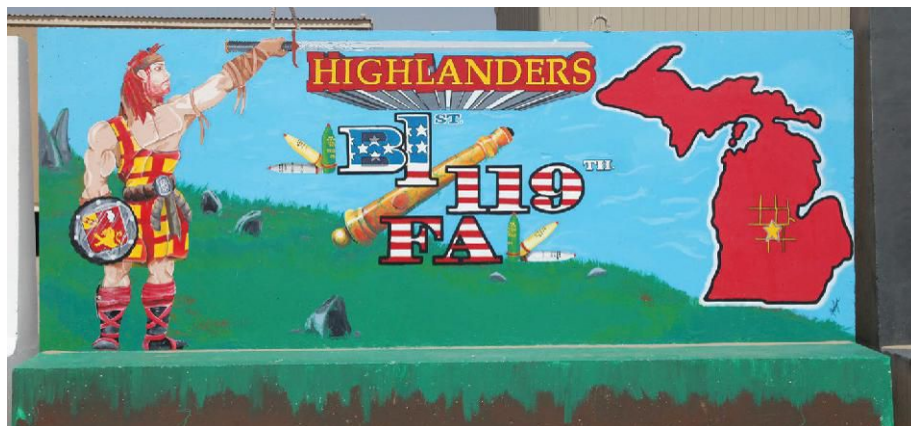
chaplain who wrote a thesis on Camp Buehring wall art and troop identity in *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Hutsell was deployed to Buehring in 2009 and also photographed many of the murals.

Strand said he doesn't have a favorite piece of art, but one that stands out to him is of the cavalry riding through the desert on horseback.

He noted that many of the murals he captured are memorial based. If the names on the memorial are legible, he will link a *Military Times* "Remember the Fallen" page in order to connect the story behind the image.

This also is why he tries to send images to units that have been illustrated on the walls.

"These serve as snapshots of the units at that time and place," Strand said. "WarMurals also tells the stories of service members' deployments. I hope that this will end up in a museum or exhibit somewhere in the future. If not, at the very least, they are in one place."



## HEALING THROUGH ART

Johnson's journey to Baghdad started after he graduated from college and joined the Navy so that he could attend flight school. As a Navy helicopter pilot stationed in Hawaii, he embarked on cruises to Southeast Asia aboard the *USS Reuben James (FFG-57)* and *USS Lake Erie (CG-70)*.

"That was probably the best job I'll ever have, flying helicopters around Hawaii and Southeast Asia," said Johnson, who is now a lawyer in Albuquerque, N.M. "In 2000, I was working at the Navy Reserve center in San Francisco and going to law school at night."

While still with the Navy Reserve, Johnson moved back home to Albuquerque to practice law and was called up for Iraq in 2011. This time, he would wear an Army uniform.

"I worked for Maj. Gen. Jeffery Buchanan, director for J9, United States





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**ABOVE:** Service members gather in front of a memorial mural at Forward Operating Base Salerno in Afghanistan during a 2011-12 deployment.

**RIGHT:** Eric Strand hopes his online gallery, *WarMurals.com*, will preserve murals painted by service members on T-walls throughout the Middle East. Strand served at Camp Buehring in Kuwait with the Minnesota National Guard's 147th Financial Management Support Detachment.

Forces Iraq in Baghdad,” said Johnson, who retired from the Navy in 2017 after 20 years. “I was impressed with the Army leadership.”

Throughout each leg of his life’s journey, Johnson’s constant has been his love for art. When he was in eighth grade, his parents secretly entered in the New Mexico State Fair a picture of a Coke can that Johnson had painted. He won first place.

“I still enter the state fair each year and I’m looking for that first prize again,” he said and laughed.

Johnson has two websites dedicated to his artistic endeavors: [www.djartstudio.com](http://www.djartstudio.com) and [www.human4m.com](http://www.human4m.com). He also is on the board of directors for the non-profit New Mexico Veterans Art (<http://new.nmveteransart.com>), which gives veterans an outlet for their creativity.

Each November, the talents of veterans, active-duty troops, as well as their spouses, have their work displayed in an art show in Albuquerque.

“There is a lot to art therapy as it relates to PTSD,” Johnson said. “A lot of these people who have art in the show are actually experiencing treatment through their art.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIC STRAND

Aside from the art angle, Johnson remains active in the veterans community by doing pro bono legal work for veterans needing assistance with their VA claims. Sometimes, he sees up to 10 veterans a week.

“Lots of veterans are unaware of their benefits, the paperwork overwhelms them, or they just don’t trust the bureaucracy anymore,” Johnson said. “I help them because I would want someone to help me if I were in their situation.”



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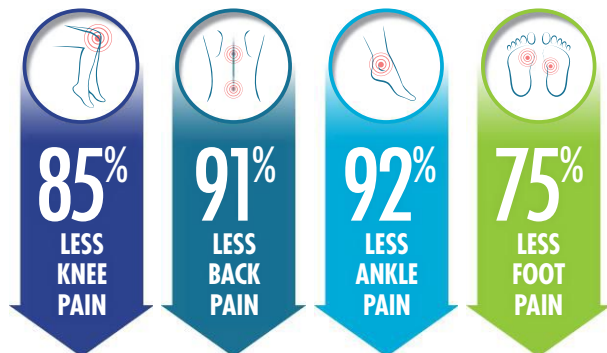
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U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Cook sits on a bench with a bar holding 551 pounds, his world-record number for the bench press in the 198-220-pound weight class, on Sept. 27, 2019, at Travis Air Force Base, Calif. Cook placed first in the U.S. Powerlifting Association's annual Olympia Pro Powerlifting Competition.



# Airman Shatters Bench Press World Record

**Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Cook set a new unassisted bench press world record during an annual powerlifting competition last year, something he plans on doing again in 2020.**

**BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.**

**A**ir Force Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Cook sat quietly on a bench with an iron bar holding 551 pounds. Surrounded by a bustling crowd of spectators at the North Hall of the Las Vegas Convention Center in September 2019, the 219-pound airman felt their eyes on him.

He had never performed in front of thousands of people, feeling both intimidated and motivated as he gripped the bar.

“It was my first time doing a large competition,” said Cook, a 60th Operations Group boom operator evaluator at Travis Air Force Base in California. “It gave me that drive knowing all those eyes were on me. I just had to get it done.”

Cook hoisted the bar above his bulging chest and came down with it. Pausing briefly at the bottom, he exploded up to mark a new raw, or unassisted, bench press world record in the 198-220-pound weight class at the annual United States Powerlifting Association’s Olympia Pro Powerlifting Competition.

“The biggest thing was visualizing I could do it,” Cook said of the competition. “I put myself in that head-space where I replayed that event over and over and over again. I must have envisioned myself doing it a thousand times before it actually happened.”

Envisioning success didn’t always come easy to Cook, whose strength goes beyond the powerlifting platform he’s been dominating since 2014.

As a troubled youth from a single-parent household, he grew up in the middle of Florida in Meadow Woods, a suburb of Orlando. Cook found himself bouncing around juvenile detention centers.

“It was real poverty-stricken, so a lot of us found ourselves doing things to get money,” Cook recalled. “That got me sent to juvenile detention centers several times, and it even landed me once in county jail as well.”

Relegated to hiding his true self for fear of being hurt, Cook admitted he was often skeptical of meeting new people who wanted to change the course of his life.

“I had some mentors that wanted to see me do well, but a lot of people I met also had their own agendas and just wanted to say they had rescued another troubled youth,” Cook said. “It wasn’t until the last time I got locked up that everything changed for the better.”

## ‘THE BEST DECISION I’VE EVER MADE’

While serving a stint at an Orange County jail, a correctional officer pitched the 17-year-old Cook on the idea of joining the military. Cook, who was fed up with letting his family down,



**Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Cook, 6th Air Refueling Squadron, poses for a photo on June 17, 2017, inside a KC-10 Extender at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., prior to the start of loading operations. Cook oversaw the loading of more than 15,000 pounds of cargo prior to a flight to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.**

PHOTO BY TECH. SGT. JAMES HODGMAN/U.S. AIR FORCE



**U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Cook displays a medal from the United States Powerlifting Association competition on Sept. 27, 2019, at Travis Air Force Base, Calif. Cook says joining the Air Force in 2006 was the “best decision” he ever made.**

returned to high school, graduated, and joined the Air Force.

“That was probably the best decision I’ve ever made in my life,” Cook said. “Ever since that decision, I can honestly say that I have tried to excel at everything I do.”

Cook’s 14 years in the Air Force thus far include six years in the security forces field, during which he deployed on three separate occasions in support of *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and *Operation Enduring Freedom*. He also has completed more than 100 convoy missions and 110 combat flying missions.

The Air Force has introduced new relationships into Cook’s life, too.

He met his wife, Tech. Sgt. Asia Cook, in the military, and they now have two sons. Kenneth also met a few others who steered him into powerlifting, where he now excels as a world-record holder.

It began in 2006 when Cook landed at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii out of high school. While stationed there, Cook found a mentor and workout partner in Tech. Sgt. Mario Coleman, a hulking man of about 5-foot-6 and weighing 220 pounds.

“Everyone thought we looked like twins despite him being two times my size,” Cook said and laughed. “He became like a big brother, and he’s still one of my closest friends. He took me under his wing, and we started working out once or twice a week.”

Cook, however, added that competitive powerlifting entered the picture when he arrived at Travis Air Force Base in 2013. While tossing iron in the gym, he was approached by two seasoned powerlifters.

“They complimented my strength, but quickly pointed out

how horrible my form actually was,” Cook said. “I soon started learning the basics of powerlifting from them, which was something I had never thought to do competitively before.”

He entered his first competition at Old Skool Iron gym in Vacaville, Calif., in 2014, where he placed second out of 90 contestants in the bench press.

“I fell in love with it,” Cook said. “I thought that if I could do that well with little experience, then I could definitely do better and better as time went on.”

Since snagging second place with a 406-pound bench press in the 224-pound weight class in Vacaville, Cook has won every other competition to date. He even set the California state record, benching a whopping 556 pounds with a bodyweight of 224 pounds just a week prior to his world-record performance.

“I’ve been trying to leave my name in the powerlifting world ever since 2014,” Cook said of his development. “I’m just addicted to it, addicted to the camaraderie of the sport, knowing that everyone cheers for everyone to break past their own barriers.”

Entering the 2020 United States Powerlifting Association’s Olympia Pro Powerlifting Competition in September, Cook hopes to further that powerlifting legacy. He hopes to shatter his current world record in the 198-220-pound weight class by almost 50 pounds.

“I’m going to do it, too,” he said. “I’m going to set the standard so high that nobody is going to touch it for years to come. That’s the kind of legacy and example I want to leave for others, but especially for my sons.”



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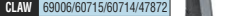
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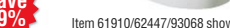
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# ACTIVE-DUTY AIRMAN PRO WRESTLING

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Gregory Gauntt, who goes by his stage name “Ryan Oshun,” is a villain in the ring but a family man at home.





Air Force Tech. Sgt. Gregory Gauntt, who goes by the name "Ryan Oshun" in the ring, wrestles during a show held in September 2019 in Pensacola, Fla.

# CHASES CAREER

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.



PHOTO BY RINGMARK PHOTOGRAPHY

Air Force Tech Sgt. Gregory Gauntt shows off his character the "Heavy Metal King," also known as "Ryan Oshun," before a match last year. The persona was inspired by anti-hero legends like Hollywood Hulk Hogan that Gauntt idolized in his youth.

**A**ir Force Tech. Sgt. Gregory Gauntt leads a double life, and he has done so for almost a decade.

The 34-year-old noncommissioned officer spends his weekdays working at Hurlburt Field Air Force Base, about 40 miles east of Pensacola, Fla., before switching gears into a different profession, name and personality altogether.

Weekends belong to his alter ego, which wrestling fans know as "Ryan Oshun," a 6-foot-4, 250-pound international pro heavyweight champion with cheeks smeared in black paint and thunderous slams that terrorize opponents.

"He's not the guy you want to introduce to your mother," Gauntt said of his wrestling persona. "But he's the cool guy you definitely want on your side."

Oshun's persona originates from anti-hero legends such as Hollywood Hulk Hogan, who Gauntt idolized as a kid watching World Championship Wrestling on Saturday nights. It was performances by Hogan and others like him that inspired Gauntt to break into the wrestling world as "Ryan Oshun" in September 2012.

"It was always something I wanted to do," Gauntt said. "But the timing between the military and where I was stationed never matched up until I got to Texas."

While stationed at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland as a military training instructor, Gauntt and a partner went to a wres-



**Air Force Tech. Sgt. Gregory Gauntt debuts his new persona as “Wrestling’s Only Politician” in February in Elberta, Ala., where he is the champion of Revolt Championship Wrestling. Gauntt tore his triceps in January, which prevented wrestling during his recovery and effectively ended his portrayal of the “Heavy Metal King.”**

## RYAN OSHUN’S ACCOLADES

River City Wrestling Tag Team Championship in Texas with Rob Love (2013)

New Heights Wrestling Heavyweight Championship in Florida (2015)

Elite Championship Wrestling Tag Team Championship in Louisiana with Frankie Thomas (2x) and once with John Saxon (2015-2017)

Combat Sport Pro Heavyweight Champion in Florida (2016)

National Wrestling Alliance Gulf Coast Heavyweight Champion in Florida (2016)

Pro Wrestling Society Heavyweight Champion in South Korea (2018-2019)

Revolt Pro Wrestling Heavyweight Champion in Alabama (October 2019-Present)

ting show hosted by Lucha Libre USA at the Alamodome, about 13 miles from the base. After the show, Gauntt snagged a flyer advertising a training program for wrestlers.

He contacted River City Wrestling in San Antonio a day after the show and then began training with them a month later. In September, two months into training, Gauntt earned his debut when another wrestler forfeited his place in an upcoming show due to injury.

“It all happened so fast,” Gauntt said. “It was one of those scenarios where they needed a body, and I was around. I’ve been wrestling in shows ever since.”

Since his debut in late 2012, Gauntt has won nine pro titles in seven different promotions that span across four states and South Korea. Among his titles are four tag-team championships, an NWA Gulf Coast heavyweight title in Florida in 2016, and Pro Wrestling Society’s second-ever heavyweight title between 2018-2019 while stationed at Kunsan Air Base in South Korea.

“The lifestyle around wrestling and performing at that level is what drives me and makes me want to keep going well into my 50s, if possible,” Gauntt said. “It’s something I want to do full-time after I retire from the military in three to five years.”

Gauntt, however, admits the sacrifices that come with living his passion are not suited for everyone. Between his Air Force commitments, the constant travel on weekends for shows, active self-promotion on social media and selling merchandise, Gauntt often finds little time to spare.

“It’s definitely not for everyone,” he said. “I’ve got a wife and two kids, and sometimes I don’t get to see them as often as I’d like. I know I do more than most independent wrestlers, but that’s the sacrifice it takes to make it a successful career.”

Gauntt, who currently holds the Revolt Pro Wrestling Heavyweight title after winning it in Alabama in October 2019, said he often books shows well in advance, leaving just one weekend out of the month open for another passion.

In 2014, Gauntt, along with his wife, Kara, and two children, began operating his own wrestling promotion under the Elite Championship Wrestling umbrella in Pensacola.

“It’s a family affair,” Gauntt said. “I set up the matches, my kids help organize the venue and my wife handles the tickets and concessions. It’s our way of spending time together around wrestling.”

Despite the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which wiped out a portion of his scheduled bouts, Gauntt continues to craft out his plan for making pro wrestling his full-time job.

“The next three years are focused on how much exposure I can get,” he said. “That means a lot of traveling.”

But that’s something he’s been accustomed to doing for most of his seven-year career in wrestling.

“I’ve driven five hours for one match, another six hours for a second match, then driven home through the night just to take a nap and report for duty the next morning,” Gauntt admitted. “I try to book hotels more often now that I’m older, but it’s still something I’m not going to shy away from doing if I need to.”

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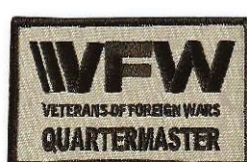
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# She is This Band's 'New Hero'

A VFW Post junior vice commander and two-time breast cancer survivor from Oregon assists her community with a little aid from a world-renowned rock band.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

PHOTO BY LEVI DARNELL



Angela Darnell, center, stands on stage with 3 Doors Down in January 2014 when they first met. It was near the end of this show that lead singer Brad Arnold, second from left, said, "I met somebody today that is sincerely my new hero. Angela is an Afghanistan and Iraq veteran, and a two-time cancer survivor. If there is a warrior in this world, she's sitting right here on this couch. Y'all give it up for her, please." He then paused the whole show to hug her, comfort her, and dedicated the last song, "When I'm Gone," to her.



**I**t all began in 2014, when Levi and Angela Darnell found themselves on a routine drive from their home in Portland, Ore., to a nearby hospital. The married couple had traveled down this road many times for Angela's treatments.

They sat tight-lipped as they neared the hospital, where Angela was expected to undergo surgery, again, for her second bout against breast cancer — a rigorous fight that had included a slew of chemotherapy treatments, a bilateral mastectomy and breast reconstruction surgery.

In an attempt to silence the anxiety, Levi turned to the airwaves, flipping the radio onto an alternative rock station that presented him with an idea.

"It was an advertisement for 3 Doors Down," Levi recalled. "They were coming to our local area, and I decided to surprise Angela with concert tickets after her surgery."

In planning the surprise, Levi discovered that the band's VIP ticket package offered a meet-and-greet session with its members. He bought those before serendipity struck, again.

## BUILDING A BOND WITH THE BAND

A few weeks later, Levi and Angela arrived at the venue a couple of hours before the concert. There, they came across Brad Arnold, the lead singer and founder of 3 Doors Down.

Levi pulled Arnold aside, and the pleasantries of a simple meet-and-greet turned into an honest 10-minute conversation between two husbands.

Upon hearing of Angela's Army service in Afghanistan and Iraq, serving tours in 2003 and 2004, respectively, and her current battle with breast cancer, Arnold agreed to surprise the veteran with a special homage.

"Little did I know that the event would turn into the whole band formally recognizing Angela on stage near the end of the show," Levi said of the night.

Perched on a couch situated onstage as part of the deluxe ticket package, Levi and a beaming Angela welcomed the roars of applause from fans after Arnold addressed her by saying, "If there's a warrior in this world, she's sitting right here on this couch."

Arnold then took it a step further, halting the band's show to tell Angela's story,

PHOTO BY LEVI DARNELL



**Pictured left to right are Richard Sneed, the principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Rob Boman, Angela Darnell, Crisper Stanford, Brad Malone, Mark Smith and Lee Parker at the Better Life Foundation concert on Sept. 7, 2019, in Cherokee, N.C. Darnell had the honor to introduce 3 Doors Down before the band took the stage.**

which he punctuated by telling the crowd that he "sincerely met someone today that is now his new hero."

The lead singer walked over to Angela, who fought back tears, and embraced her before dedicating the last song of the show, "When I'm Gone," to her.

"It was so cool and something I never imagined," Angela added. "I specifically remember them asking me questions in between songs, and making me feel like I was part of the band."

But the band didn't stop there, and neither did Levi, who encouraged the band to remain a constant in his wife's life as much as their music had been.

The following day, on an afternoon in mid-January of 2014, Angela received a friend request from Arnold on Facebook, and it snowballed from there.

"I couldn't believe it," she said. "I ended up becoming friends with all the band members, their wives and even some of their parents. I think I speak for many people when I say that they're a great band,

but they're even greater people who do a lot for others, especially veterans."

## CALLING ON A FRIEND

The relationship between the Darnells and 3 Doors Down evolved during the four years that followed. It then got even closer as word that Angela's breast cancer had returned and progressed into stage four by 2018.

Since the cancer had begun metastasizing into her bones and liver, leaving doctors to declare a terminal diagnosis, Levi started planning a "Celebration of Life" for Angela.

Levi reached out to the band and asked if they could appear at the event, which was slated for July 2019. Unfortunately, 3 Doors Down was on tour at that time and had to decline.

"It was a pretty big ask for a world-renowned, international super group that was touring, and I didn't have the capital to pay for that," Levi said. "But they decided to do something better, countering my

proposal with one of their own.”

The band surprised Angela with a video message played on a giant screen in front of her friends and family during the “Celebration of Life.” In the message, guitarist Chris Henderson expressed his thoughts about Angela.

Henderson, a Navy veteran who served on active duty from 1989-1993 and later in the Navy Reserve from 1995-2001, confessed that there’s “only a few people in the world that bring with them the positive energy that Angela does. I’m one of the lucky ones that got to know her.”

The band then awarded Angela a \$10,000 check through their non-profit charity, The Better Life Foundation, which was presented to her by VFW Post 1442 in Portland, Ore., where she and Levi currently serve as junior and senior vice commanders, respectively.

Band members also invited Angela to The Better Life Foundation’s charity con-

cert weekend in September 2019, where they surprised her as the guest of honor.

## ‘A SURREAL EXPERIENCE’

At the weekend event in September, the band presented Angela with a pink guitar autographed by every band member and a custom plaque with a Valkyrie design to honor her “service, sacrifice, struggles and triumphs,” according to Levi.

“It was absolutely amazing,” Angela said. “I was up on stage for every single thing they did, and it was pretty cool to get to throw T-shirts into the crowd and receive all these cool items. The whole weekend made for a great, fabulous and surreal experience.”

The band then awarded Angela another \$10,000, which they said would go to the breast cancer non-profit organization of her choosing.

Angela didn’t hesitate to name her recipient, which stunned everyone involved.

“They told me I could take a few days to search for one, but I already knew in my heart who would get the donation,” Angela said. “Cancer sucks, and we need to find a cure for it. And that’s who I gave it to — an organization that focuses on stage four cancer and ways to beat it.”

## TAKING ACTION

Angela chose METAvivor, a non-profit that specializes in metastatic breast cancer research, support and awareness, as the sole recipient of the \$10,000 from The Better Life Foundation.

The organization’s website states that less than 5 percent of money for breast cancer research gets dedicated toward understanding metastatic breast cancer and finding solutions to extend the lives of those patients affected by it.

Angela’s donation will go toward the organization’s initiative to expedite benefits, which includes Social Security and disability income for patients, as well as new treatments, therapies and affordable health insurance.

As for the other \$10,000 donated by 3 Doors Down, the Darnells have pledged to use it for VFW Post 1442’s visual arts community outreach program for children.

Now in its third year, the visual-arts camp features Mark Kistler, an Emmy-winning American artist who hosts drawing instruction programs for children, young adults and their parents.

Through VFW Post 1442, the local kids in the community gather for a week in July to learn the art of drawing from Kistler, who tours year-round teaching his renowned drawing program.

## THIS YEAR’S CAMP IN JULY

This year’s camp is slated to run from July 28-31 at Grandview Christian Academy in Beavercreek, Ore., about 17 miles south of Post 1442. All VFW members and their children receive free admission, while the general public cost is \$49, a 50 percent discount from Kistler’s \$100 cover charge per person.

“At VFW, we have two mission areas, which are to assist veterans and their families and to serve our communities,” Levi said. “We at the Post wanted to bridge those two into one, and the idea was to sponsor this children’s outreach program.”



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## ALWAYS HELPING

Angela Darnell served with the Army’s 3rd and 5th Special Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2003 and 2004. She operated as a finance officer, providing direct oversight and payment of U.S. funds to Green Berets.

“She single-handedly led and implemented a multi-million-dollar finance operation, in theater, that enabled Special Forces A-Teams to seek out and eradicate the enemy,” Levi said of Angela’s time in the Army. “That eventually led to the downfall of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein.”

In Afghanistan, Darnell managed the budget at Camp Vance located at Bagram Airfield, receiving commander support to appropriate viewing equipment, an outdoor space and a popcorn machine to host movie nights. Her contributions to the base “brought morale to soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines stationed at Camp Vance,” according to Levi.

Darnell also was heavily involved in the community outside of Camp Vance, often passing out candy to Afghan children in nearby villages and helping in any way she could, which carried over to her time in Iraq.

There, she lived in one of Saddam Hussein’s opulent palaces, attached to an Army special ops unit as part of the Combined Joint Special



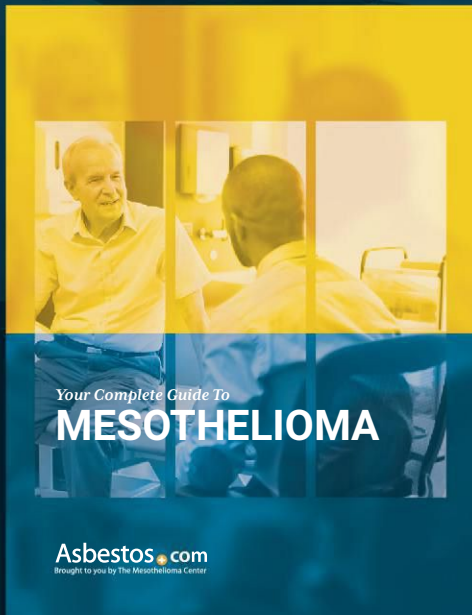
PHOTO BY LEVI DARNELL

**Brad Arnold, lead singer and founder of 3 Doors Down, takes a photo with Angela Darnell in Lincoln City, Ore., on Jan. 18, 2014. Arnold added Darnell as a friend on Facebook a day later, and the band’s friendship with the veteran began.**

Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP). While there, she continued to help the local villages when possible.

“She’s always going out of her way to care for others,” Levi said. “She always bore her signature smile and often took part in protecting every American within the walls of the palace. She trooped the line, served her fellow man, and left the country better than when she arrived.”





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# Korean War 70th Anniversary

A black and white photograph showing several U.S. Marines in a trench during the Korean War. The soldiers are wearing M1 helmets and combat uniforms. One Marine in the foreground on the left is aiming a rifle. Other soldiers are visible behind him, some looking forward and others looking to the side. The trench is dug into a hillside, and there are trees and brush in the background.

Marines stand in a trench to repel an expected Chinese attack on their position, May 1, 1951. At left with rifle is Pfc. Richard Pantoliano and at right is Pfc. Robert Curtis.

America's war in Korea began 70 years ago this month. The following chronology focuses on significant events during the war's three-year time-frame. VFW extends its gratitude and appreciation for all who served in the fight against Communist aggression in "The Land of the Morning Calm."

**BY THE VFW MAGAZINE STAFF**



# 1950

**June 25:** North Korea invades South Korea with 135,000 troops, initiating war.

**June 29: First U.S. Ground Force Arrives in Korea** Detachment X (35 men of the 507th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Bn.) shoots down 1 YAK with M-55 machine guns at Suwan Airfield. Det. X sustains 5 WIA — the first U.S. casualties of the Korean War.

**June 29:** U.S. Naval Forces Far East's light cruiser *USS Juneau (CL-52)* fires the first salvo of the initial shore bombardment of the war on Korea's eastern coast.

**June 29:** 5th Air Force's 3rd BG sends 18 B-26 Invader light bombers against Heijo Airfield near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, destroying 25 enemy aircraft on the ground and shooting down one YAK.

**July 1:** First U.S. infantry unit — 1st Bn., 21st Inf., 24th ID — arrives in Korea. Along with A Btry., 52nd FA Bn., it comprises *Task Force Smith*.

**July 2: War's Only U.S. Sea Battle** Off Chumunjin on Korea's east coast, the *Juneau* helps destroy three of four attacking North Korean torpedo boats.

**July 4-Aug 3: Delay of North Korean Invasion** 3 U.S. divisions (24th, 25th, 1st Cav) participate. U.S.: 1,991 KIA; 2,588 WIA.

**July 5: Battle of Osan** First U.S. ground action of the war. *Task Force Smith* (406 infantrymen and 134 artillerymen) engages and delays advancing NKPA units. U.S.: 20 KIA; 130 WIA. N.K.: 42 KIA; 85 WIA. First U.S. KIA is never identified.

**July 13-16: Battle at the Kum River** 19th and 34th Infantry regiments (24th ID) delay the advancing NKPA at the Kum River line. 19th Regt. and other units suffer 650 casualties among the 3,401 men deployed.

**July 13:** B-29s of the 326th BS, 92nd BG, conduct the first strike against N.K. (Wonsan) from Japan.

**July 19-20: Battle of Taejon** 24th ID (3,933 GIs) defends the town against the NKPA. U.S.: 922 KIA/MIA (most MIA later confirmed KIA); 228 WIA.

**July 25-26: Hadong Ambush** 29th RCT is committed to combat near Chinju. Its 3rd Bn. (757 men) is decimated with 313 KIA and 100 captured. It is the second-worst single-action U.S. loss of the war.

**Aug. 4-Sept. 16: Defense of Pusan/Naktong Perimeter** 84,478 U.S. troops participate: 1st Cav; 2nd, 24th and 25th IDs; 5th RCT; and 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. U.S.: 4,599 KIA; 12,058 WIA; 2,107 MIA; and 401 POW.

**Aug. 4:** First-ever aeromedical evacuation of U.S. casualties is performed by Marine VMO-6 helicopters.

**Sept. 15: Inchon Landing (Operation Chromite)** X Corps (70,000 troops from the 7th ID and 1st Marine Div.) begins landing on Korea's west coast. Marines secure their objective, sustaining 22 KIA and 174 WIA.

**Sept. 16-27: Naktong Perimeter Breakout** U.S. 8th Army breaks out of the Naktong Perimeter. 4 U.S. divisions (1st Cav, 2nd, 24th and 25th) participate. U.S.: 790 KIA; 358 WIA.

**Sept. 18-30: Inchon Operation and Liberation of Seoul** Seoul falls Sept. 27 after a week of fighting. 1st Marine Div. — 427 KIA; 5 MIA; 1,961 WIA. 7th ID — 86 KIA; 10 MIA; 358 WIA.

**Oct. 9: Invasion of North Korea** I Corps, led by the 1st Cav Div., crosses the 38th Parallel north of Kaesong and attacks northward toward Pyongyang. Eight GIs are found massacred.

**Oct. 19:** Pyongyang falls to the U.S. 1st Cav Div., and 1st ROK Div.

**Oct. 20: War's First Airborne Operation** 187th Airborne RCT (187th Abn. Inf. and 674th FA Bn.) makes a parachute assault — by 2,860 paratroopers — on Sukchon and Sunchon north of Pyongyang. U.S.: 46 injured in jump accidents and 65 battle casualties. 75 GIs are found executed at Sunchon.

**Oct. 25:** CCF launch their first offensive phase of the Korean War.

**Nov. 1: Northernmost U.S. Action of the War** 21st Inf. Regt. (24th ID) reaches the 8th Army's "high-water mark" when it captures the



Pfc. Paul A. Rivers of the 2nd Inf. Div. hunts for North Korean snipers in a burning village in the Yongsan area, Sept. 16, 1950.



Infantrymen of the 17th Regimental Combat Team ride on M-4 tanks as they move against Chinese Communist positions, June 13, 1951.



F4Us (Corsairs) return from a combat mission and circle the *USS Boxer* as they wait to land, Sept. 4, 1951.

PHOTO COURTESY OF D.M. GIANGRECO, AUTHOR OF "WAR IN KOREA"

NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO

NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO

## LEGEND

BG	Bombardment group
BS	Bombardment squadron
CCF	Chinese Communist Forces
FA	Field artillery
FEAF	Far East Air Forces (U.S.)
ID	Infantry division
KIA	Killed in action
MIA	Missing in action
MiG	Soviet-made fighter aircraft
NKPA	North Korean People's Army
POW	Prisoner of war
RCT	Regimental combat team
ROK	Republic of Korea (South)
WIA	Wounded in action
YAK	Soviet-made fighter aircraft

village of Chonggodo, 18 air miles from Sinuiju and the Yalu River, the border between China and North Korea.

**Nov. 1-2: Battle of Unsan** First U.S. battle with the CCF. 8th Cav Regt., 1st Cav Div., suffers heavy casualties: 1st Bn. — 265 KIA or POW; 3rd Bn. — 600 KIA or POW; and 5th Cav Regt. — 350 losses.

**Nov. 8: First All-Jet Combat in History** An F-80 Shooting Star of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing shoots down a MiG-15 fighter near Sinuiju in a 30-second dogfight.

**Nov. 8:** Korean Service Medal authorized.

**Nov. 25-Dec. 15: CCF Counteroffensive** Seven U.S. divisions participate (1st Cav; 1st Marine; 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 24th, and 25th IDs). U.S.: 562 KIA; 3,122 WIA.

**Nov. 27-Dec. 9: Battle of the Chosin Reservoir** Encircled 1st Marine Div. fights its way southward from the Chosin Reservoir to the Hungnam Perimeter. Marine casualties: 4,418 — 718 KIA; 192 MIA; 3,508 WIA and 7,313 losses due to frostbite or indigestion ailments.

**Nov. 29-Dec. 1: Battle of Kunu-ri** CCF destroy the U.S. 2nd ID; 4,940 are lost.

**Dec. 10: Wonsan-Hungnam Campaign** Ends this date. Casualties: X Corps — 56 KIA; 69 WIA. 1st Marine Div. — 885 KIA; 3,428 WIA. 3rd ID — 227 KIA; 266 WIA. 7th ID — 2,657 KIA; 354 WIA.

## 1951

**Jan. 1-15: Third Phase CCF Offensive** 500,000 Communists push U.N. forces 50 miles south of the 38th Parallel and recapture Seoul.

**Jan. 25-Feb. 20: Operation Thunderbolt** Counteroffensive against CCF. Six U.S. Army IDs participate (1st Cav, 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 24th, 25th). 667 KIA; 3,570 WIA.

**Feb. 11-13: Battle of Hoengsong** 2nd and 7th IDs and 187th Abn. RCT suffers 2,018 casualties. War's largest concentrated loss of American lives occurs when 530 men of the 503rd

and 15th FA battalions are killed in an ambush.

**Feb. 13-15: Battle of Chipyeong-ni** First mass assault by the CCF, 18,000 troops. CCF offensive contained by 23rd RCT (2nd ID); 1st Ranger Co.; 37th FA Bn.; and B Btry, 82nd AAA Bn. U.S.: 94 KIA; 259 WIA.

**Feb. 16-July 27, 1953: Siege of Wonsan** Task Force 95 (U.N. Blockade and Escort Force) blockades Wonsan Harbor. An unprecedented 861-day naval operation, it is the longest effective siege of a port in U.S. Navy history.

**March 7-April 4: Operation Ripper** Drives the Communists back to the 38th Parallel and retakes Seoul. Seven U.S. divisions participate (1st Cav, 1st Marine, 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 24th and 25th). U.S.: 566 KIA; 3,220 WIA.

**March 23: War's Last Jump (Operation Tomahawk)** 187th Abn. RCT (2nd and 4th Ranger companies attached) — 3,447 men — makes an air assault on Munsan-ni, 20 miles northwest of Seoul. 84 jump injuries; 1 KIA; 18 WIA.

**April 12:** War's first major aerial duel — nine MiGs are shot down. Also, 40 MiGs attack a B-29 formation — three are shot down.

**April 22-29: CCF First Spring Offensive** Largest single battle of the Korean War. CCF launch their Spring Offensive with 250,000 men in 27 divisions. Five U.S. Army divisions (2nd, 3rd, 7th, 24th, 25th) and the 1st Marine Div., participate. U.S.: 314 KIA; 1,600 WIA.

**May 16-21: Battle of the Soyang River** "May Massacre" along No Name Line. 2nd ID inflicts severe casualties on the Chinese. 23rd Inf. Regt. — 72 KIA; 158 WIA; 190 MIA.

**May 17-22: CCF Second Spring Offensive** Four U.S. divisions (1st Marine, 2nd, 3rd and 25th) participate. 333 KIA; 888 WIA.

**June 10-16: Battle for the Punchbowl** 1st Marine Div., encounters heavy NKPA resistance. Marines: 67 KIA; 1,044 WIA.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO



Riflemen of the 1st Marine Division fight their way through the streets of Seoul. The city was taken on Sept. 27, 1950.





Cannoneers of the U.S. 8th Army reload their 8-inch howitzer after firing on Chinese positions in support of infantry units on June 10, 1951. A peak of 2.7 million rounds were fired during June 1953.

**June 12: Destroyer Walke (DD-723)** is hit by a mine off Hungnam, N.K. 26 KIA and 35 WIA. It is the largest single Navy combat loss of the war.

**Aug. 15-Sept. 5: Battle of Bloody Ridge** (Hill 983) U.S. 2nd ID and attached units sustain 326 KIA; 2,032 WIA; 414 MIA. Counted enemy dead total 1,389. 15th FA Bn. sets a record by firing 14,425 rounds in 24 hours.

**Sept. 13-Oct. 15: Battle of Heartbreak Ridge** (Hill 931) 2nd ID seizes ridge: 597 KIA; 3,064 WIA; 84 MIA. The 23rd Regt. alone takes 1,832 casualties.

**Sept. 21: Operation Summit** A company of 228 Marines is lifted by 12 Sikorsky S-55s in the first helicopter deployment of a combat unit.

**Oct. 23: Biggest Air Battle of the War** "Black Tuesday" over Namsi. By week's end, three B-29s are shot down and four crash land. 55 KIA/MIA.

**Nov. 12: Offensive Operations Cease** 8th Army begins "active defense."

## 1952

**April 17:** Presidential *Executive Order 10345* extends enlistments involuntarily for nine months.

**May 25: Raid on Agok** Nine tanks of the 245th Tank Bn., 45th ID, retaliate for three raids on the division's sector.

**June 6-14: Operation Counter** 45th ID launches a two-phased series of attacks to establish 11 patrol bases in the Old Baldy area. The 2nd and 3rd battalions of the division's 180th Inf. Regt. fight fiercely for Outpost

Eerie on Hill 191, which is counterattacked by two Chinese battalions.

**June 23: Hydroelectric Plants Strike** FEAF and 290 carrier planes bomb nine hydroelectric power plants in North Korea.

**July 17-Aug. 4: Battle for Old Baldy** (Hill 266) 23rd Inf. Regt. (2nd ID) sustains 39 KIA, 234 WIA and 84 MIA by July 21.

**Aug. 12-16: Battle of Bunker Hill** (Hill 122) First major Marine ground action in western Korea is fought by the 1st Marines: 48 KIA; 313 WIA. Fighting there flared up again from Sept. 5-15.

**Aug. 29: War's Largest Air Raid** FEAF and carrier planes bomb Pyongyang in a 1,403-plane assault — the largest single-day raid of the war.

**Aug. 30:** Ocean tug **Sarsi** is sunk by a mine off Hungnam. Four KIA and four WIA. It is the last U.S. Navy vessel lost in the war.

**Sept. 1: Largest All-Navy Raid** 144 planes from three carriers destroy the oil refinery at Aoji, N.K.

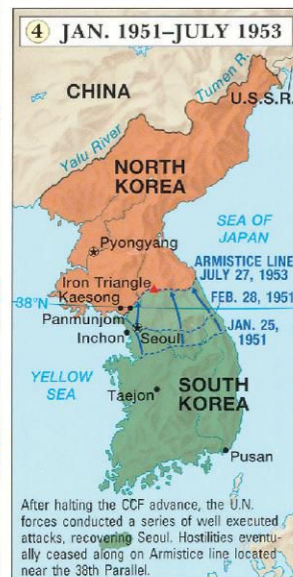
**Sept. 30:** During the month, units of the 5th Air Force shoot down 64 MiG-15s at a cost of seven Sabrejets.

**Oct. 6-13: CCF Attack on Western and Central Fronts** U.S.: 51 KIA; 348 WIA.

**Oct. 9-July 1953: Cherokee Strikes** 7th Fleet bombing campaign against battlefield enemy supply facilities.

**Oct. 14-25: Operation Showdown/Battle of Hill 598** (Sniper Ridge) 7th ID battles the Chinese near Kumwha, the right leg of the Iron









1st Lt. William E. Brown, Jr., an F-86 Sabrejet pilot of the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing, was among hundreds of U.S. pilots who waged aerial duals.



Capt. Jane Thurness was one of the 500 women who served in Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) units in Korea.



Sgt. Harold R. Cross, Jr., of Detroit, Mich., was the last American killed in action during the Korean War on July 27, 1953.

Triangle, and suffers 2,000 casualties.

**Oct. 21:** *USS Lewis (DE-55)* is hit by a shore battery off Wonsan; seven KIA.

**Oct. 26-28: Battle of the Hook** 7th Marines: 70 KIA; 386 WIA; 12 MIA; 27 POW.

**Nov. 3: Hill 851** Heartbreak Ridge area. The 2nd Bn., 160th Inf. Regt., 40th ID withstands an NKPA attack. U.S.: 19 KIA; 54 WIA.

## 1953

**January:** 270,000 Chinese and North Korean troops man enemy lines.

**March 9:** A 7th ID 34-man patrol loses 20 KIA, 2 MIA and 12 WIA in a CCF ambush. A 2nd ID 34-man patrol also loses 12 KIA and 5 MIA in another ambush.

**March 20:** War's heaviest naval bombardment on Communist lines at Kosong.

**March 23-24: Old Baldy/Pork Chop Complex** Held by 31st Inf., 7th ID. 32nd Inf. relieves the 31st. Units sustain 300 casualties during a Chinese attack.

**March 26-30: Nevada Cities' Outposts** (Vegas-Reno-Carson). CCF attack the 5th Marines. CCF regiment is destroyed. Marines: 214 KIA; 801 WIA; 19 POW.

**April 16-18: Battle of Pork Chop Hill** The 7th ID's 17th and 31st regiments are hit hard by CCF and suffer heavy casualties.

**April 20-26: Operation Little Switch** exchanges 149 sick and wounded U.S. POWs.

**May 13: Raid on Toksan Dam** A dramatic strike by the 58th Fighter Bomber Wing destroys a major irrigation system.

**June 10-18: Siege of Outpost Harry** U.S. 3rd ID's 15th Regt. and 5th RCT withstand an assault by the CCF 74th Div. Chinese suffer 4,200 casualties. U.S.: 174 KIA; 824 WIA during CCF attack on ROKs.

**June 15: USS Princeton (CU-37)** launches 184 sorties, establishing the single-day Korean War record for offensive sorties flown from a carrier.

**June 15:** Navy and Marine Corps aircraft fly 910 sorties — the highest combined number for a single day.

**June 30:** Marine Air Group 12 flies a record-breaking 217 combat sorties.

**June 30:** During June, Sabrejets down 77 enemy aircraft.

**June 30:** The most artillery rounds fired in one month — 2,710,248

— during the war occur in June.

**July 6-10: Battle of Pork Chop Hill** 7th ID is ordered to evacuate its defensive positions after five days of fighting and heavy casualties.

**July 7-8: Outposts Berlin-East Berlin** (7th Marines right sector) are attacked during the Marine relief of the 25th ID. Marines: 21 KIA; 126 WIA.

**July 13-20: Battle of Kumsong River Salient** Last Communist offensive. CCF launches a six-division attack partly directed at the U.S. IX Corps (3rd, 40th, 45th IDs). 187th RCT is attached to 2nd ID during the fighting. U.S.: 182 KIA; 718 WIA.

**July 14:** Army's 555th FA Bn., is overrun, losing 300 KIA and MIA.

**July 19-20: Outposts Berlin-East Berlin** — held by 81 Marines — are overrun, but reinforced. Marines: six KIA; 44 MIA; 12 POW; 86 WIA.

**July 24-26: Final U.S. Ground Combat** Heavy enemy attack (3,000 men) is launched in the Berlin Complex ("Boulder City") area held by the 7th and 1st Marines. U.S.: 43 KIA; 316 WIA. Last Marine ground actions of the war are fought on Hills 111 and 119. Central Sector: 3rd ID units assaulted on Sniper Ridge.

**July 25:** TF 77 planes fly 538 offensive and 62 defensive sorties — a record number for a single day.

**July 27: Last Air Kill of the War** An enemy transport is downed near the Manchurian border.

**July 27: Korean War Truce** Korean armistice is signed. Total U.S. casualties: 33,651 hostile deaths; 103,284 WIA; 7,140 POWs. Static warfare (1951-53) alone claims 1,586 (39.6%) Marine infantry lives and 11,244 (43.9%) WIA, and of Marines/Army combined — 12,300 KIA (36.5%) and 50,900 WIA (49%). Non-hostile U.S. deaths: 3,262.

**July 28: Last U.S. Casualties** Five GIs of Cos. B and C, 23rd Inf. Regt. (2nd ID) are killed in an accidental explosion near Ansan, N.K.

**July 31: Peak U.S. Ground Troop Strength** 302,483. Total of 1,587,040 U.S. personnel serve in Korea during the war. Some 198,380, or 12.5%, actually fight in combat.

**Sept. 6: Operation Big Switch** Last of 3,597 U.S. POWs are released. 🌐

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*This chronology is an edited version excerpted from America's War in Korea, VFW's official account of the Korean War.*



# ‘It Helps Us to Continue







Members of a VFW Post in West Nashville, Tenn., swiftly organized relief efforts after a tornado ravaged the area. The Post commander credits traditional and social media for their quick action.

# to Serve,

BY DAVE SPIVA

Volunteers from VFW Post 1970 in West Nashville, Tenn., clear debris from property damaged by the March 3 tornado in Nashville. Post 1970 Commander John Lambert said the best way to organize during a disaster is through social media.



In the early morning hours of Tuesday, March 3, an EF-3-rated tornado devastated the Nashville, Tenn., area, which caused extensive damage and at least 25 deaths. This prompted members of VFW Post 1970 in West Nashville to later that day start disaster relief, which lasted through the rest of the week.

Post 1970 Commander John Lambert, a Navy veteran who served from 2002 to 2006, said that he and other Post members decided to open their building as a drop-off center for donations.

"We got the word out to receive donations on social media and by contacting Nashville media outlets," Lambert said. "We received many donations. Most of them came from people who said they heard about our efforts from the TV and radio stations."

Lambert, who served aboard the *USS Philippine Sea (CG-58)* as a fire controlman, said his Post was able to "quickly organize" because of social media.

"I would say that the best way to communicate information to the public during a disaster is through social media," he said. "It's a media source that you can control and people can spread the word for you. It's the easiest way to quickly get the word out to a large amount of people."

Because of this, Lambert said the Post received many donations from local residents and businesses during the relief efforts. Among the items received included more than 12,000 bottles of water.

"We heard from the community that the biggest need was water," Lambert said. "We were happy to be able to help out with that."

Members of Post 1970 also decided to provide meals at the Post to the victims

affected by the tornado. Through the week, Post members and other volunteers visited affected areas to help clear properties of fallen trees and debris.

Lambert said there were about 25 volunteers from the VFW Department of Tennessee; the Department's Districts 6 and 7; Post 6022 in Tuscaloosa, Ala.; and other organizations.

Donnie Nelson, commander of Post 6022, said that when he learned about the Nashville tornado, he wanted to help with any VFW-led relief efforts.

"I contacted the Department of Tennessee in Nashville to get in contact with someone in the damaged area," Nelson said. "They gave me John Lambert's number and he advised me of what they needed."

Nelson said he and Post 6022 Junior Vice Commander David Jemison traveled from Alabama to Tennessee to assist

## POST 1970'S RELIEF EFFORTS BY THE NUMBERS

John Lambert, a Navy veteran and Post 1970 commander, said his Post received and donated:

- 12,096 bottles of water.
- About 1,000 pounds of non-perishable and dry food.
- 25 medium boxes' worth of hygiene products.



PHOTO BY JOHN LAMBERT/VFW POST 1970

with Post 1970's efforts. Nelson also said he was able to bring a U-Haul trailer full of supplies and donations taken from their Post members and community.

"Our mission at VFW is to help veterans, and that is what we strive to do," Nelson said. "As veterans, it helps us to continue to serve." ★

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**ABOVE:** Past VFW Commander-in-Chief John Furgess (2004-05) helps with donations at Post 1970 in West Nashville, Tenn. The Post, of which Furgess is a life member, received about 1,000 pounds' worth of food from community members and businesses in the Nashville area.



Volunteers at VFW Post 1970 in West Nashville, Tenn., load bottles of water onto a pickup to donate to victims affected by the March 3 tornado that struck the Nashville area. Post 1970 Commander John Lambert said his Post received and donated more than 12,000 water bottles to Nashville's Community Resource Center.



VFW Post 1970 volunteers clear tree branches from property damaged by a March 3 tornado in Nashville. About 25 volunteers from the VFW Department of Tennessee; the Department's Districts 6 and 7; Post 6022 in Tuscaloosa, Ala.; and other organizations helped with the disaster relief efforts.



# 2020 VFW Scholarship Award Winners

The Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen winners received more than \$200,000 in scholarships for their winning essays. All 54 VOD winners and the national Patriot's Pen winner received recognition for their works during VFW's Legislative Conference in March in Washington, D.C.

PHOTOS BY BOB KNUDSEN



High school senior Shruthi Kumar reads her winning Voice of Democracy essay in March at VFW's Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. Kumar, who won the top prize of \$30,000, was sponsored by VFW Post 1581 in Omaha, Neb.

Each year, VFW provides high school students in grades nine through 12 from across the country and other parts of the world with an opportunity to express themselves through a democratic-themed essay. This year, more than 51,000 students entered the Voice of Democracy contest.

VFW received considerable contributions from Twisted X, which presented VFW with a \$100,000 donation, and Dell, which donated a new laptop to each VOD Department winner.

Shruthi Kumar, a senior, won the 2019-2020 VOD contest. Kumar, sponsored by VFW Post 1581 in Omaha, Neb., won the T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship, a top prize of \$30,000. In her essay called "What Makes America Great," Kumar wrote: "In America we've been numb to noticing the greatness of America, a sense that we've too easily adapted to."

Kumar is pictured above with VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz and National VFW Auxiliary President Peggy Haake.



More than 138,000 students in grades sixth through eighth competed in the 2019-2020 Patriot's Pen youth essay contest. The competition spanned the U.S. as well as the Pacific areas, Europe and the Panama Canal.

The Patriot's Pen winners shared the \$54,000 purse, distributed accordingly to each of the winners.

This year's top prize of \$5,000 went to Ruby Howe, a seventh-grader from Rochester Hills, Mich. Howe was sponsored by VFW Post 334 and its Auxiliary in Oxford, Mich. She also received a Dell laptop.

In her "What Makes America Great" essay, Howe wrote: "The beautiful quilts my grandmother makes reminds me of what makes America great: diversity."

Howe is pictured above with VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz and National VFW Auxiliary President Peggy Haake.





# 2020 Voice of Democracy Winners

WINNER	SPONSOR POST	LOCATION	AWARD AMOUNT	NATIONAL AWARD
Shruthi Kumar	1581	Omaha, NE	\$30,000	T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship
Rachel Perry	7239	Acushnet, MA	\$16,000	Charles Kuralt Memorial Scholarship
Dallin Christensen	1481	Ogden, UT	\$10,000	VFW Scholarship
Seth Weeks	1486	Sandwich, IL	\$7,000	LeRoy Moorhead Memorial Scholarship
Joseph McDonald	5652	Ronan, MT	\$6,000	Floyd County VFW Post 3281, New Albany Indiana Scholarship & Mr. and Mrs. John Biedrzycki and the 2015 Homecoming Committee Scholarship (PA) Combined
Sara Smith	762	West Fargo, ND	\$5,000	Rehoboth Beach Post 7447 and Auxiliary Dept. of Delaware Scholarship
Shannon O'Hare	9785	Eagle River, AK	\$4,000	Department of Indiana and Auxiliary Scholarship & Department of New Jersey Howard E. Vander Clute Scholarship (combined)
Ellie Wolthuis	7217	Northwood, NH	\$4,000	Department of Minnesota William F. Halsey Memorial
Justin Thomas	12140	Lake Oswego, OR	\$3,500	Department of New York and Auxiliary, Rev. Albert G. Salmon Memorial Scholarship
Jessica Schlaudt	1836	Luftkin, TX	\$3,000	Joseph and Irene Hansen Memorial Scholarship (MD)
Neily Raymond	1761	Bangor, ME	\$2,500	Daniel Sean Wallace Memorial Scholarships (NJ)
Benjamin Gossett	6073	Scottsboro, AL	\$2,500	Troy and Sandy Rothbart Memorial Scholarship (NY)
Olivia Lee	6830	Walhalla, SC	\$2,000	Jesse A. Lewis Memorial Scholarship (CA)
Isabella Gharib	8364	Clear Fork, WV	\$2,000	Silver Spring Memorial Post 2562 Scholarship (MD)
Elizabeth Meshkin	3801	San Juan Capistrano, CA	\$2,000	Department of Arizona and Auxiliary Harry A. Kosht Memorial Scholarship
Ruth Anand	3345	Strongsville, OH	\$2,000	Department of California and Auxiliary Scholarship
Kayla Teipen	2693	Green Field, IN	\$2,000	Department of Illinois VFW – Ray Soden/George Cramer Scholarship
Elizabeth Link	295	South St. Paul, MN	\$2,000	Department of Wisconsin Wally Hogan/Tom Tradewell Commanders-in-Chief Scholarship
ShaLynne Ouellette	1371	Owego, NY	\$2,000	Department of Kentucky and Auxiliary Brian Duffy and Marion Watson Scholarship
Lillian Baird	3376	Ephrata, PA	\$2,000	Francis J. Tallman Memorial Scholarship & Robert A. Stock Memorial Scholarship (NY) (combined)
Journi James	8798	Eufaula, OK	\$2,000	Walter and Doris Marshall Memorial Scholarship (MT) & Southern Conference Scholarship (combined)
Pierette Foy-Kougha	1399	Linden, NJ	\$2,000	Mr. and Mrs. James H. Black Scholarship (NC) & Jane Young Memorial Scholarship (OH) (combined)
Ella Bradley	792	Montpelier, VT	\$2,000	Department of Alabama Scholarship & Department of Georgia James H. "Sloppy" Floyd Memorial Scholarship (combined)
Nicholas DuBois	9298	Montfort, WI	\$2,000	Department of Georgia R.D. "Bulldog" Smith, Jr. Scholarship & Department of Ohio Chester J. Koch Memorial Scholarship (combined)
Sienna Bertamini	12146	Ban Chang, Thailand	\$2,000	Department of Connecticut and Auxiliary Scholarship & Stephen and Elsie Riordan Memorial Scholarship (NJ) (combined)
Kaitlyn James	3227	Saint Cloud, FL	\$2,000	Larry W. Rivers Scholarship (LA) & Department of Illinois Scott Post 4183 Scholarship (combined)
Sophie Crowder	7897	Blackstone, VA	\$2,000	All American Post 284 Scholarship (D.C.) & Bernard J. Michels, Post 9610 and Auxiliary Scholarship (combined)
Alexandrea Wong	10154	Kaneohe, HI	\$2,000	Juanita Crowe-Durbino, Department of Tennessee Scholarship & Ervin and Lorraine Rothenbuhler Scholarship (MD) (combined)
Genevieve Hayes	1677	Casa Grande, AZ	\$2,000	Fridley VFW Post 363 and Auxiliary Scholarship (MN) & Department of Michigan and Auxiliary Scholarship (combined)
Mackenzie Roberts	7319	Armour, SD	\$1,500	Department of New Hampshire Scholarship
Ariadne Dulchinos	406	Newport, RI	\$1,500	Department of Illinois and Auxiliary Scholarship
Ayushman Choudhury	10689	Ellington, CT	\$1,500	Department of Missouri and Auxiliary Scholarship
Jordan Bell	7686	Alamo, NM	\$1,500	Department of New Mexico and Auxiliary Scholarship
Clarabelle Watson	12159	Naples, Italy	\$1,500	Department of Massachusetts Edward A. Nardi Scholarship
Kaylee Tinsley	4075	Frankfort, KY	\$1,500	Department of Colorado and Auxiliary Scholarship
Liliane Anderson	1004	Rigby, ID	\$1,500	Department of Arkansas and Auxiliary Les Thone Memorial Scholarship
Amy Ludescher	4139	Lapeer, MI	\$1,000	Department of Wyoming and Auxiliary Scholarship
Sophia Hoffman	1829	Kansas City, MO	\$1,000	Roy Chandler VFW Post 762 and Auxiliary Scholarship (ND)
Brianna Busch	3633	Monmouth, IA	\$1,000	Department of Pennsylvania Joseph L. Vicites Memorial Scholarship
Sofia Sinda	7305	Colorado City, CO	\$1,000	Department of Maine Scholarship "to Remember the U.S.S. Maine"
Gabrielle De Marco	1949	Enumclaw, WA	\$1,000	Gilbert N. Nelson — Post 1326 and their Auxiliary — Bismarck, North Dakota Scholarship
Karli Abbott	5118	Easton, MD	\$1,000	Department of Kansas and Auxiliary Robert R. Whipple Memorial Scholarship
Austin Amos	5352	Kernersville, NC	\$1,000	Department of Nevada and Auxiliary Scholarship
Ella Otken	7017	Denham Springs, LA	\$1,000	Department of Florida John M. "Jack" Carney Scholarship
Kathlyn Hedstrom	2350	Elko, NV	\$1,000	Department of Hawaii and Auxiliary Scholarship
Jon Castleman	1972	Dyersburg, TN	\$1,000	Department of Idaho and Auxiliary Scholarship
Juliana Handlin	3420	Newark, DE	\$1,000	Department of Mississippi VFW and Auxiliary Bernard McClelland Memorial Scholarship
Hannah Miller	3031	Rogers, AR	\$1,000	Ray Sisk Memorial Scholarship (CA)
Dailyn Nichols	1756	Gillette, WY	\$1,000	Department of Tennessee Cooper T. Holt — John Furgess Scholarship
Brianna Ball	7397	Lenexa, KS	\$1,000	Department of Mississippi Toxie K. Stapleton Post 6473 Luther J. Cox Memorial Scholarship
Eli Coleman	4982	Quitman, MS	\$1,000	Commander-in-Chief Richard L. Eubank and 2010-2011 Department Commanders Scholarship (CA)

# 2020 Patriot's Pen Winners

WINNER	SPONSOR POST	LOCATION	AWARD AMOUNT	NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP
Ruby Howe	334	Oxford, MI	\$5,000	North End Post 144, Paul A. Spera Past Commander-in-Chief Award
Casseus Rhodes	7968	Apache Junction, AZ	\$4,000	VFW Award
Rei Borges	11367	Mary Esther, FL	\$3,500	VFW Award
Talisa Dean	8433	Cairo, GA	\$2,750	Alaine Benson Memorial Award
Lucia Williams	10049	Simi Valley, CA	\$2,500	Rehoboth Beach Post 7447 and Auxiliary (Dept. of Delaware) Award
William O'Bryan	191	Canonsburg, PA	\$2,000	Clyde A. Lewis Department of New York and Auxiliary Award
Bryan Couzens	3238	Camden, DE	\$1,750	Dept. of New Hampshire George J. Maxfield Post 1772 and Auxiliary John A. Knapper Memorial Award
Sadie Lamerson	108	Chillicothe, OH	\$1,500	John F. Gwizdak Award
Amelia Brumley	2554	Sultan, WA	\$1,500	VFW and James R. and Pat Mueller Award
Sam Verdoni	9558	Springfield, NE	\$1,500	VFW Award
Hannah Ayzman	4737	Highwood, IL	\$1,250	VFW Award
Harlee Cooley	3619	De Ridder, LA	\$1,250	Grace Minnix Memorial Award
Ava Bennett	11254	Hampstead, NH	\$1,000	Golden Valley VFW Post 7051 (Golden Valley, Minnesota) Award
Holly Davenport	2760	Gadsden, AL	\$1,000	Louis W. Oppenheim VFW Post 1019 Award
Julianna Morelli	8276	Delmar, MD	\$1,000	Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Colorado Award
Evangeline Gingerich	10014	Kaiserslautern, Germany	\$1,000	John V. Daniels Jr. Post 2813 and Auxiliary (Dept. of New York) Award & John E. (Jack) Bales Post 10581 (Dept. of Colorado) Award (combined)
Simon Zawistowski	7487	Lewiston, NY	\$1,000	Silver Spring Memorial Post 2562 (Dept. of Maryland) Award & Department of Utah Award (combined)
Asher McGlinchy	3629	Fairbanks, AK	\$1,000	Department of Michigan Award & Warren A. Tressler Memorial (Dept. of Minnesota) Award (combined)
Raunak Singh	7858	Bernardsville, NJ	\$1,000	Department of Nevada Award & Chaplain Lyman Rollins Post 2005, Marblehead, Massachusetts Award (combined)
James Caddell	6932	Edgefield, SC	\$1,000	Charlie H. Adamson, Jr. Memorial Award & Joseph A. Scerra Memorial (Dept. of Massachusetts) Award (combined)
Violet Lotenschtein	941	Harlan, IN	\$1,000	James L. Keeley Award & Department of Ohio Award (combined)
Vanessa Perkins	6908	Mountain City, TN	\$1,000	Department of South Dakota VFW and Auxiliary Award & Department of Idaho and Auxiliary Award (combined)
Hannah Cunningham	782	Burlington, VT	\$1,000	Department of Georgia and Auxiliary Award
Brilee Knight	1114	Evansville, IN	\$750	Department of Kansas VFW and Auxiliary Award and Department of Iowa Award (combined)
Evelyn Fisher	2466	Lubbock, TX	\$750	VFW Department of Washington and Auxiliary Eric G. Sandstrom Memorial Award
Kailyn Stokes	12022	Marion, KY	\$500	Glenn D. Raney Memorial (Louisiana) Award
Elexis Haring	9049	Oakes, ND	\$500	Mary Margaret Romano Memorial (Dept. of Connecticut) Award
Jubilee Brown	1039	Menomonie, WI	\$500	VFW Southern Conference Award
Hershey Bhutoria	5027	O'Fallon, MO	\$500	Edward S. Banas Sr. Award
Finnegan Straub	6053	Hingham, MA	\$500	Deering Memorial Post 6859, Portland Maine Award
Jonah Keithan	10690	Higganum, CT	\$500	Department of Tennessee John Furgess Award
Kaleigh Graham	8969	Lumberton, NC	\$500	Department of Missouri VFW and Auxiliary Award
Timothy Haynes	10721	Edwards, CO	\$500	The Robin V. Fell Memorial Award
Charley Kwaps	1695	Brigham City, UT	\$500	Deering Memorial Post 6859, Auxiliary Portland Maine Award
Thea Bothun	1215	Rochester, MN	\$500	Department of South Carolina and Auxiliary Award
Norah Winslow	5392	Tiverton, RI	\$500	Sanford-Springvale Memorial VFW Post 9935 Award
Addisyn Smith	6141	Fairview, OK	\$500	Department of California Award
William Brewer	661	Salem, OR	\$500	Department of Arkansas, "Dewayne Fletcher Memorial" Award
Hendrik Heerema	6917	Las Cruces, NM	\$500	Frederick H. Smalley Department of New Mexico Award
Chase Adcock	9122	Mendenhall, MS	\$500	VFW Department of Pacific Areas Award
Elisabeth Beattie	4809	Norfolk, VA	\$500	VFW Department of New Jersey Award
Brodie Merrell	3646	Glenns Ferry, ID	\$500	Veterans of Foreign Wars of Ohio Charities Award
Lilja Anderson	12138	Ewa Beach, HI	\$500	Department of Wyoming and Auxiliary Award
Deven Miller	4768	South Charleston, WV	\$500	The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Mississippi and Auxiliary Award
Camillah Mariano	2917	Agat, Guam	\$500	Department of Connecticut and Auxiliary Award
Jenna Holland	4813	Circle, MT	\$500	Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki and 2015-2016 Department Commanders Award
Gracelyn Farnham	11453	Cheyenne, WY	\$500	National President Francisca Guilford and 2015-2016 Auxiliaries Award
Katie Cooke	3115	Wichita, KS	\$500	Department of New Mexico and Auxiliary Award
Arina Weber	4525	Waldoboro, ME	\$500	Department of Nevada Award
Carter Jensen	3164	Canton, SD	\$500	Department of Pennsylvania 2015-16 "LDRSHIP" Award
Fontaine Rossi	8245	Huntington, AR	\$500	Peter J. Mascetti Jr. & Department of Europe Award
Spencer Gale	2350	Elko, NV	\$500	VFW and Auxiliary members of Southern Charles County Memorial Post 10081, Dept. of Maryland Award



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# U.S. MILITARY HELPS BATTLE COVID-19 ACROSS THE COUNTRY

From New York to Los Angeles and areas in between, service members provided much-needed care to those affected by the virus that swept through the country. Navy hospital ships docked to treat patients, and National Guard units set up screening stations and field hospitals at multiple locations. VFW salutes those who answered the call to service in this time of national crisis.







The *USNS Comfort* hospital ship passes lower Manhattan on its way to docking at Pier 90 in New York harbor on March 30. The *Comfort* has 1,000 beds and 12 operating rooms. Originally, the *Comfort* was to be used for non-COVID-19 patients. However, at press time, the Pentagon announced that the *Comfort* would begin accepting COVID-19 patients in "convalescent care as well as low-acuity patients." Such patients require a lower level of medical care.



Sailors aboard the *USNS Mercy* prepare to accept the hospital ship's first patients while docked in San Pedro, Calif., in late March. With 1,000 beds and 800 active-duty doctors, nurses and medical staff members on board, the *Mercy* was taking patients who did not have COVID-19 in order to free up space in shore-based hospitals. *Mercy's* commanding officer, Navy Capt. John Rotruck, said patients were transferred to the floating hospital ship after being referred by hospitals through a county medical alert center, to which the *Mercy* had been added.



Army Spc. Reagan Long, left, a horizontal construction engineer with the New York Army National Guard's 827th Engineer Company, and Army Pfc. Naomi Velez, a horizontal construction engineer with the New York Army National Guard's 152nd Engineer Support Company, register people at a COVID-19 mobile screening center in New Rochelle, N.Y., in March. At press time, more than 1,500 National Guard members in 22 states had been activated in support of state and local authorities responding to the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition to operating mobile screening centers, Guard members were tasked with disinfecting public spaces, providing logistical and transportation support, and coordinating with state and local health officials.





# Telehealth Offers ‘Fantastic’ Potential for Rural Veterans

A group of rural veterans participated in a study that focused on providing technology-based brain wellness programs through remote sessions. One participant said he noticed a “mental performance” increase because of the sessions.

BY DAVE SPIVA

**A**t the beginning of the year, an Arizona-based company completed a six-month study of how best to provide online sessions to rural veterans who have anxiety, depression and PTSD.

Vitanya provides drug-free neuroscience programs that can enhance brain performance through technology-based sessions.

Mike Southworth, CEO and co-founder of Vitanya, said he started the company eight years ago and that their programs don’t require “talk-based” sessions.

“Individuals don’t have to feel like they are broken or need to be fixed,” Southworth said. “They don’t need to remember or talk about old experiences. They can just go into these sessions

wanting to increase their brain performance ability.”

Southworth said that Vitanya’s programs focus on:

- Stabilizing “free radicals,” which are unstable molecules that can cause damage to part of the body’s cells and DNA.
- Clearing toxins from the brain.
- Optimizing nutritional delivery and absorption.
- Activating neuro response, by helping restore the brain’s natural balance.

Southworth said that these steps help “detoxify” and repair areas of the brain through the body’s own healing properties, and that those who suffer from anxiety or PTSD may see a difference after

taking part in these sessions.

Last year, Vitanya completed a study to see if providing their services remotely would affect the outcomes of those participating in their sessions.

“We knew that we would be capable of offering our services remotely,” Southworth said. “We wanted to try and see if we could send the equipment that is used through the mail and have a person hook it up to their own computer.”

Southworth said that Vitanya provided five veterans with remote sessions at Dawson Community College in Glendive, Mont. Southworth added that there were “fantastic” outcomes.

One of the participants was Thad Rule, a life member of VFW Post 1125 in Glendive. He joined the Army in 1999 and served as an infantryman in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2004 with the 116th Inf. Regt., 1st Inf. Div.

Rule said he completed the six-month program and claimed that his “mental performance” increased.

“I had started my bachelor’s degree in nursing before the program, and over the months, I could tell that the amount of stress and anxiety from it went down after starting,” Rule said.

Rule explained that he was able to complete nursing program coursework in less time after completing tele-remote sessions with Vitanya.

“I could completely tell the difference before and after going through the sessions,” Rule said.

John Strickland, a Vietnam War veteran and life member of VFW Post 812 in El Paso, Texas, is a franchise owner of a Vitanya location in El Paso. He said he came out of retirement to become a part of Vitanya.

“I saw what our programs have done for many veterans,” Strickland said. “I felt different at the end of that six weeks. I actually retested myself, and nothing was out of balance concerning post-traumatic stress. The technology said I don’t have PTSD.”

Strickland said that Vitanya’s brain performance programs are on the “cutting edge” of technology.

“Since I’ve been in business, we have upgraded our system twice because something better came out,” Strickland said. “That’s what I like about this program.” ★

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Thad Rule (right) with his family — wife, Eryn; toddler, Colin; and baby, Sawyer. Rule participated in a study that focused on providing technology-based brain wellness programs through remote sessions last year in his hometown of Glendive, Mont.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THAD RULE

# VFW and Humana Work Together to Support Veterans Health

For the benefit of veterans, VFW and Humana have partnered together for several initiatives for the betterment of health and wellness for veterans and their families.

BY DAVE SPIVA

If you've attended VFW's National Convention these past few years, you probably noticed Humana's presence in the exhibit hall.

Since 2016, Humana has sponsored VFW's annual health fair, which provides free health screenings to everyone in attendance.

"VFW and Humana have been working together to support the health and wellness of America's veteran community since our alignment started," VFW Foundation Director Richard Potter said. "For years, Humana has been very engaged in our partnership."

In 2017, the two organizations teamed up for a different program. VFW and Humana wanted to give healthy meals to needy Americans as part of *Uniting to Combat Hunger*. The program has already provided almost 500,000 meals to food-insecure families in Kansas City, Mo., and Orlando, Fla. VFW and Humana had hoped to double that number to 1 million meals by the end of the 121st VFW National Convention in Reno, Nev.

According to the nonprofit Feeding America, 1-in-8 people in the U.S. are food insecure, meaning they don't have access to healthy foods or fresh produce.

"Even more staggering, about 20 percent of households that Feeding America supports has a veteran," Potter said. "Because of this, VFW wanted to participate in *Uniting to Combat Hunger*."

For more information about *Uniting to Combat Hunger*, visit [www.vfw.org/uniting-to-combat-hunger](http://www.vfw.org/uniting-to-combat-hunger).

More recently, Humana has sponsored some of VFW's veterans service officer training sessions in Annapolis, Md. VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci said these sessions are "vital" to helping veterans obtain benefits from VA.



A Humana team member leads a training conference in January in Annapolis, Md. Each year, VFW service officers complete up to 80 hours of training per year in order to advocate on the behalf of veterans around the world.

"VA requires a minimum of 40 hours of continuing education a year to maintain a service officer's accreditation, but we provide up to 80 hours of training every year," Gallucci said. "In order to successfully advocate on behalf of veterans, they must be able to explain what VA programs and benefits are available, as well as understand and access a complex VA benefits system."

During Humana-sponsored training sessions, service officers are educated by Humana representatives on Medicare and how it could work along with a veteran's VA health care benefits.

Ed Sandrick, director of the veterans channel at Humana, said that the most important thing about the VFW-Humana relationship is that both organizations want to do all they can to "improve" the

lives of veterans.

"Together, the VFW and Humana are doing all we can to leverage our respective strengths and resources to work intentionally to help veterans and military families," Sandrick said. "Our separate and shared approach to the veteran community is based on keeping the best interests of the veteran and their families at the forefront."


Sandrick also said that Humana is committed to helping VFW serve the nation's veterans.

"At Humana, we believe that health-care is personal and local, which is why we value the work that we are doing with the VFW's National Veterans Service," Sandrick said.

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# Comcast Pledge Boosts VFW Membership

**More than 110 female vets joined VFW with a “buy-one-year, get-one-year-free” offer made possible by a \$5,000 donation from the telecommunications corporation.**

**BY JANIE DYHOUSE**

VFW's Membership Department got a financial boost this year thanks to a donation from Comcast NBCUniversal. Retired Army Brig. Gen. Carol Eggert, senior vice president of Comcast's Military and Veterans Affairs, spoke at last year's VFW national convention. She surprised all when she announced a \$5,000 pledge by Comcast to assist VFW in recruiting more female vets into its membership ranks.

“Comcast's donation led us to set up a program that offered an additional year of VFW membership to new women veterans joining the organization,”

VFW Membership Eligibility Coordinator Matt Nute said. “More than 110 women benefited from this program between late November 2019 and early March 2020, giving them an additional year to experience what the VFW has

to offer, interact with local Posts and enjoy the benefits of membership before receiving a dues renewal notice.”

Eggert, a VFW member at-large with the Department of Pennsylvania, said it's important for women vets to serve as role models.

“Women veterans face unique challenges,” said Eggert, who served in Iraq from March 2009-June 2010. “We need to hear their voices.”

Eggert, who has been with Comcast for nearly five years, added that veterans service organizations are “critically” important to supporting veterans.

“We also support unique populations in the military, and women fall in that

category,” she said. “It is important to promote women and welcome women into the family.”

According to Comcast's Military and Veterans Affairs Director of Communications Sean Casey, the pledge shows that VFW is an organization that welcomes women.

“It also highlights that women veterans are the fastest-growing demographic in the veterans' community,” said Casey, who is in the Army Reserve.

Comcast NBCUniversal's Military and Veterans Affairs is a nine-member team dedicated to engaging the military and veteran community in a variety of ways.

“We advise on programs and policies to best serve our military customers,” Eggert said. “Much of this work involves communicating the unique needs of the military community.”

Eggert highlighted Comcast's Internet Essentials offer, which includes more than 1 million low-income veterans in the program that offers a discounted rate of \$9.95 a month for internet service.

In addition to helping veterans and the military community, Comcast also strives to hire as many vets as possible, according to Eggert.

Further, between 2015 and 2017, Comcast NBCUniversal hired more than 10,000 military community members. The company's current goal is to hire another 11,000 by the end of 2021.

“We are focused on the long-term success of our military community employees,” Eggert said. “We help foster their personal and professional growth through our Veterans Network, an employee resource group with more than 9,500 members across the company.”

Nute said the pledge has shown positive results thus far.

“The incredibly positive response to this campaign is evident not only in our membership numbers in the short term, but in helping to mentor more active and involved VFW members for the future,” Nute added.

★  
EMAIL [jdyhouse@vfw.org](mailto:jdyhouse@vfw.org)

VFW FILE PHOTO



Retired Army Brig. Gen. Carol Eggert, senior vice president for Comcast NBCUniversal, speaks in July 2019 at VFW's national convention in Orlando, Fla. Eggert pledged \$5,000 to assist VFW in recruiting female veterans. More than 110 women took advantage of the buy-one-year, get-one-year-free offer.

## COMCAST NBCUNIVERSAL'S MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS IN 2019

**40+** Number of community support organizations and events sponsored.

**\$9.5 million** Amount of public service announcement time allocated to military community support organizations.

**13,886** Number of Comcast employees who participated in veteran-related service projects.

**12,000** Number of Xfinity military customers who received thank-you cards and coupons on Veterans Day.



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Exciting new scientific research shows that hemp contains special molecules called cannabinoids which bind to receptor sites in the brain and body. When taken orally, hemp activates these receptors

## Why This New Technology Is Better Than Hemp

Unfortunately, most hemp found on the market can't deliver a fraction of these results. "The problem is, most hemp formulas come in oil form," according to Chief Technologist Mi Hwa Kim of The Green Gardener. "Oil doesn't breach the cell membrane, which is where the real healing happens. Our body is 80% water, our cells 90%. And you know what they say about oil and water — they don't mix."

This is why **Canna LS** contains a unique "water soluble" system. The technology is shown to improve absorption in the cells by 450%, quickly boosting the body's cannabinoid levels.

"The other problem is that most of these formulas only contain a single compound extract," says Ms. Kim. "Hemp's full spectrum of cannabinoids are shown to work synergistically. In short, they work better together. It's called the "entourage effect." Most miss out on the full effects because they are missing some of the best rejuvenating compounds within the hemp plant. This is why we've made **Canna LS** with "full spectrum" hemp."

"Finally, most hemp formulas are made on foreign farms with pesticides, or grown using non-organic seeds and processes. We've grown the hemp in **Canna LS** at a 100% organic American farm, under strict agricultural guidelines. It's grown without pesticides or GMOs. And it's grown to contain no THC."

## How It Works

The key to hemp's health benefits is the Endocannabinoid System, a network of receptors in the cells. The system is there to maintain homeostasis (balance). In response to toxins in our body, it releases cannabinoids to set things back to their natural state.

"It's really an amazing God-given system that's been completely overlooked," says Ms. Kim. "Our bodies are practically designed to work with the compounds in hemp, which is why we needed a technology like **Canna LS** that unleashes its full potential."

Over time, with aging, the endocannabinoid system eventually burns out. Fewer cannabinoids are released, so the body's levels deplete. The result is, all sorts of symptoms of aging like age-related memory loss, blurry vision, joint discomfort, and much more.

"This is why there's almost nothing hemp can't do and no health concern it can't address," says Mi Hwa. "The trouble is, most hemp formulas are just not absorbable enough for the cell, so they fail to activate the endocannabinoid system. This is why they don't deliver anything close to the full range of potential results."

Fortunately, **Canna LS** is clinically shown to enter the cell membrane 450% more powerfully. This is how it boosts cannabinoid levels fast, helping to relieve joint discomfort... restore foggy memory... and support healthy blood sugar. And what most people really love is that the "pearl" gel is easier to take than taking a pill or oil.

## Not Yet Sold In Stores

Full-spectrum hemp, like **Canna LS**, is available nationwide. However, several major pharmaceutical companies are currently testing hemp in clinical settings, which means it may require a prescription in the future. It's advised to get **Canna LS** while you can.



## Taking All The Risk Off Consumers

A large percentage of men and women using **Canna LS** experience truly amazing results. That's why it's now being sold with a guarantee that goes way beyond the industry standard. "We can only make this guarantee because we are 100% certain our customers will be satisfied," says Ms. Kim. We want to take full risk off consumers. So in addition to offering substantial discounts for first-time customers, we also make them a huge promise that ensures they don't have to risk a cent."

Here's how it works: Take **Canna LS** exactly as directed, and you must be thrilled with the results! Otherwise, simply return the bottles and any unused portion within 90 days of purchase.

## Where To Find Canna LS

This is the official nationwide release of **Canna LS** hemp technology. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to anyone who calls. An Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try **Canna LS** hemp extract. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE at 1-866-256-2857. The company will do the rest. Use Promo Code **VFW0620CAN** when you call in.

Important: Due to hemp's growing popularity and recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

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Here is an overview of AD&D.

### What types of events does accidental death and dismemberment insurance typically cover?

This coverage is designed to pay benefits in addition to other types of insurance coverage. The benefits depend on the loss, but the policy generally pays out the benefit to either the policyholder, if living, or a beneficiary.

This type of insurance coverage regularly applies to deaths and injuries from covered accidents such as automobile accidents, falls, exposure to the ele-

ments, drowning and accidents caused by heavy equipment. It commonly does not cover situations where a person's injuries are self-inflicted or if he or she is under the influence of non-prescribed drugs or alcohol.

### How are dismemberment benefit amounts determined?

Dismemberment benefits are generally paid as a portion of the coverage amount depending on the degree and type of injury incurred. The more serious the injuries, the larger the payment could be. When reviewing the terms and conditions of any accidental death and dismemberment policy, look for charts listing specific benefits paid for each type of loss.

For more information regarding this valuable member benefit, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-833-VFW-VETS.

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## PROPOSED

101st Airborne Div., A Co., 326th Eng., I Bde., Vietnam 1965-66: Dennis W. Lenox (918) 289-5961; [lenoxhd@aol.com](mailto:lenoxhd@aol.com)  
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176th Assault Helicopter Co., Americal Div., Chu Lai, RSVN, Aug. 1969-May 1970 - Seeking to contact the CO or XO in regard to a flight physical to substantiate a claim. Jake Kennedy (937) 773-2392; [jkennedy3@woh.rr.com](mailto:jkennedy3@woh.rr.com)

199th Inf., 2nd Bn., 40th Arty, Vietnam, Oct. 1967-Sept. 1968 - Seeking anyone who can substantiate me being on fire support a month at a time and now having hearing loss. VA has denied my claim twice saying no records. Ronald Flory (717) 507-0631; [schfnancy@comcast.net](mailto:schfnancy@comcast.net)

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# Marine Corps Veteran Sets World Record

**George Hood of Naperville, Ill., set the Guinness World Record for longest male abdominal plank to raise awareness about youth substance abuse.**

**BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.**

**G**eorge Hood channeled his inner rock star at 515 Fitness in Plainfield, Ill., on a cool day in February. Taking center stage in the morning, the 62-year-old Marine Corps veteran performed for more than eight hours.

With his torso clenched horizontally on a table covered in lambskin, anchored by his toes on one end and forearms on the other, Hood navigated through a tailor-made rock 'n' roll playlist and sipped water from time to time.

Without clocks or timers visible to him, it wasn't until Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" blared on the stereo that Hood snapped back to reality with less than three minutes to go.

As Diamond's voice trailed off and the timer hit zeroes, Hood began unclenching his body after holding a plank position for a whopping 8 hours, 15 minutes and 15 seconds to set a Guinness World Record.

The Naperville, Ill., retiree and former Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) special agent began unwinding his body for the next 12 minutes into a yoga position called "child's pose."

He then proceeded to crank out 75 additional push-ups for more than a dozen cheering fans.

"It really does make you feel like a rock star, like they all want you to do an encore," Hood admitted. "Sometimes you wonder why you're up there, but it's the constant energy exchange with the crowd that keeps me in the game."

While the adulation and encouragement keeps him motivated during competitions and fitness events, it's Hood's otherworldly preparation that allows him to excel. In the 18 months leading up to his record-breaking performance, he trained

for seven hours a day, accumulating 21,000 hours in the plank position, while completing 270,000 push-ups and 674,000 sit-ups.

But that's nothing new to Hood, who added that his passion for surpassing barriers and "keeping score" began as a commissioned Marine Corps officer out of college.

"I'll always be a Marine," said Hood, who served four years on active-duty as an officer with the 2nd Bn., 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division. "My first exposure to a PFT [Physical Fitness Test] happened while at the Platoon Leaders Class, and I just fell in love with it. It became important to me."

After the Marines, Hood started a career as a special agent with NCIS and later transitioned into a DEA special agent. Then in 2008, he deployed for six months as a contractor, providing counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency investigative support to U.S. forces in southern Afghanistan.

"That was the first time I ever witnessed combat death," Hood said of his time as a law-enforcement professional in Afghanistan. "It put things in perspective for me. Those guys over there put their lives on the line every single day. To lose your partner, or a leg, and still pick up your rifle to fire your rounds at the enemy is a commitment that doesn't get enough recognition."

After Afghanistan, Hood returned to competitive fitness and has since set the plank record six times over the past eight years since his first Guinness



**George Hood, 62, a Marine Corps veteran who served with the 2nd Bn., 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division, holds the abdominal plank for 8 hours, 15 minutes and 15 seconds to set the Guinness World Record on Feb. 15, 2020, at 515 Fitness in Plainfield, Ill. Hood says his new focus will be push-ups.**

World Record in December 2011. Hood's recent record in February also shattered the previous record set by Mao Weidong, who defeated Hood in a competition in China in 2016.

Customary to the many fitness events Hood has held over his 10-year fitness career, the Guinness World Record helped raise money for a cause.

In this case, Hood collected nearly \$10,000 for 515 Fitness and the Braidwood Area Healthy Community Coalition in Braidwood, Ill., which promotes healthy life choices and seeks to prevent youth substance abuse, according to his spokesperson.

"Be it raising awareness and funds for mental health or advocating for my fellow veterans, all my events have always been fundraisers for a cause I believe in," Hood said. "I'm what gets people there, but that's what gives my story a heart. It is always for the greater good."

Following his world record in February, Hood announced his retirement from the abdominal plank contest. But he admitted that he's far from done.

"I started dabbling in the push-up genre," he said. "Let's see how many I can do in an hour..."

✪ **EMAIL** [irodriguez@vfw.org](mailto:irodriguez@vfw.org)

PHOTO BY JOSEF HOLIC



# THE VIETNAM VETERANS TRIBUTE COLT .45 PISTOL

FEATURING ARTWORK BY VIETNAM VETERAN AL ALEXANDER | LICENSED BY THE ARMY HISTORICAL FOUNDATION



To those who fought battles in the steaming jungles of Vietnam. To those who patrolled day and night, with threats of attack at every hour. To those who weathered the ambushes, the village mortar rounds and rifle fire. To those who patrolled the Mekong Delta in PBRs and flew in helicopters. To those in the fields and jungles always on the watch for punji sticks and explosives.

To those who returned home to a divided United States. To those who never returned home. To those who were glued to the nightly news, waiting for news of their father, or husband, or brother, or friend. To those who were drafted. To those who volunteered. To those who served. The Vietnam Veterans Tribute Colt .45 Pistol is dedicated to you.

For those who served in that faraway country, and for those who wish to honor them, this Tribute captures images from Vietnam that will be familiar to many of the veterans who courageously and honorably served in Vietnam when called by our country.

Al Alexander proudly served in the Vietnam War and this is reflected in the paintings he has created. His artwork is an especially fitting tribute to those who served in Vietnam, and those Americans who waited for them to come home. We are honored he has authorized America Remembers to issue this Tribute focused on his Vietnam War paintings.

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Nothing about the Vietnam War was easy. Those who were there remember swampy grasslands, rice paddies, dense

jungles, the heat and an elusive enemy; a war that took place halfway around the world in a country divided by decades of bitter history. They came from all over the country, from all walks of life, to fight for freedom on the other side of the world.

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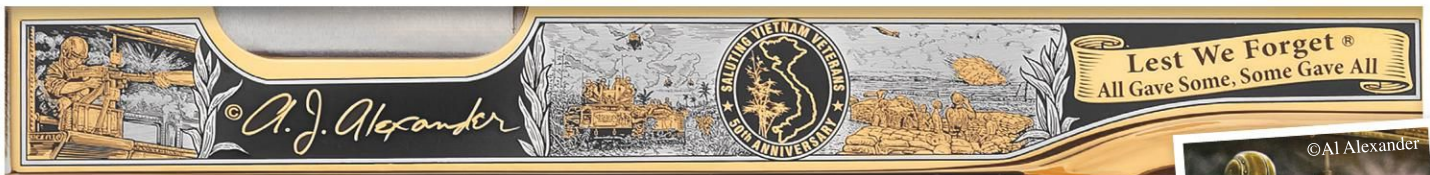
America's involvement spanned three decades and it's estimated that more than 2,500,000 Americans served in Vietnam. All the brave Americans who served in Vietnam deserve an honored place in America's history. When our nation called, they answered. Few generations have faced a more daunting challenge than those who fought in Southeast Asia. They didn't hesitate to put their lives on the line and give everything in defense of freedom. This Tribute honors their dedicated service.

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The left side of the slide features four paintings of Al Alexander's: "Heavy Weight Contenders", "Delta Dragon Ship", "Red LZ" and "Lonely Point". You'll find tanks patrolling a jungle road, Huey helicopter dropping troops in a hot landing zone (a Red LZ), a point man on the lookout as he approaches a river crossing, and a patrol boat engaging the enemy on the river bank. Near the muzzle end, you'll find a banner reading, "Vietnam Veterans Tribute".



The right side features: "Another Day at the Office", "Double Trouble" and "Ringside for a Fast Mover". You'll find a helicopter gunner covering troops on the ground, personnel carriers with troops and helicopters overhead, and a Phantom dropping napalm as troops observe from a distance. You'll also find a banner reading "Lest We Forget, All Gave Some, Some Gave All", in honor of all who served in Vietnam.

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