

AUGUST 2020

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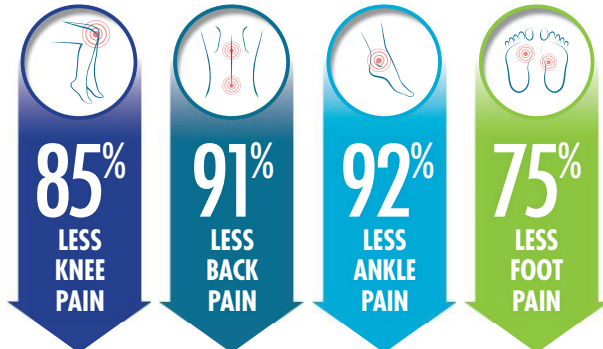
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14 ACTIVELY HELPING VETERANS

Only a year after she lost her leg in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan, former Marine Kirstie Ennis was competing as a snowboarder in the Paralympics. Since then, she started a foundation, climbed some of the world's highest mountains and received ESPN's Pat Tillman Award. Ennis says it's all about bringing attention to veterans issues. **BY DAVE SPIVA**

VIRTUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the first-ever cancellation of VFW's annual gathering of delegates from around the world. Here is why the physical convention was canceled and how VFW's first virtual convention was conducted.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

22



VFW DELIVERS COVID-19 RELIEF

VFW members leapt into action when the coronavirus threatened to halt the flow of food and basic supplies to those most in need. As one member said, it was an opportunity "to give back" to their communities.

**BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.
AND DAVE SPIVA**

24



A LINE IN THE SAND

In August 1990, U.S. troops began arriving in Saudi Arabia in response to Iraq's hostile occupation of Kuwait.

It was the beginning of *Operation Desert Shield*, the prelude to 1991's Persian Gulf War.

BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON

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AUGUST 2020

Vol. 107 No. 10

COVER PHOTO: Former Marine helicopter gunner Kirstie Ennis is photographed in October 2019 in Carbondale, Colo. Ennis has devoted her life to promoting veterans issues by attempting to climb the world's highest mountains. She also holds two master's degrees, owns an apparel company and worked as a Hollywood stuntwoman. *Photo courtesy of Kirstie Ennis*

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VFW Conducts First-Ever Virtual Convention

For the first time in VFW's nearly 121-year history, the organization did not gather delegates to conduct a "physical" national convention this year. Rather, the business of the 2020 VFW National Convention was scheduled for one day, July 24, at VFW's National Headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., and VFW's Washington Office. The process was expected to be streamed remotely.

The reason, of course, was the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged the world. VFW's leaders determined that the safety and health of its delegates was top priority, and the business of the convention could be conducted remotely and still be in compliance with VFW's bylaws.

On April 24, immediate past VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz issued *Executive Order No. 2*, which allowed VFW to hold a "Pro Forma" convention that handled only the most important administrative functions of the annual gathering.

The main item was the transition of leadership. According to *Executive Order No. 2*, the incoming

Commander-in-Chief was expected to appoint a Quartermaster Pro Tempore [and all other appointments pursuant to *Section 618(a) (6)* of the national bylaws]. The Council of Administration was to consider resolutions that support VFW's priority goals, but not vote on any proposed bylaw amendments.

To maintain compliance with *Section 603* of VFW's national bylaws,

no business was to be transacted due to a lack of a quorum, or the minimum number of delegates needed. As stated in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, which VFW uses as a guideline for conducting meetings, "the inability to transact business does not detract from the fact the society's rules requiring the meeting to be held were complied with and the meeting was convened, even though it had to adjourn immediately."

VFW leaders said that it was important for the continuity of the organization that there be a 121st National Convention. And such a "virtual" convention fulfills the duties and obligations outlined in VFW's bylaws.

For more information about why the convention was cancelled, see the article on page 22 of this issue. Additional coverage of this year's convention will be presented in the October 2020 issue of VFW magazine.

This year's "virtual" convention fulfills the duties and obligations outlined in VFW's bylaws.



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VFW OBJECTIVES

To ensure national security through maximum military strength.

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

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

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



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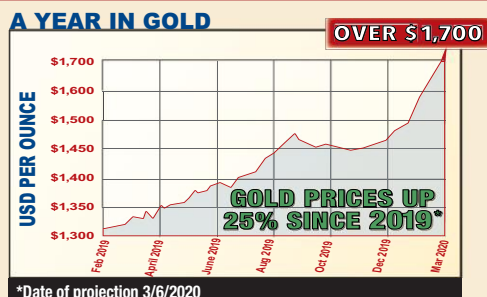
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Climbing Pikes Peak

The story of Army veteran Travis Strong never missed a beat from the introduction of the clinched fist to the celebration of achievement. He must be one hell of a man and a nice person. You took us from the point of the tragic battle to the tops of Pikes Peak.

THOMAS ROLLINS
COLUMBIA, ILL.

This is yet another motivational, inspirational veteran who ignored his physical impairments to achieve seemingly unreachable goals. He represents the very best of our decorated cadre of U.S. military veterans. Hooah, Travis!

DAVE BAKER
KINGSLEY, PA.

I applaud them both for their efforts, energy and enthusiasm. While you explained in great detail how Travis Strong lost his legs during a combat tour in Iraq, you gave no mention of Mandy Horvath's situation.

CHARLES BARR
LIBERTY, ILL.

Editor's Note: Mandy Horvath is not a veteran. While Horvath and Strong are friends, the focus for VFW magazine was on Strong and his sacrifice while in uniform and his subsequent recovery.

Final Salute

You have incorrectly identified the following deaths in Japan as being the result of an aircraft crash: Aviation Electrician Airman Jordan C. Cook (collapsed after PT) and Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Chase Edwards (found in off-base park with gunshot wound).

ALIX CHENARD
HONOLULU, HAWAII

Grief Bridges Divide

Many years ago, an English teacher asked my husband, Jerry, to speak to one of her classes. A group of boys had been studying Vietnam. Later, the boys all wrote him thank you letters. Jerry passed away in December. As I was cleaning out his dresser, I found all the letters. I sent the English teacher a note about the letters. In turn, she reached out to the boys, now young men. Several of them got in touch with me. They still remember Jerry's words.

LEITH DEWEESE
SAINT MARIE, MONT.

Having recently graduated from an anthropology program, I found myself in a similar situation. The angst between anthropologists and the military is well-known, so I wondered how they would accept a combat veteran. I, too, found that by speaking out, as well as listening, differences were often bridged by what we had in common.

DR. JODIE SWEZEY
MOUNT DORA, FLA.

I served in Recon, HQ Co., 1st Bn., 503rd Inf., 173rd Abn. Bde., in Vietnam. I feel a kinship to Staff Sgt. Williams. Perhaps it's because I got my Ph.D., after my time in combat just like he did. What's different, though, is that he can speak in a classroom and the folks listen now to veterans. You don't know how important that is. Veterans are respected now, as they should be.

RALPH B. MORA
LWAKUNI-SHI, YAMAGUCHI KEN, JAPAN

Weight-Loss Program

I started the program in April 2019 and my A1C has gone from 8.1 to 7.3 and my blood tests are all within normal ranges. Plus, I have lost 21 pounds. This program is truly a lifesaver for me.

VINCE LONG
BEASON, ILL.

VE Day 75th Anniversary

I was stationed in the Pacific Ocean in all areas and served the U.S. Navy NATS-Air sending supplies and returning wounded troops to help. We felt thankful and helpful for doing our part.

JACOB GERHARDT
CLEARWATER, FLA.

I would like to add the sinking of Navy destroyer *USS John Jacobs (DD-130)* by torpedoes off the coast of New Jersey on Feb. 28, 1942. That led to the loss of lives for 138 sailors.

STEVEN STOCKSTILL
PICAYUNE, MISS.

You finally put something about Audie Murphy in your magazine. I couldn't believe it. I'm a WWII veteran, and I feel it is an injustice not to have the American people know who he is.

WALTER PEGHI
PORT ST. LUCIE, FLA.

I am a WWII Army veteran who served in the European Theater. I am 98 years of age and remember it well, as does my fellow greatest generation. My local newspaper failed however to make mention of it today, which was disappointing.

JOE CODY
PRESCOTT, ARIZ.

Audie Murphy is photographed with Maj. Gen. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, not Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch.

LARRY LONGACRE
GARLAND, TEXAS

Editor's Note: Commander of the Army's 3rd Inf. Div., Maj. Gen. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, was misidentified. Thank you for the information.

The *USS Beatty (DD-640)* sank on Nov. 6, 1943. The cause was a torpedo in the Mediterranean Sea. The *Beatty* was omitted from the article. She was the sister ship to the *USS Tillman (DD-641)* which I served on.

ROBERT KEMP
KISSIMMEE, FLA.



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

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Senate Confirms New Air Force Chief

The Senate on June 9 unanimously confirmed Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., as Air Force chief of staff. The vote means Brown will become the first-ever African-American to lead a U.S. military service.

Prior to his confirmation, Brown, a decorated F-16 combat pilot, had been commander of Pacific Air Forces. He replaces Gen. Dave Goldfein as the Air Force's top general.

"I am truly honored and humbled by the nomination to serve as the Air Force's 22nd chief of staff," Brown said in a June 8 Air Force news release. "If confirmed, Sharene [his wife] and I look forward to building upon the legacy of Gen. Dave and Dawn Goldfein and the many airpower giants before who have served our Air Force and our nation with such dedication."

During Brown's Air Force career, he



Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., arrives at Yokota Air Base, Japan, last year on Nov. 13. Previously commander of Pacific Air Forces, Brown was confirmed as the new Air Force chief of staff June 9, making him the first African-American to lead a U.S. military service.

served as the air component commander for U.S. Air Forces Central Command in 2015-16. In that role, he coordinated the bombing campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and insurgents in Afghanistan. From 2016-17, Brown was deputy commander of U.S. Central

Command. In 2018, he was named head of Pacific Air Forces.

Among his military awards, Brown has earned the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and the Korea Defense Service Medal.

VFW Condemns Vandalism of WWII Memorial

Vandals spray-painted graffiti on the National World War II Memorial on the National Mall on May 31. The act occurred during a protest in Washington, D.C., following the death of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis.

VFW's Commander-in-Chief at the time, William "Doc" Schmitz, noted the following day that equality is a "cornerstone" of VFW. And while "bigotry and unequal treatment" have "zero" place in the world, neither does vandalizing a structure memorializing the men and women who fought and died to free the world of tyranny, he added.

"The VFW believes in peaceful, organized demonstrations," Schmitz said on June 1. "That is the right of every American. However, we are extremely saddened and angered to find that our sacred World War II Memorial was defaced.

"The veterans who fought for the very freedom to demonstrate deserve better, and we condemn those who vandalized the memorial."

VFW was one of the leading supporters of the memorial's construction and donated \$6 million toward its completion in 2004.

Floyd died while in the custody of the Minneapolis Police Department. It resulted in widespread protests throughout the nation and the subsequent activation of more than 17,000 National Guard troops in at least 23 states and the District of Columbia.

NATO Adds North Macedonia as 30th Member

The former Yugoslav republic of North Macedonia officially joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on March 27. It became the 30th member of the military alliance that exists to "guarantee the freedom and security of its members," according to NATO.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that North Macedonia's membership will offer the country "greater integration, democratic reform, trade, security and stability across the region. North Macedonia's accession also reaffirms to other aspirants that NATO's door remains open to those countries willing and able to make the reforms necessary to meet NATO's high standards and to accept the responsibilities as well as benefits of membership."

The top responsibility of each member is to defend other NATO members if they are attacked. NATO members also are expected to provide troops and equipment for NATO-led operations. Members also pledged in 2014 to spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense by 2024.

NATO is a full member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, trains forces in Iraq, helps fight terrorism in Afghanistan and has fought piracy off the Horn of Africa since 2016.



North Macedonia's flag (left) hangs next to NATO's banner in late March at NATO's headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. North Macedonia became the military alliance's 30th member on March 27.

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Reginald D. Sims, an accredited VFW service officer and life member of VFW Post 6496 in Jackson, Tenn., helps a veteran apply for benefits. In April, VA stopped allowing veterans service officers the option to review rating decisions after they've been handed down by VA. For more, see page 10.

VFW Opposes Repeal of 48-Hour Review for Veteran Disability

VA changed a policy that could affect the accuracy of disability ratings for veterans. VFW believes the change will cause further delays in helping veterans get their earned benefits.

BY DAVE SPIVA

On April 30, VA changed its long-standing 48-hour disability rating review period for veterans service officers.

According to VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci, the review is “vital” to ensure the accuracy of VA decisions.

“The 48-hour review period allows service officers, such as the ones here at VFW, to give claims an independent quality control check before it goes through VA’s review process,” Gallucci said. “The lack of review on behalf of veterans could affect the accuracy of veterans’ disability ratings now and in the future. Service officers can no longer ensure that veterans’ ratings are correct the first time.”

In March during a meeting with veterans service organizations, VA Undersecretary for Benefits Dr. Paul Lawrence announced that the department will eliminate the review period. Gallucci said that immediately after the announcement VFW raised its concerns about the change.

“But Dr. Lawrence said his mind was made up, and it was happening, whether

we agreed or not,” Gallucci said.

Gallucci also said that VFW’s veterans service officers find errors in about 7 percent of all claims, and without a veterans service officer review, VA is “shifting the burden” to veterans to discover VA’s errors.

“Service officers now have to wait after a rating is finalized before reporting any issues with a VA decision,” Gallucci said. “Since it’s after-the-fact, we can’t fix any problems without causing further delay for the veteran.”

Past-VFW Commander-in-Chief William “Doc” Schmitz said 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.”

Gallucci said while veterans service officers can no longer review a veteran’s rating decision before it is finalized by

VA, the VFW will remain “committed” to the organization’s veterans’ advocacy mission, which he noted “predates” VA’s existence dating back to 1930.

“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.”

While still in office, Schmitz and leaders from other veterans service organizations in April wrote a letter to President Donald Trump asking for a reconsideration to the new policy.

“Without [veterans service officers’] review prior to formal ratings promulgation, countless veterans would receive incorrect ratings decisions, due only to correctable errors,” the letter stated. “This abrupt policy change comes amidst the nationwide public health crisis caused by COVID-19. During these uncertain times, VA should not implement broad policy changes to veterans’ claims adjudication, which will only bring about more uncertainty.” ★

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President Donald J. Trump signs the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* on March 27. The \$2.2 trillion assistance package will ease economic disruption caused by COVID-19. A section of the law also allows delayed payments on VA home loans.

CARES Act Helps Veterans During National Emergency

President Donald Trump signed a bill into law in March that will economically help Americans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A part of the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* — P.L. 116-136 — allows homeowners with VA home loans to delay payments or make partial payments for at least 180 days. According to VA, a borrower can:

- Request a temporary postponement for up to 180 days without paying late fees or other penalties by stating they were financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Request up to 180 additional days before the first period ends.

If the holder of a VA home loan takes advantage of the service, lenders cannot report delinquency through the COVID-19 emergency and 120 days afterward, according to VA.

For more information about the *CARES Act* and how it relates to VA home loans, visit www.va.gov.

Past VFW Commander-in-Chief William Schmitz Says 'VFW Stands for Equality'

The VFW stands for equality, inclusivity and diversity. No matter race, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation, it is our duty as an organization to advocate for our members, fellow veterans, service members and military families who may face systematic injustices. We owe this to every man and woman who dedicated their lives to selflessly defending our great nation, and in fact, every American who should reap the equal benefits of their service.

As a nation, we should all be outraged and heartbroken over the tragic and senseless loss of human life. America must live up to its ideals and the fundamental truth that all human beings are created equal. The only way this can be accomplished is for our nation to continue its work to strive for the unity of all people with different backgrounds into a single nation of equal justice and equal opportunity. The VFW is proud to stand in this fight with our sisters and brothers.

Bill to Reinstate 48-Hour Review Period Introduced to Senate

A bill that could repeal VA's decision to eliminate the 48-hour disability rating review period for veterans service officers was introduced to the Senate in April.

The VFW-supported *Veterans Claim Transparency Act (S. 3761)*, if passed and signed into law, would reinstate the option that gives service officers 48 hours to review rating decisions after they've been handed down by VA.

VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Matthew Doyle said that he believes the 48-hour review period is "vital" to ensuring the accuracy of VA decisions for disabled veterans. Doyle also said that the review allows service officers to give reviews a quality control check.

"The 48-hour review period is an essential feature of the VA claims process," Doyle said. "It functions as an independent quality review check on claims decisions before final ratings are sent to veterans."

Doyle also thanked Sen. John Tester (D-Mont.) for introducing and cosponsoring the legislation.

After the VA's longstanding policy was stopped in April, VFW, along with other veterans' service organizations, sent a letter to President Donald Trump calling for him to "uphold" the 48-hour review period.

"Mr. President, the 48-hour review period is an essential feature of the VA claims process," the letter stated. "Without VSO review prior to formal ratings promulgation, countless veterans would receive incorrect ratings decisions, due only to correctable errors."



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

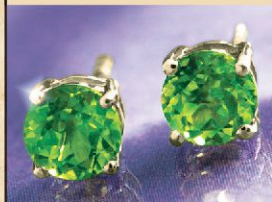
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Compensation Boost Approved in House

The House introduced and passed two bills in May that aim to help veterans this year. One has become law.

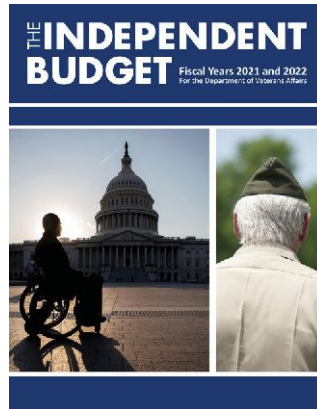
VFW National Legislative Director Patrick Murray said that he was “grateful” that veteran issues were being addressed in the House during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are encouraged to see our supporters in the House working in a bipartisan way to benefit veterans,” Murray said in June.

Here’s what each bill would do if passed and signed into law:

- **Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2020 (H.R. 6168):** Would direct VA to increase the rates of veterans’ disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children starting on Dec. 1. The increase would be the same as the cost-of-living increase for recipients of Social Security.
- **Major Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2020 (S. 3414):** This became *Public Law 116-44* on June 16. The law also dictates the maximum amount that can be spent on each project. Construction will take place in Alameda, Calif.; Louisville, Ky.; New York City; West Los Angeles; and San Diego.

“Passage of these bills today is a step in the right direction,” said Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.), who is the ranking member of the House VA Committee said. “But, there is much more work to do for veterans and their families.



House Bill Aims to Expand Survivor Benefits

A new VFW-Supported House bill would expand survivor benefits for dependents who lost a service member.

The Caring for Survivors Act of 2020 (H.R. 6933) was advocated for in *The Independent Budget*, a recommended spending plan co-authored by VFW, Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America. According to a press release from cosponsor Rep. T.J. Cox (D-Calif.), this legislation introduced in May could:

- Reduce the age allowed for a surviving spouse to remarry and maintain their benefits from 57 to 55. This would make it consistent with other federal survivor programs.
- Increase the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) base rate to 55% of the rate of compensation paid to a totally disabled veteran.
- Ease the 10-year rule for eligibility and replace it with a graduated scale of benefits that begins after five years and increases by percentage until reaching the full amount at the 10-year mark.

The bipartisan bill was introduced by Cox, as well as Rep. Gil Cisneros (D-Calif.), Rep. Ted Yoho (R-Fla.), Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-N.J.) and Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-Conn.).

To learn more about *The Independent Budget*, visit www.independentbudget.org.

Vet Employment Bill Offers One Year of GI Bill Benefits

The House and Senate introduced identical VFW-supported bipartisan bills in June that could help with the veterans’ unemployment rate due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.) and Rep. Mike Levin (D-Calif.) and Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) and Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) introduced the *Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020*. The bills, if signed into law, would provide support for veterans who lost jobs because of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The *Veterans Economic Recovery Act* offers eligible veterans one year of GI Bill benefits to be used at approved high-demand programs. The bill aims for veterans to get back into the workforce “as quickly as possible,” according to VFW National Legislative Director Patrick Murray.

“The VFW applauds our congressional leaders for swiftly introducing this



legislation to help curb unemployment among veterans,” Murray said.

Tester, the ranking member of the Senate VA Committee, said that the veterans’ unemployment rate increased from 3.1 percent in 2019 to 11 percent in April 2020.

“With veteran unemployment on the rise, it’s critical that we expand resources to swiftly get these folks trained and back to work,” Tester said. “The reality is that the coronavirus hasn’t spared our nation’s service members, and we’ve got to work twice as hard to make certain these men and women get the support they earned during their service.

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Kirstie Ennis, a medically retired Marine Corps sergeant, poses for a photo during a workout. Ennis was featured on one of the 2017 ESPN Body Issue covers and was honored at the 2019 ESPYs with the Pat Tillman Award for Service.

CLIMBING FOR A PURPOSE

An Afghanistan War veteran scales mountains and competes in endurance races for causes important to her. The Pat Tillman Award for Service recipient plans to reach the summit of seven of the tallest mountains in the world during her journey.

BY DAVE SPIVA

In 2008, Kirstie Ennis, who was 17 years old at the time, enlisted in the Marine Corps to serve as a helicopter door gunner and airframes mechanic.

Ennis served in two deployments in the Afghanistan War, the first in 2011 and second in 2012. During her second deployment, her life changed forever.

On June 23, 2012, Ennis was injured in a Sikorsky CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter crash. She was a part of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 363 at the time and sustained a traumatic brain injury, as well as injuries to her shoulders, face, neck, spine and left leg.

No one was killed in the crash, but Ennis received the most severe injuries from the incident. After dozens of surgeries over the next several years, her left leg was amputated above the knee.

But the injuries have not stopped Ennis from pursuing many major athletic feats on just one leg. A year after her injury, she was training to compete in Paralympic snowboarding events.

In 2014, Ennis left the Marine Corps and continued to pursue endurance and outdoor sports.

"After being medically retired from the Marine Corps, I decided to dedicate my life to serving others in a different way," Ennis said.

In 2015 from August to November, Ennis walked 1,000 miles throughout the United Kingdom to honor 25 Marines who were killed or committed suicide after her deployments. About every 40 miles of her trek, Ennis hung up

"I decided that I was going to take on the mountain in a different way," she said. "I decided that I was going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa."

But Ennis said she didn't want to climb one of the tallest mountains in the

"After being medically retired from the Marine Corps, I dedicated my life to serving others in a different way."

one of the 25 dog tags she made for each Marine. Her walk also raised awareness for the British nonprofit organization Walking with the Wounded.

Ennis said that "on a whim" she started participating in these kinds of events.

"I knew, for sure, that I wanted to help others," Ennis said.

SUMMITTING SEVEN MOUNTAINS

In 2016, Ennis needed to have surgery on her left limb, which resulted in her losing out on competing in the 2016-17 snowboarding season.

world for no reason.

"I wanted to have a purpose behind it," she said. "I ended up raising \$150,000 for clean water for Tanzanians through the nonprofit Waterboys."

In March 2017, Ennis completed a hike to the more than 19,300-foot-tall summit of Kilimanjaro, the highest on the African continent. Ennis said when she finished the climb, she wanted to not only show that she could physically and emotionally complete these kinds of endurance events, but she also wanted to make it about other people.



PIN-UPS FOR VETS FEATURES ENNIS AS FIRST AMPUTEE

Kristie Ennis was the first amputee to pose for the Pin-Ups for Vets calendar, which started in 2006.

Ennis, a Marine Corps veteran who had her left leg amputated after a helicopter crash in 2012 in Afghanistan, was a part of the 2019 Pin-Ups for Vets calendar, which featured other women veterans from all five military services.

Pin-Ups for Vets was founded by Gina Elise, a daughter of a World War II veteran. Proceeds of the calendar go to veterans' hospitals across the country.

Each year, Pin-Ups for Vets releases a new calendar to raise money not only to support hospitalized veterans but also troops who are deployed overseas.

For more information about Pin-Ups for Vets, visit www.pinupsforvets.com.

Marine Corps veteran and above-the-knee amputee Kirstie Ennis stops for a photo during her climb of Mount Everest in May 2019. While she did not make it to the summit, she was only about 200 meters from the top.

TILLMAN AWARD FROM ESPN

After her climb, Ennis was the first veteran to be featured on one of the covers of the June 2017 ESPN Body Issue. Two years later in 2019, ESPN recognized Ennis for her service with the Pat Tillman Award for Service.

"When I found out from ESPN that I was receiving the Pat Tillman Award for Service, there was no hesitation for me to go and accept the award," Ennis said. "It was just a great honor to even be considered to be recognized alongside a true American hero like Pat Tillman."

Ennis said that her current initiative is to keep summiting for her Climbing for

a Cause project. Since 2017, she's been climbing the highest peak on each of the seven continents.

RECOGNIZING 'DESERVING' NONPROFITS

In July 2017, Ennis successfully climbed Mount Carstensz in Indonesia, the highest point in Oceania. That climb, she said, was completed to recognize The Heroes Project. Later in February 2018, Ennis completed Iliniza Norte, the more than 16,800-foot peak in Ecuador.

In June 2018, Ennis attempted to climb Denali in Alaska, but was unsuccessful due to weather. Denali is the

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Marine Corps veteran Kristie Ennis crosses a ladder bridge during her climb on Mount Everest in April 2019. Ennis said her reason for climbing mountains all over the world is to bring awareness to different causes she finds important.

highest point in North America.

In September 2018, she completed the summit of Elbrus, the 18,510-foot-tall mountain in Russia, the highest point in Europe. The climb, she said, was in support of a non-profit, GLAM4GOOD.

In February 2019, Ennis climbed Aconcagua, which is more than 22,800 feet tall and the highest point in South America. Later in May 2019, Ennis attempted to climb the tallest mountain in the world, Mount Everest. She made it to the south summit of Everest but was unable to finish.

"I pay for my climbs, but I use them as an opportunity to raise awareness and as a fundraising tool for my foundation and

other nonprofits," Ennis said.

Ennis plans to compete in the IRONMAN 70.3 in October in Oceanside, Calif., and will compete in the 50th annual New York City Marathon on Nov. 1. During both events, Ennis said she plans to bring awareness to Challenged Athletes Foundation, a nonprofit for physically challenged athletes.

Ennis said that, in the end, she doesn't want her awareness and fundraising campaign to be all about her.

"If I can inspire people, great," Ennis said. "But if I can raise awareness for different causes by doing this, that's what I'm truly doing this for." ★

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

DOOR GUNNER TO MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

AUGUST 2008 Joined Marine Corps; attached to units HMH 465, HMH 461 and HMH 362 as helicopter door gunner and airframes mechanic.

JANUARY – AUGUST 2011 Deployment to Afghanistan HMH 465/461.

JANUARY – JUNE 23, 2012 Deployment to Afghanistan HMH 362; combat meritoriously promoted to Sergeant; injured June 23, 2012.

JULY 2013 Earns Master's in Human Behavior.

DECEMBER 2013 Begins competing in Paralympic boardercross and banked slalom (snowboarding).

MAY 2014 Medically retired from Marine Corps.

AUGUST – NOVEMBER 2015 Walks 1,000 miles throughout England, Scotland, and Wales in honor of 25 Marines who are deceased; also to raise awareness for British non-profit Walking with the Wounded.

APRIL 2016 Starts career in Hollywood as a stuntwoman; first feature is "Patriots Day" with Mark Wahlberg.

SEPTEMBER 2016 Earns Master's in Business Administration.

MARCH 2017 Summits Kilimanjaro (19,341 feet, highest point in Africa) while supporting non-profit The Waterboys.

JULY 2017 Summits Carstensz (16,030 feet, highest point in Oceania) with non-profit The Heroes Project.

SEPTEMBER 2017 Launches outdoor apparel (T-shirt line) HeadCase.

DECEMBER 2017 Opens Chapter One Hair and Body Lab.

FEBRUARY 2018 Summits Iliniza Norte (16,818 feet, located in Ecuador); attempts Cotopaxi (19,347 feet, Ecuador).

JUNE 2018 Attempts Denali (20,310 feet, highest point in North America) in support of non-profit Building Homes for Heroes.

JULY 2018 Earns Master's in Public Administration.

FEBRUARY 2019 Climbed Aconcagua (22,800 feet, located in Argentina).

MAY 2019 Attempts Everest (29,029 feet, located in Asia).

Timeline information courtesy of www.kirstieennisfoundation.com.

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Air Force veteran Hal Crighton (far left) and former VFW Post 2146 Commander Bob Akins (far right) prepare to face off in a ceremonial puck drop by Navy veteran and VFW member Bill Harrie (second from left) and Navy veteran Buck Horton as part of the 2020 Veterans Appreciation Hockey Game held at the Idaho Falls (Idaho) Joe Marmo and Wayne Lehto Ice Arena.

Hockey as ‘A Remedy’

A former VFW Post commander and hockey enthusiast created this annual tradition 14 years ago to help local veterans cope with PTSD while building relationships along the way.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

When former VFW Post 2146 Commander Bob Akins of Idaho Falls, Idaho, created the Veterans’ Appreciation Hockey Game in 2006, the motive was personal.

As a Canadian native, Akins joined the U.S. Air Force in 1963 and served at Da Nang Air Base in Vietnam from July 1966 to July 1967 with the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing Squadron. After returning to the States, he found that playing hockey helped him cope with his own PTSD.

From his leisure play to coaching youth hockey teams in Idaho Falls, Akins understood the benefits of the game. But he wanted his fellow veterans to join him.

“I had played hockey for many years, so I figured I could get other veterans involved in playing when I became Post commander in 2006,” Akins said. “I believed they would get the same kind of enjoyment from the game that I often got.”

Since its inception in 2006, the Veterans’ Appreciation Hockey Game has become a staple among the veteran community in Idaho Falls, running strong for 14 consecutive years, which includes this year’s game played on Feb. 29.

Each year, Akins noted, the game continues to blossom relationships and a sense of camaraderie among local veterans in

and around Idaho Falls.

“It’s a great opportunity for those fellas with PTSD to play with their buddies in front of family and friends,” said Akins, who at 81 continues to play. “I know some of these guys go through stuff in their lives. I go through stuff myself, but this is as good a remedy as any to help us veterans unwind.”

The event is held annually within the confines of the Joe Marmo/Wayne Lehto Ice Arena at Tautphaus Park, an 85-foot-by-190-foot ice rink that Akins said he helped build. The arena was dedicated to Marmo and Lehto, both war veterans.

The Idaho Falls Parks & Recreation Department, along with support from Post 2146 and Brady’s Inc., a veteran-friendly business in Idaho Falls owned by VFW life member Brad Brady, sponsored this year’s game.

The teams were comprised of veterans and several active-duty members from the local Idaho Army National Guard. The 10-man teams each included a young goalie that volunteered on behalf of their veteran family member.

“Most of the skaters in the game are VFW and/or American Legion members,” Akins said. “Some of us are Vietnam veterans, but we’ve also got Iraq and Afghanistan vets. It’s usually a pretty good group of us.”



ABOVE: Veterans participating in the Veterans' Appreciation Game join together for a pregame U.S. flag ceremony alongside players of the Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association.

RIGHT: Bob Akins (left) and his son, Erik Akins, bond over the Veterans' Appreciation Game each year.

Mike Canavan has been taking the ice alongside Akins since 2015. He says that the game provides a good time despite the varying skill levels of the players.

"It's a fun game, not very competitive, so us weaker skaters actually have a chance to play," said Canavan, a Navy veteran who served as a submarine officer in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and in the Caribbean on the *USS Virginia (CGN-38)* and *USS Albuquerque (55N-706)*.

Canavan added that he enjoys the flag ceremony before the game, which he says doesn't usually happen at amateur hockey games.

This year's U.S. flag, measuring 20 feet by 30 feet, was provided by Perkins Family Restaurant and presented by members of both teams and players from the Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association in the introductory ceremony.

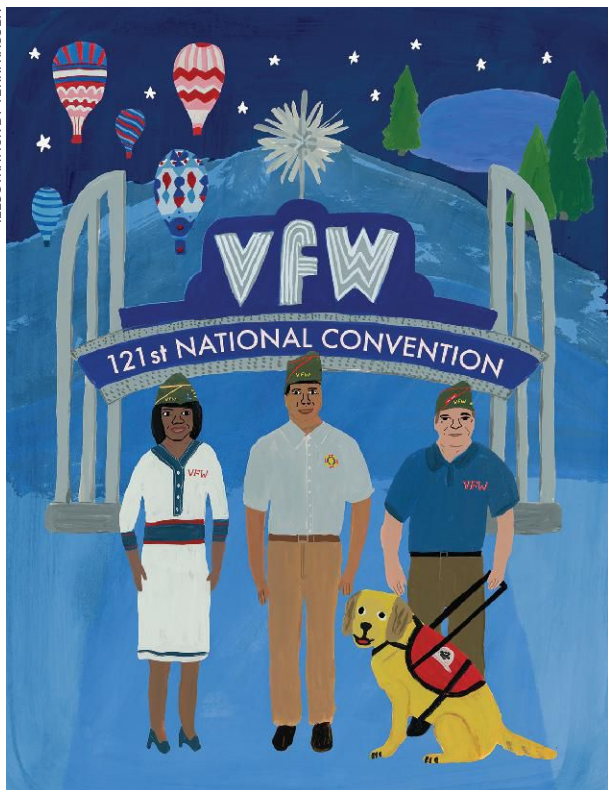
Part of the annual tradition also includes Post 2146's food drive, which generated more than 155 pounds of food at this year's event. Attendees and the local branch of Albertsons food store in Idaho Falls donated the food.

"In the wake of this [COVID-19 crisis], our food bank success during the game came at an opportune time," Akins added. "All 155 pounds of it were quickly donated to the Idaho Falls Community Food Basket for those in need."

Akins and Post 2146 have already started working towards next year's event, which is slated for February 2021. 🌟

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org





'UNPRECEDENTED' CRISIS LEADS TO CANCELLATION OF CONVENTION

With a traditional gathering out of the question due to COVID-19, VFW held a change of command to install the national Commander-in-Chief, thus moving the organization forward.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

As VFW members were reserving hotel accommodations and planning for a trip to Reno in July, COVID-19 reared its ugly head. For the first time in 120 years, VFW was unable to have a traditional national convention.

Members hoping to return to "The Biggest Little City in the World" for convention and those excited to attend a VFW convention for the first time were met with disappointment.

But according to then-VFW Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz, this was a tough decision to make. In fact, VFW waited as long as possible before making the call.

"We explored every effort to move forward with the convention in its current form, and the decision was not made lightly," Schmitz said. "But the fact is, the health and well-being of our members, partners, supporters and staff remain our priority, and we did not want to put them at risk."

In April, Schmitz issued *Executive Order No. 2*, allowing VFW to hold a "Pro Forma" convention scheduled for July 24.

According to Adjutant General Kevin

Jones, a "pro forma" convention meant that there was an opening of the convention via Zoom, but it was closed immediately due to a lack of a physical quorum (a required number of people gathered together in the same space).

"In essence, this allowed us to have a change of command, so to speak," Jones said. "To keep the organization moving forward, and in accordance with our National Bylaws, we needed to have some form of a convention, which is why we did this."

The intended agenda for the change-of-command event was to install and swear in VFW's new Commander-in-Chief, Hal Roesch. His acceptance speech was livestreamed so that the membership could watch.

Since elections could not take place during this virtual meeting, Roesch was expected to appoint Debra Anderson as Quartermaster Pro Tempore, as well as all other positions, pursuant to *Section 618(a)* of VFW's National Bylaws.

There were many considerations and adjustments that had to be made after the decision to cancel VFW's biggest annual event. For example, the National

Council of Administration voted in May to waive Post National Convention registration fees.

For those members who made hotel reservations through VFW, rooms were automatically canceled and no deposits were charged to the credit cards on file. If a member provided a check for a deposit, it was refunded.

But VFW is still recognizing the "Pro Forma" convention. Anderson said the VFW Store is selling the commemorative convention pins for both the VFW (VFW stock #1329) and Auxiliary (AUX stock #1334). Pins are \$4 apiece and can be purchased at www.vfwstore.org.

"Not having a physical convention did save the organization considerable expense," Anderson added. "We've been able to use this savings to fund critical programs, since the pandemic has reduced revenue from some sources for the VFW."

The VFW convention program was not printed, but is available online at www.vfw.org. It serves as the annual report to members regarding VFW's programs.

Jones noted that the 2019-2020 All-American Department commanders

ABOVE: While VFW's 121st National Convention did not occur in Reno, Nev., as planned, the convention program was produced and is available online at www.vfw.org. It serves as an annual report to the membership, with updates from VFW's leaders and internal departments.



VFW and Auxiliary members can still purchase 121st National Convention commemorative pins from the VFW Store at www.vfwstore.org. Pins are \$4 apiece. To purchase, search VFW stock #1329 and AUX stock #1334.

will be recognized at next year's convention in Baltimore. Other awardees were presented or will be presented at Department events in the state in which they live.

"There is no question about it, what we have done is unprecedented," Jones said. "The purpose of how we have handled this situation is to maintain the continuity of the business of the organization as we have for the past 120 years."

Jones added that while things are different than ever before — with the vast majority of VFW's employees teleworking for several months — the important work of VFW remained steadfast.

For example, he noted that during the peak of the pandemic, VFW's Member Service Center had some 700 outbound calls a week. Fundraising numbers were better than the same time the year prior, too, he added. "I couldn't be more proud of our staff for stepping up and continuing to do what needs to be done," Jones said.

"While we were all disappointed that we couldn't gather together in Reno, it will make our reunion in Baltimore July 31-Aug. 5, 2021, that much sweeter." ★

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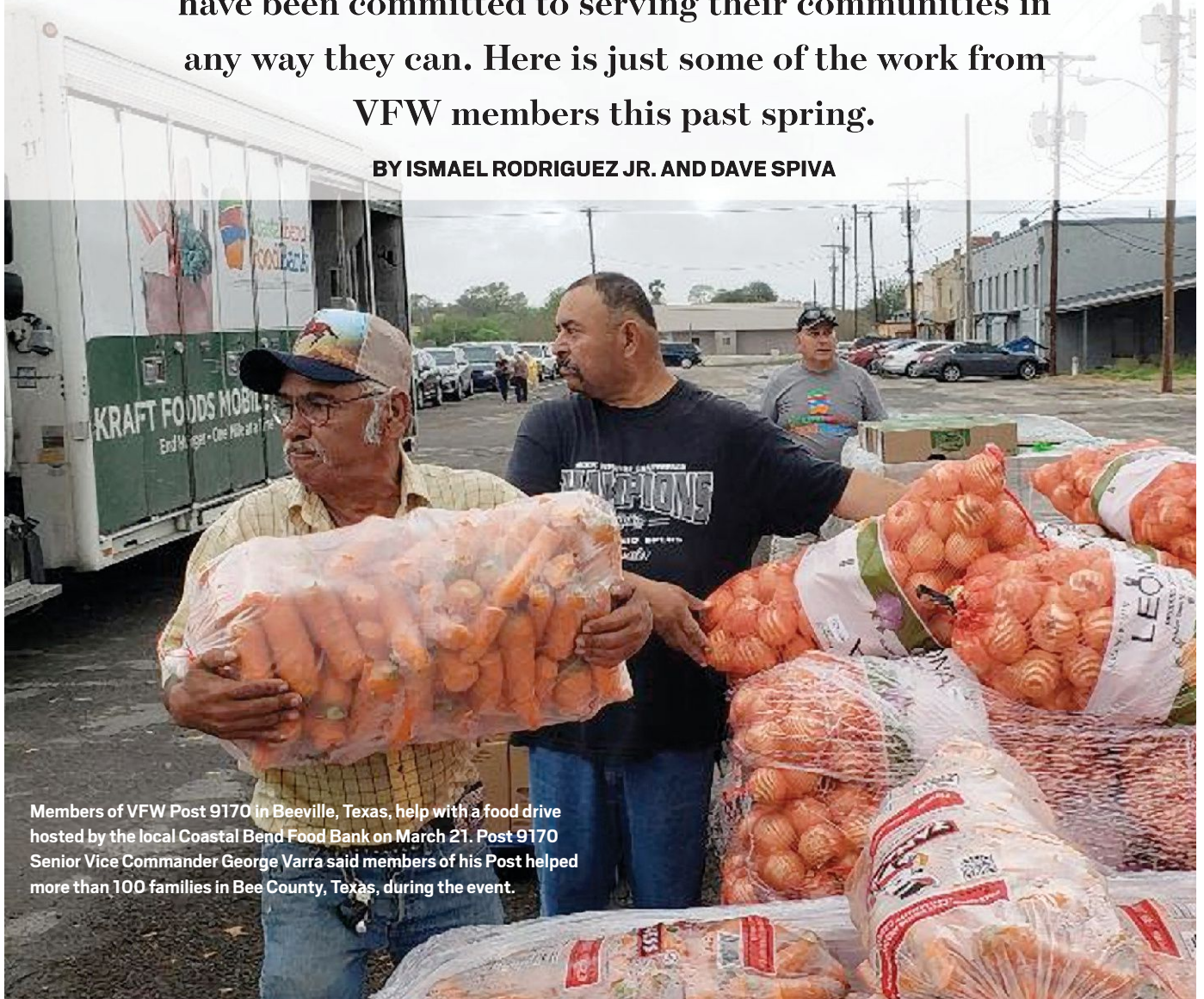
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VFW Assists Communities Around the Country During COVID-19 Pandemic

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, VFW members have been committed to serving their communities in any way they can. Here is just some of the work from VFW members this past spring.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR. AND DAVE SPIVA



Members of VFW Post 9170 in Beeville, Texas, help with a food drive hosted by the local Coastal Bend Food Bank on March 21. Post 9170 Senior Vice Commander George Varra said members of his Post helped more than 100 families in Bee County, Texas, during the event.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every person in America this year, VFW members across the country have made it their mission to provide meals to those in need, making face masks for medical workers and helping the elderly of their communities during the crisis.

During these unprecedented times, VFW members have answered the call to help in any way they can. Here are just some of the stories of how VFW members have assisted those in their communities.

'WE NEED TO DO OUR PART'

VFW Post 3701 Commander Stacey Roberts and the members of her Post understood the urgency in preparing for a possible COVID-19 outbreak in their rural town of Lakeview, Mich.

The members crafted a plan to assemble volunteers willing to create masks for essential businesses around their community, located about 50 miles northeast of Grand Rapids, Mich.

"When we first planned a mask-making assembly, Michigan had not yet been shut down, and hospitals were not accepting handmade masks," Roberts said. "But we could see the path we were on, and we figured it would be better to have masks made and never be used than not be available at all."

Michigan eventually joined other states after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order, mandating that all Michiganders stay at home unless they were traveling to essential jobs, running critical errands or engaging in safe outdoor activities, that took effect on March 24. By then, Roberts and 19 volunteers — the majority being Post 3701 and its Auxiliary members — had already worked three 12-hour days to create 450 masks in a hurry.

"Our community is very close, so when this virus started ramping up in our area, we knew what we had to do," Roberts said. "We would not be where we are today without the support of our community, and this was our opportunity to give back."

Roberts, however, had a tough decision to make.

"As commander, I had to weigh the safety of volunteers against the impact our efforts could have," she said.

"Although we faced no adversity for holding this function during a stay-at-home order, we certainly could have. I was prepared to deal with opposition because I knew morally that this was the right thing to do for the greater good of our community."

With no more than 10 volunteers at a time, each at a workstation spaced 6 feet apart and containing hand sanitizers, the crew worked on borrowed sewing machines to create more than 450 masks. Roberts and other members of Post 3701 then packaged each mask, which featured adjustable straps, bendable nosepieces and pockets for filters, for delivery.

The masks have since been used at four hospitals, four doctors' offices, a grocery store, one newspaper, an assisted living facility and by many members of Post 3701 and their respective families. They also shipped masks to two other cities for their employees.

Post 3701 plans on doing another round of masks per request from Lakeview community officials, as well as blood drives in partnership with the Red Cross.

"It's times like these that test our strength," Roberts said. "It's in times like these that, as a community and organization, we need to do our part and serve those who supported us while we were fighting overseas. It is the least we can do."

TEXAS POST PROVIDES MEALS

Members of a VFW Post in southern Texas have made it their duty to make sure residents in their area were not going hungry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 21, VFW Post 9170 in Beeville, Texas, helped its local Coastal Bend Food Bank by providing food to area residents. Beeville is located about 100 miles southeast of San Antonio.

"Our Post had a big part in helping more than 100 families in the Bee County area," said George Varra, the senior vice commander of Post 9170. "When it came to older veterans needing help, Post 9170 was quick to respond and helped deliver much needed food."

Varra said his Post was keeping "extremely busy" while the novel coronavirus spread throughout Texas and the rest of the country.

Post 9170 also conducted its monthly veterans breakfast on March 28 but not

in the typical way. Varra said that the Post provided a "drive-thru" service for all Bee County veterans and other residents.

"We had the honor of serving at least 44 veterans, as well as our brothers and sisters with the Beeville Police Department and county sheriff's department," Varra said.

PAST VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF #STILLSERVING

A past VFW Commander-in-Chief said he didn't want to sit on the sidelines while the COVID-19 pandemic was happening across the country.

Brian Duffy, who is a Gold Legacy life member of VFW Post 1170 in Middletown, Ky., and his wife, Jean, a member of VFW Post 1170's Auxiliary, made about four dozen face masks for medical professionals in the Fort Myers, Fla., area near their home.

"Me doing this is really from the VFW's desire to always be engaged in a fight," Duffy said. "We are always helping to defend our country, but since I don't wear a uniform anymore, I thought this would be a good way of helping while maintaining social distancing."

Duffy said his and his wife's actions, as well as those of VFW Posts, Districts and Departments during the pandemic, "live up" to VFW's "still serving" mantra, as well as past Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz's "Dare to Care" motto.

"We have to find ways to help not just our veterans, but our citizens," said Duffy, VFW's Commander-in-Chief in 2016-17. "Even though this is the first time I've tried to handle a sewing machine, I'm still able to help in any way I can."

NATION'S 'BEST RESPONSE AND RECOVERY TEAM'

The VFW Department of Florida led the charge in an initiative to fight the COVID-19 crisis across the state.

The Department partnered with the Brevard County Veterans Council and Florida Department of Emergency Management (FEMA) in Tallahassee, Fla., to gain ground against the wide-spreading pandemic in March and April.

In doing so, the Florida VFW's Emergency Response Team often transported masks, gloves, gowns, hats and booties to first responders and hospitals across Florida, which included Halifax



A 17-month-old girl shows off her specialized face mask courtesy of Judy King, VFW Indiana District 10's chaplain. King also donated 34 masks to Major Hospital in Shelbyville, Ind.

Health Medical Center in Daytona and Good Samaritan Medical Center in West Palm Beach.

"Florida veterans have the most experienced and equipped disaster response and recovery teams in the nation," said Glen Tilley, VFW Department of Florida senior vice commander. "Under the direction of Department Commander Tony Purdy, the team can deploy to any disaster, anywhere in Florida, within 15 minutes. Our quick-hit trailer is stocked to the roof with everything needed to assist in any situation."

Don Pearsall created the Department's Emergency Response Team in 2018 after the destruction of *Hurricane Michael*, a Category 5 storm that ripped through the Caribbean and parts of Florida.

"It was chaos," said Pearsall, who is currently the response team's director, while also serving as chairman of the

Brevard Veterans Council and coordinator for VFW's Southern Conference Disaster Management team. "Trucks, cars and trailers from every state were bringing everything under the sun to the area, but there needed to be better organization and prioritizing of relief supplies."

Pearsall crafted a "centralized sort of triage" in order to distribute supplies over a period of months to those most in need. His philosophy was later tested when *Hurricane Dorian* decimated parts of the Bahamas in 2019. The team gathered an array of supplies and organized them in order of importance. Pearsall then shipped the goods aboard 11 separate flights targeting Marsh Harbor, Treasure Cay and other remote airports across the island.

Pearsall's success during *Hurricane Dorian* earned him permission from Florida's VFW Department command-

er to build a triage system for the state, where immediate needs were the top priority.

"The quick-hit concept is simple," Pearsall said. "There are five trained coordinators that cover Florida. When a natural disaster strikes, the coordinators travel to the affected areas to do an initial assessment as to what is needed first. The trailer and teams are already en route with basic human supplies, such as first-aid kits, medical supplies, emergency food and water, pet food, feminine products, tarpaulins, cook stoves, emergency lighting and generators for veterans without power that need medical devices, such as a CPAP or oxygenators."

Pearsall added that coordinators also invest plenty of time setting up communication among the other 176 VFW Posts in Florida, dictating what each Post will supply and where it will go.

"The team also has a large barbecue cooker that can be dispatched and used at local fire stations," Pearsall said. "This gas, coal or wood behemoth when fired can serve a community with food donated from grocery stores in the affected areas."

The program's success during previous natural disasters and during the COVID-19 crisis has made Pearsall a commodity in need. Alongside 1st Deputy Director Bob Doyle, commander of VFW Post 12167 in Merritt Island, Fla., Pearsall has been asked to set up similar programs across all states belonging to VFW's Southern Conference.

The Department of Florida's Emergency Response Team also has working relationships with the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Team Rubicon and the Cajun Navy Airboats. In 2019, the team distributed more than 309,000 meals to the homeless or needy veteran population in Florida.

The team's most recent efforts included partnerships with restaurants in late April and May, which the Department expects to keep intact after the crisis.

One of the relationships built during the COVID-19 crisis was with Chick-Fil-A restaurants, which donated 500

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pounds of cooked chicken to distribute among veterans and their families in need. The donation also included more than 10,000 biscuits, 9,000 dinner rolls, fruit salad and yogurt cups.

Chick-Fil-A then added 16,500 MREs, or meals-ready-to-eat, that were distributed among 12 VFW Districts within Florida and first responders in three counties.

The Department of Florida also developed a relationship with Pizza Hut that will provide leftover pizzas from every location within Brevard County.

"These are the pizzas that people order and never pick up," Tilley said. "Sometimes we receive as many as 45. These are then delivered to homeless and veterans in need."

The Department also secured relationships from 13 bagel restaurants that have donated more than 28,000 bagels over the last 10 months to first responders and fire stations in Brevard County.

"We're also using current donations during this pandemic to distribute more than 110 dozen eggs to low-income apartment complexes in the county," Tilley added. "These are efforts that with the relationships we have secured from these restaurants, we can continue to supply those in need, even after the pandemic."

'ONE MASK AT A TIME'

A VFW chaplain in Indiana is #StillServing her community in any way she can.

VFW Indiana District 10 Chaplain Judy King said her usual quilting has slowed down this year because of the novel coronavirus, but when she saw COVID-19 numbers rising in the state of

Indiana, she started cutting up her quilting fabric and started making face masks for her community.

King said that while she can't serve in the Army anymore, she could make a difference by making "one mask at a time."

"I saw that a hospital in Shelbyville, Ind., put out a request looking for folks who could sew some face masks," King said. "For my first set, I sewed 34 masks and took them to Major Hospital (in Shelbyville)."

The next day, King said a woman contacted her to see if King could make a mask for a 17-month-old girl. The child was born with only one ear, so King went to work on making a special mask.

"I found a way to make the mask with two hair bands that went all the way around her head," King said. "I never got to meet the little girl, but all I could do was cry happy tears, because I helped to make a difference in that little girl's life."

'ALL HANDS ON DECK'

A VFW Post and its Auxiliary in south central Arizona opened a food bank amidst the COVID-19 crisis to help feed those most susceptible to hardship.

Post 1677 in Casa Grande, Ariz., about 47 miles south of Phoenix, opened a food bank in late March to safely provide food and water twice a week for the elderly, homeless and 19 patients at a local VA cancer treatment center.

By May, the Post and its Auxiliary had raised \$29,000 and delivered more than 6,000 care packages, while hosting a free drive-thru breakfast special on Wednesdays and Saturdays for anyone in

need of a meal.

"Our Post has been very engaged with the community in helping them through this crisis," said Hugues Byrne, VFW Post 1677 commander. "We've got a very energized Post and Auxiliary, and all hands are on deck to help where we can."

Prior to launching the food bank initiative, Post 1677 invited two local health-care professionals to train its members on handling the food and how to protect themselves and the community from coronavirus exposure.

The knowledge and preparation allowed Post 1677 volunteers to safely deliver supplies and food for the elderly at their respective homes. It also prepared them to deliver lunch to the 19 patients at Alliance Cancer Care Arizona at Casa Grande, a ward of the VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

"This kind of preparation has allowed for tremendous success with the program," Byrne said. "And the community has responded with an outpouring of support."

Byrne added that with incoming financial support from the Casa Grande community, the Post plans to continue running the program for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

'WE ARE ALL VERY FORTUNATE'

VFW Post 7916 in northern Virginia pledged to advance its mission of "honoring the dead by helping the living" amid the COVID-19 crisis.

The Post provided and delivered food to those in need around the town of Occoquan, Va., about 23 miles southwest

PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 3701



Volunteers from VFW Post 3701 in Lakeview, Mich., practice social distancing in March after making and packaging more than 450 face masks for medical workers and members of their community. Post 3701 Commander Stacey Roberts said that Post members wanted to help their community and health care workers protect themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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VFW Department of Florida Sr. Vice Commander Glen Tilley (left) and Post 8191 Sr. Vice Commander John Frazier load up MREs for delivery to homeless veterans in March at Post 8191 in Melbourne, Fla.

of Washington, D.C. It also donated additional funds to a local food bank to purchase 5,000 pounds of food in April.

For its own members, Post 7916 delivered 20 Easter Sunday dinners, along with health and welfare checks to any member in need of additional help in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Several Post 7916 members who also work for the Occoquan Police Department have donated health and welfare checks for all of the town's residents, according to Jeff Lett, VFW Post 7916 commander.

The Post's donations also include protective masks for local medical facilities and scuba diving masks from a member's dive shop for conversion into ventilator masks compatible in preventing the COVID-19 spread.

A few members of Post 7916 work for national organizations battling the spread of coronavirus, which include the VA and Department of Homeland Security. Another Post member, a Navy nurse, was aboard the *USNS Comfort*, a floating hospital with 1,000 beds that was docked along Pier 90 in New York City in the spring.

"We are very fortunate to have these Post members and other VFW members all over the world defending us and our families today," Lett said.

DAILY COFFEE WITH A VETERAN

For the past two years, VFW Post 2913

Commander Dave Rodgers has pioneered a way to connect local veterans with citizens of Patchogue, N.Y., and surrounding areas through storytelling.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis swarming the nation, Rodgers, a 14-year Army veteran, found a way to maintain the recommended physical distance without the social distancing that often occurs.

What had become a daily "Coffee with a Veteran" session at noon between members of the community and local veterans such as Rodgers at Roast Coffee and Tea Trading Co. in Patchogue, about 50 miles east of Manhattan on Long Island, transitioned into online meetings on Zoom.

Rodgers said he wanted to keep people connected and remind them that they were not alone during the uncertain time.

Rodgers added that Zoom conference meetings bridged a safe gap between physical and social distance, while continuing to serve as a vehicle for veterans and civilians to share experiences.

Rodgers also held informal VFW meetings to keep members updated on the current state of affairs in wake of the pandemic.

FEEDING THOSE IN NEED

A VFW Post and its Auxiliary in the Kansas City area ramped up their monthly food drive efforts in the spring during the COVID-19 crisis.

Taking the proper precautions as advised by the Centers for Disease

pick-up lane."

With help from Harvesters community food network, which donated between five and eight food pallets, members of Post 5606 located in Parkville, Mo., five miles northwest of Kansas City, Mo., and its Auxiliary then loaded each vehicle with a neon-green Humana bag filled with food measured by family size.

"Every month, we help put food on the table for an average of 150 families," Butterworth said. "Due to the unemployment effect of the COVID-19 crisis, we noticed a slight uptick of 172 families needing assistance this month."

Post 5606 plans on continuing its monthly food drives held on the first Friday of each month after the COVID-19 crisis.

'WE ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR WORDS OF GRATITUDE'

It was a long time coming, but VFW Post 3522 in Charles Town, W.Va., launched its Veterans Table Program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With origins dating back to December 1999, the program was designed to provide free food for veterans and their families. But it had garnered little interest among Posts since its introduction at a West Virginia VFW mid-winter conference.

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, however, Post 3522 revisited the idea of joining the program to help fellow veterans. The Post partnered with

Control and Prevention, Post 5606, partnering with Humana in Kansas City, Mo., turned its parking lot into a drive-thru that assisted more than 172 families in April.

"We had volunteers with clipboards signing folks in, inquiring as to how many families were represented per vehicle," said Cathy Butterworth, Post 5606 commander. "They then directed traffic into the



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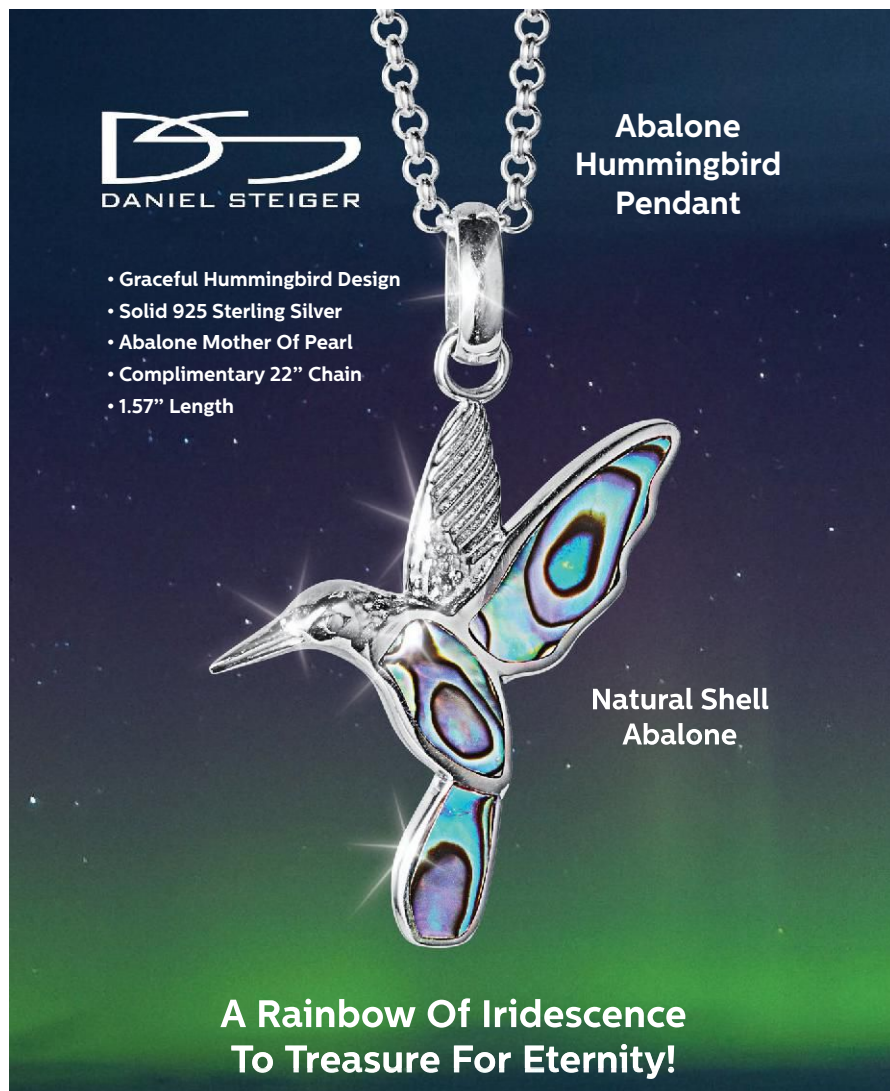


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non-profit Mountaineer Food Bank out of Gassaway, W.Va., and local businesses around the Charles Town area to launch the program in March.

“Our VFW Post was forward-thinking and proactive in getting prepared for any need that we had encountered in the past,” said Wayne Casto of Post 3522. “It was being prepared to address the needs of our community and our veterans during this hard time.”

With the Veterans Table Program in place at Post 3522, its members began supplying fellow veterans and community members in need with free 40-pound boxes of groceries and other necessities such as toilet paper and soap.

“While the need to express their appreciation and happiness was very present, our members kept their distance to be safe,” Casto said. “We all did acknowledge their smiles and words of gratitude in return.”

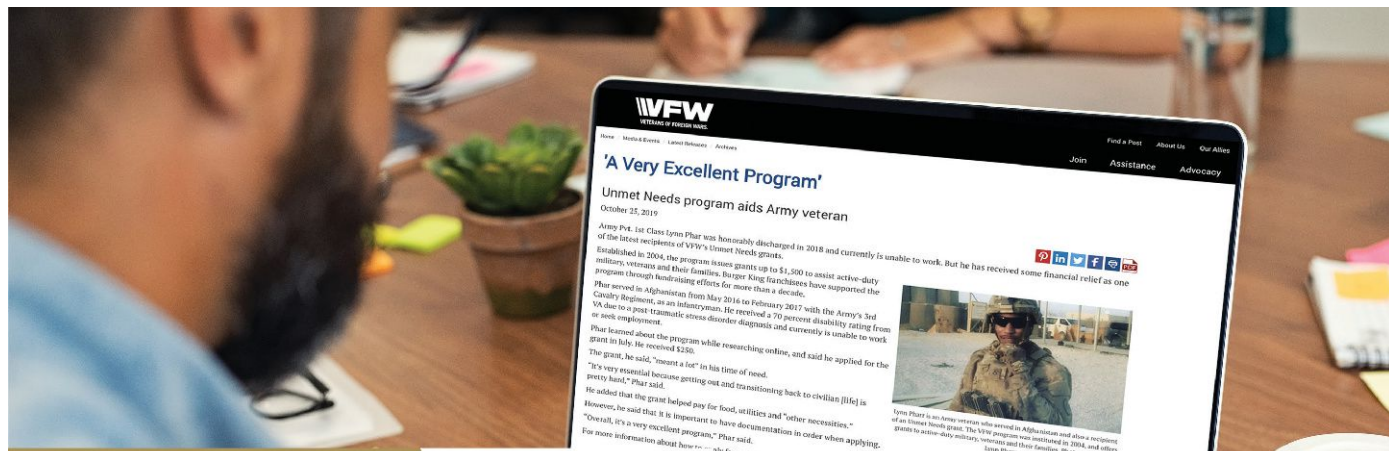
Post 3522 plans on continuing to serve the veterans and community by conducting the program once a month for the duration of the year. ★

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org and dspiva@vfw.org



PHOTO COURTESY OF VFW POST 1677 COMMANDER HUGHES BYRNE

Arizona's District 7 Commander James McCormick, right, helps fellow VFW members and their Auxiliaries unload goods for those in need during the COVID-19 crisis in April.



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Paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division quickly occupy defensive positions and set up a mortar section as M551A2 *Sheridan* light tanks provide security in late September 1990 after the division's arrival in Saudi Arabia. The 82nd Airborne's 4th Bn., 325th Inf., (the Gold Falcons) served as the division's "ready force" during *Operation Desert Shield*.

A Line in the

U.S. troops began deploying to Saudi Arabia in support of *Operation Desert Shield* 30 years ago this month. It was the buildup to *Operation Desert Storm*, also known as the Persian Gulf War, that would ultimately involve more than 500,000 uniformed Americans.

BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON

On Aug. 2, 1990, horrified television viewers across America watched live as Iraqi forces stormed into neighboring Kuwait. By his unprovoked invasion of this tiny yet oil-rich country, Iraq's ruthless dictator, Saddam Hussein, triggered a global crisis. Was Saudi Arabia next?

After receiving intelligence of enemy tanks massing on the Kuwaiti border, Saudi ruler King Fahd appealed for international assistance on Aug. 6. One day later, U.S. President George H.W. Bush authorized the deployment of American combat troops to help defend Fahd's kingdom against Iraqi aggression.

Code-named *Operation Desert Shield*,

this campaign would eventually involve more than 500,000 U.S. service members fighting alongside their coalition partners to liberate Kuwait. For those who arrived in Saudi Arabia during those first uncertain days, however, victory seemed a long way off.

At Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, Air Force Lt. Col. Howard "Pip" Pope commanded the 71st Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS). In an interview with unit historians, Pope described how his airmen went on "Lightning Recall" (an alert posture meant to prepare eight F-15C jets for launch within 12 hours) shortly after learning of Kuwait's invasion. Then they waited. Pope remembered receiving "no

words, no info, no nothing" about his mission for five full days.

Finally, at 2:30 a.m. on Aug. 7, orders came down sending the entire 24-plane squadron to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Unit personnel spent every available minute readying their fighters for the long intercontinental flight. At 5:30 that afternoon, the 71st TFS departed Langley in four echelons spaced 30 minutes apart.

"We didn't know what to expect," Pope later said of his outfit's arrival in Dhahran.

At the time, he recalled, their Saudi allies "were flying combat patrols day and night. Within hours, our jets were refueled, and we were ready to fight, too."

Other Air Force assets, to include

Sand



an airborne warning and control system (AWACS) plane, also deployed that first week of August. The Military Airlift Command's fleet of heavy transports, supported by aerial tanker aircraft, opened a strategic "air bridge" that moved critical personnel and equipment into theater.

GOLD FALCONS GOING TO WAR

The first of many troops to use this air bridge came from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C. The 82nd Airborne always kept on call a 600-paratrooper division ready force, or DRF-1, ready for immediate service anywhere in the world. On Aug. 7, the 4th Bn., 325th Airborne

Infantry Regt., ("Gold Falcons") served as DRF-1.

82nd Airborne Staff Sgt. Jon Walker, acting as staff duty NCO that evening, says he knew something was up when his battalion commander kept rushing in and out from meetings late into the night. Walker's duty phone then rang with a "Red Corvette" alert from Division HQ.

Walker, a member of VFW Post 6722 in Lumberton, N.C., copied the message and started notifying key leaders: The Gold Falcons were going to war.

Joining the DRF-1 were other paratroopers who brought with them a unique set of special weapons and training. Pfc. Cory Kroll served as a tank driver with B Co., 3rd Bn., 73rd Armor Regt. Kroll remembers the "hectic time" he spent loading two Sheridan light tanks and a water purification unit trailer inside an enormous Air Force C-5 Galaxy cargo aircraft for the 7,500-mile flight to Dhahran.

Not all deploying service members reached Saudi Arabia via military transport. The Gold Falcons' 1st Lt. Joe Arata landed at Dhahran's sprawling airbase onboard a contract civilian jetliner. Arata recalls an emotional moment as flight attendants — some with tears in their eyes — handed out all remaining snack packages as a last gift to those paratroopers stepping into the unknown.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Roger Blackwood, superb leadership kept fear to a minimum as the Gold Falcons moved forward to set up defensive positions. Blackwood, a VFW life member, credits

the battalion commander, Lt. Col. John Vines, as an especially inspiring leader.

"This is what we trained for," Vines would often tell his soldiers during those stressful first days. "You know how to do this, now do it."

The United States had demonstrated its resolve by rapidly deploying both combat aircraft and elite ground troops to help defend Saudi Arabia from the threat of Iraqi invasion. More Americans would follow.

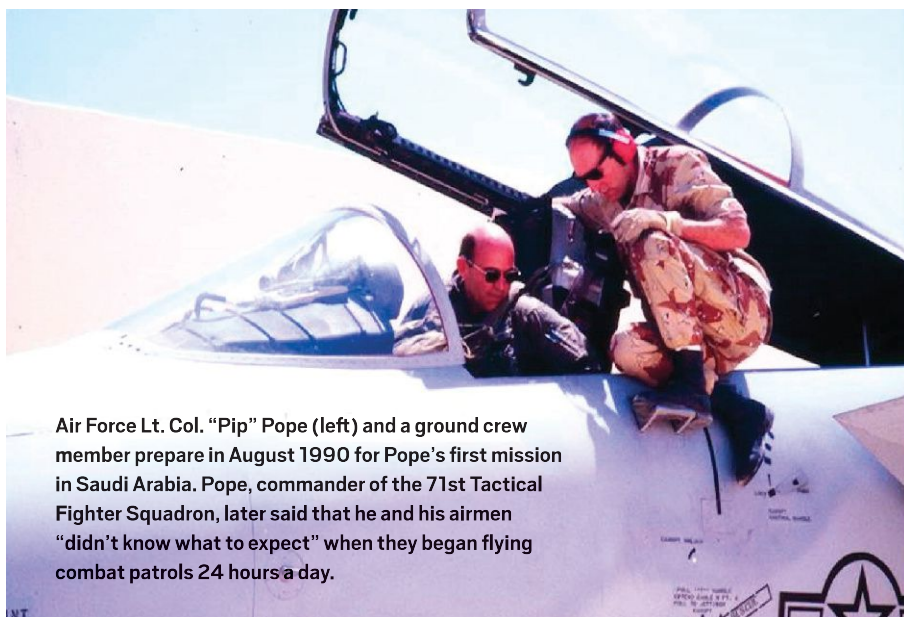
The rest of the 82nd Airborne arrived later in August, along with lead elements from the 101st Airborne and 24th Infantry divisions. So, too, came the 7th Marine Expeditionary Brigade from its base at Twentynine Palms, Calif. Two Navy carrier battle groups (*USS Independence* and *USS Dwight D. Eisenhower*) also took up station in neighboring waters.

By mid-September, Saudi Arabia was considered secure. Planning could now begin on the next phase: Kuwait's liberation, or *Operation Desert Storm*.

That was in the future, though. In August 1990, a small group of courageous U.S. service members sent Hussein and his legions an unmistakable message: America had drawn a line in the sand. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

A member of VFW Post 8690 in Broadalbin, N.Y., Patrick J. Chaisson served with the 82nd Airborne Division during both Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He is a frequent contributor to VFW magazine.



Air Force Lt. Col. "Pip" Pope (left) and a ground crew member prepare in August 1990 for Pope's first mission in Saudi Arabia. Pope, commander of the 71st Tactical Fighter Squadron, later said that he and his airmen "didn't know what to expect" when they began flying combat patrols 24 hours a day.

PHOTO COURTESY OF 1ST FIGHTER WING ASSOCIATION

CALLING ALL GULF WAR VETERANS

Are you a VFW member who served in the war zone during *Operation Desert Shield* or *Operation Desert Storm*? If so, we want to hear from you.

Please email us your:

1. Name
2. VFW Post or Department
3. Location in the war zone
4. Unit and rank in the war zone

Tell us briefly what your most vivid memory is of your time there. We will consider your submission for a future article in *VFW* magazine.

Send your emails to magazine@vfw.org.

Army Capt. Patrick J. Chaisson, a VFW member who served with 3rd Bn., 73rd Armor, 82nd Abn. Div., in the Persian Gulf War, is photographed at Fort Bragg, N.C., on June 3, 1991. If you are a VFW member who served in either *Operation Desert Shield* or *Desert Storm*, VFW would like to hear from you.

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Greek Inventor's Eardrops Could Make Hearing Aids Obsolete By 2023

Startling discovery reported to boost hearing with eardrops, not expensive & embarrassing hearing devices

By Jeffery Noldice
Health Writer

MYKONOS: According to the **National Institute on Deafness**, a staggering 89% of Americans will eventually have to deal with hearing loss. But now, a well-respected Greek inventor claims he's perfected an eardrop that helps you hear better — without needing a hearing aid.

The eardrop is getting a lot of attention. After all, if a low-cost eardrop could reboot hearing, some predict the billion-dollar hearing aid industry could be out of business by 2023.

Hear What You've Been Missing

It's reported that the drops are powerful. Some say they can now hear things they couldn't hear before. Others tell us they no longer struggle to hear the T.V. or ask people to repeat themselves anymore.

Untreated Hearing Loss Often Leads to Depression

Researchers at the University of British Columbia report every 10-decibel drop in hearing sensitivity, the odds of social isolation increase by 52%. Left untreated, the loss of hearing results in feelings of depression and diminished quality of life.

We tracked the inventor of the drops down to a small island just off the coast of Mykonos. He was very protective about his privacy. But the man, (who only goes by the name J.D.) was very excited to openly talk about his eardrop formula.

J.D. cleverly calls his drops **Audiolo-G**. Most users agree it really is remarkable.

"The drops let you hear sounds you may not have heard in a while, like the purring of a cat or the quiet hum of a small fan. But the biggest news is, Audiolo-G works after the very first dose... no matter how bad your hearing is."

But the inventor won't reveal how it works. According to J.D., "Everybody is trying to get their hands on my formula. It wasn't easy to come by and I definitely won't let Big Pharma steal it from me. That's for sure."

The Earthquake That Clobbered His Hearing

For J.D., it all started in 1978 when his whole town was devastated by a massive earthquake. It was the same year he noticed his hearing seemed stuffy and clogged. He kept asking people to repeat themselves. And pretended to be in conversations he didn't hear. It was embarrassing.

Frustrated Friends & Family

Ordinary conversation was impossible. "I'd

make my friends repeat every other word. It got so bad, some avoided me altogether. They would joke. "We can tell J.D. anything. He won't say anything. He can't hear a word you say."

From Desperation to Discovery

J.D. tried every supplement and hearing device he could find. Nothing worked. "Most of the time, my hearing was cloudy. But sometimes I had no idea what was going on." So the inventor began to experiment in his kitchen "science lab."

Old Family Remedy to The Rescue

J.D.'s great-grandmother proudly talked about the secret "miracle drops" too. After all, they were handed down for generations. She was delighted about all the people it helped over the years.

Through many conversations, J.D. learned about the ingredients used in the special ear drops. He discovered which herbs to use and not to use. How they were picked at distinct times of the year... and grown only in special soil.

"It Worked. It Really Worked."

And then one day, "I finally discovered just the right combination." J.D. became his own guinea pig.

He put the drop in his left ear and felt a pleasant WHOOSH. It felt great. Like a great blockage was removed. "I cried tears of joy. I got my clear hearing back!"

In fact, J.D. claims to have restored almost all the elders in his village of weak hearing. And now, he wants to share his joy with everyone. That's why you're reading this article right now.



Now I Watch TV Without Subtitles

"I was totally Depressed. I could only watch TV with the subtitles on. Now it's not a problem," says Sofia K. age 71.

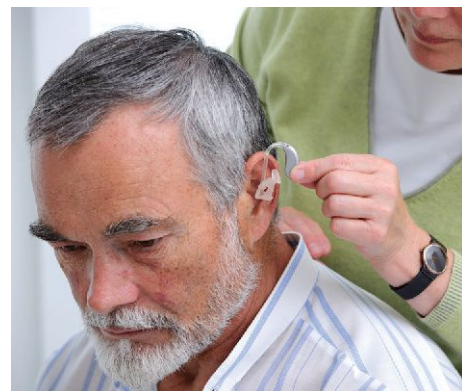


Everybody Stopped Yelling

"I used to think people were speaking low, until I realized I had a problem. But now people don't have to yell for me to hear them and it only took a few drops." Darius K. age 53.

Clinical-Strength Dose

These clinical-strength eardrops can be used safely by anyone with muted or stuffy hearing. You won't need to struggle with insurance companies to try it. And best of all, you won't be embarrassed by an ugly tube hanging out of your ear canal.



Could this inventor's "Miracle Eardrops" be the end of the multi-billion-dollar hearing aid industry? Reported to work no matter how bad your hearing is.

The Great Big Hearing Aid Rip-Off

The dirty little secret about hearing aids is no matter how small they are, they still feel like an ant crawling in your ear. And contrary to the sales pitch... they're embarrassing, because with those wires sticking out of your ears, everybody knows you're hard of hearing.

Plus, they're expensive...average cost is around \$5,000 or more. And the cheaper models just give you an earful of buzzing and whistling noises.

Never Sold in Stores

It's not easy but J.D. purposely keeps his secret recipe from Big Pharma. "They'd like nothing more than to see me go away." So to keep his formula secret, J.D. made arrangements with a small company that agrees to keep the formula secret and the price low. Audiolo-G is never sold in retail stores that rely on middlemen to jack up the price.

How to Get (2) FREE Bottles

This is the official nationwide release of Audiolo-G. For the next 48 hours only, the company is offering readers 2 FREE bottles with any order. Plus, you get a full 90-day satisfaction guarantee.

FREE GIFT: Instant Back & Shoulder Fix

Call now and we'll also rush you a special FREE Gift— The "Instant Back & Shoulder Fix". It corrects slump and posture while soothing even the most excruciating pain. This one-size-fits all back-saver is virtually invisible under clothes and makes you appear slimmer and taller too. A \$27.84 value, yours FREE with your order of Audiolo-G.

This offer will expire soon. To order Audiolo-G, call 1-844-951-0309 now.



Local Citizen Helps VFW Post Commemorate Its Namesake

A history enthusiast delved deep into the past to uncover the friendship that forged and chartered a Pennsylvania VFW Post more than a century ago.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

When Joseph Felice drove through Main Street in Coatesville, Pa., last summer, he was drawn to one of the many pennant banners dangling above its sidewalks.

He had seen the banners several times since VFW Post 287 lobbied to have them hung for Memorial Day in his hometown of Coatesville, about 44 miles west of Philadelphia.

But this time was different.

Felice, 35, who holds degrees in local

LEFT: Army Cpl. Wellington Sahler of Coatesville, Pa., enlisted at Fort Slocum, N.Y., in 1917 alongside his friend and eventual founder of VFW Post 287, Lance Eck. Both men were assigned to the Army's 1st Engineer Battalion as privates, deploying in August 1917 from Hoboken, N.J., toward France aboard the *USS Finland (ID-4543)*. While Eck returned to the U.S. a wounded veteran following WWI, Sahler was killed in action during the Battle of Meuse-Argonne in France on Oct. 10, 1918.

and world history from West Chester University in Chester County, Pa., noticed that only one of the banners had been dedicated to a World War I veteran.

"It grabbed my attention because as far as I could determine, it displayed the only local WWI veteran," Felice said. "All of the other banners had been in honor of men and women who served in Vietnam, Korea and World War II."

Inscribed on the banner was the name of Army Cpl. Wellington G. Sahler, who had been killed in action during the Battle of Meuse-Argonne in 1918.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

When Felice returned home that day, he reached out to Post 287 via Facebook and discovered that Sahler was actually the Post's namesake. The other half of the Post's name, Sedan, represented the Eastern-most point that U.S. forces had reached in France before the Armistice was signed.

"I discussed my interest in Sahler with Post Chaplain Claresa Whitfield," Felice said. "We exchanged several emails, but she informed me that little was actually known about his personal history."

Whitfield, however, asked Felice to delve into research and invited him to present his findings in front of VFW members during the Post's 100th anniversary on Dec. 7, 2019.

Accepting the challenge, Felice soon plunged into a six-month journey that navigated the muddy waters of the past. He mauled through limited clips, records and reports provided by several organizations that included the local newspaper *Coatesville Record*, the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Mo., and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

The all-encompassing trip uncovered a troubled childhood, a friendship forged in a Coatesville steel plant that



From left to right, Joseph Felice stands beside Cpl. Sahler's third-cousin removed Corson Stephens, who holds a framed certificate of service issued by National Archives. They are joined by VFW Post 287 Commander Tiffany Robinson (middle) and VFW Post 287 Chaplain Claresa Whitfield during the Post's Centennial Celebration on Dec. 7 of last year.

grew stronger in the trenches of a French province plagued by war, and a clerical error that has kept Sahler's kin from claiming the Citation Star — now known as the Silver Star.

WHO WAS WELLINGTON SAHLER?

Through Felice's research, he couldn't help but notice how tragic Sahler's life had been as a child.

"His childhood, although very tragic, impressed me a great deal," Felice said. "Here was someone who had endured heartache and tragedy long before the atrocities of war claimed his life."

Wellington Sahler was born in March 1896 to Isaac Wayne and Rachel Sahler of Coatesville. He was just a 3-year-old when his father died from rheumatism in 1899. Then in 1902, Sahler's mother was murdered at a boarding house along 6th Avenue in Coatesville for refusing to accept a marriage proposal.

He became an orphan at 6 years old, spending a few months under the care of his mother's friend, Rebecca Grey, in Thorndale, Pa., before being shipped to a boarding school in Philadelphia.

Sahler lived and studied at Girard College for the next 12 years until being discharged in March 1914 under the school's "18-year-rule."

He returned home to Coatesville, where he found work as a draftsman at Lukens Steel Company. While work-

ing at the steel plant, he met Lance Eck, a Reading, Pa., native and the eventual founder of VFW Post 287.

A FRIENDSHIP STRENGTHENED BY WAR

The pair groomed their friendship over the next three years, and when the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917, they joined together.

Sahler and Eck enlisted at Fort Slocum, N.Y., a now defunct U.S. Army post that occupied Davids Island at the western end of Long Island Sound off the coast of New Rochelle, N.Y., from 1867 to 1965. Both men were assigned to the Army's 1st Engineer Battalion as privates, deploying in August 1917 from Hoboken, N.J., toward France aboard the *USS Finland (ID-4543)*.

Although Eck and Sahler deployed with different companies, both Company D and E served in the same defensive sectors and campaigns. Together, their companies fought in the Battle of Montdidier-Noyon, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne.

At the Battle of Meuse-Argonne, both men saw their last days of action in a war that had tipped in favor of the allies toward the end of 1918.

WWI AFTERMATH

On Oct. 6, 1918, Eck left the battlefield harboring severe injuries after pieces of shrapnel penetrated both of his legs.

Coupled with complications from mustard gas exposure, Eck's time at war had come to an end.

Two days later, on Oct. 10, 1918, Sahler was killed in action.

"What they found on him was most interesting," Felice said. "On his person at the time was a ladies' gold Elgin pocket watch, which had been among his mother's personal effects at the time of her death."

While Eck returned to the U.S. after the war, Sahler's body was buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romagne, France, along with 14,245 other Americans who died in battle during WWI.

Sahler's time at war earned him the Purple Heart and the WWI Victory Medal, but the Citation Star for his valor in battle was never awarded to his kin as a result of a clerical error.

When Felice contacted the Col. McCormick Research Center at the First Division Museum in Wheaton, Ill., he found that the error had been a misspelled name.

The General Orders issued by the headquarters of the First Division on Jan. 1, 1920, cited Cpl. Sahler for his "gallantry in action and especially meritorious services." Unfortunately, Sahler's first name was listed as William instead of Wellington, according to Col. McCormick Research

JOSEPH FELICE'S RESEARCH TIMELINE

- **July 28, 2019** — Felice establishes contact with Claesa Whitfield, VFW Post 287 chaplain.
- **July 29, 2019** — Felice submits request online to Bruce Malone, superintendent at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery for information regarding Cpl. Sahler. Searched on *FamilySearch.com* and *Ancestry.com* for basic information such as parents and some military information.
- **July 30, 2019** — Felice emails Corey Stewart, archivist at National Archives in St. Louis, Mo. Advised to submit *SF-180* form to retrieve Sahler's record. Informed of possibility that record may have been lost in 1973 fire.
- **Aug. 12, 2019** — Felice Facebook messages Randy Gaulke at the World War One Historical Association. Following Randy's advice, Felice contacts Lori Miller at Redbird Research, LLC in St. Charles, Mo.
- **Aug. 14, 2019** — National World War I Museum volunteer researcher Jerry Schmidt provides a copy of the passenger list of the *USS Finland*, the ship aboard which Sahler sailed to France.
- **Aug. 15, 2019** — Felice emails the First Division Museum in Wheaton, Ill. Director Eric Gillespie responds with a copy of *General Orders No. 1* issued by Camp Zachary Taylor in January 1920 issuing the Citation Star (now the Silver Star) to Cpl. Sahler for "gallantry in action and especially meritorious services." In the General Orders, Sahler's first name is stated as "William," instead of his correct first name of Wellington.
- **Aug. 19, 2019** — Felice visits Chester County Archives in West Chester, Pa. Meets with Assistant Archivist John E. Smith III. Researches Sahler family wills to learn about early life and Sahler's academic studies at Girard College.
- **Aug. 20, 2019** — Miller donates Cpl. Sahler's burial file to Felice's research free of charge.
- **Sept. 4, 2019** — Felice tours VFW Post and Fairview Cemetery with Whitfield and VFW Post 287 Commander Tiffany Robinson in Coatesville, Pa.
- **Sept. 6, 2019** — Felice visits Staples in Downingtown, Pa., to fax in an *SF-180* request to the National Archives for Cpl. Sahler's service record.
- **Sept. 18, 2019** — Felice establishes email communication with Corson Stephens, 3rd cousin removed from Cpl. Sahler.
- **Sept. 25, 2019** — Jacob Seley, expert archives technician and Kevin Edelman, archives technician at the National Archives, respond to Felice's *SF-180* fax submission to inform him Sahler's service record was lost in the 1973 fire.
- **Oct. 4, 2019** — Felice visits Chester County Historical Society in West Chester, Pa. Meets with Assistant Librarian Margaret Baillie to conduct microfilm research.
- **Oct. 18, 2019** — Felice visits Chester County Historical Society. Microfilm research yields the November 1919 edition of the *Coatesville Record*, in which Felice learned for the first time about the chartering of Post 287 and the friendship between Eck and Sahler.
- **Oct. 21, 2019** — George Fuller, archival reference technician at National Archives, responds to a previous fax submission.
- **Oct. 25, 2019** — Malone confirms Cpl. Sahler is buried at that cemetery. Malone's message was then forwarded to George Fuller at the National Archives, who then issued NARA 13038, Certificate of Military Service for Cpl. Sahler.
- **Nov. 14, 2019** — Andrew Woods, research historian at First Division Museum, provides Sahler's muster rolls.
- **Dec. 5-6, 2019** — Post receives Sahler's morning reports from Miller.
- **Dec. 7, 2019** — Sahler's certificate presented at Sahler-Sedan VFW Post 287 Centennial Celebration in Coatesville, Pa. Stephens in attendance.

Center's Director Eric Gillespie.

A NAME THAT LIVES ON

Eck left the hospital in April 1919, six months after the war ended on Nov. 11, 1918. Upon finding out about his friend's death, Eck resolved to commemorate Sahler the best way he could.

Later in 1919, Eck returned home and worked with the VFW Post in Reading, Pa., to charter his own Post in Coatesville. On Dec. 4, 1919, Eck chartered VFW Post 287, naming it Sahler-Sedan in honor of his fallen friend.

"Without Eck's determination to preserve his friend's memory," Felice said, "Post 287 might have never existed."

Eck's contributions to preserve his friend's legacy solidified his own in the process. Despite being plagued by injuries, he married and had three children. Eck died in September 1934 at the age of 35. He was laid to rest at Charles Evans Cemetery in Reading.

The bond between two comrades was Felice's message for VFW members during Pearl Harbor Day, which coincided with Post 287's 100th anniversary.

He presented his findings and gifted Sahler's Certificate of Military Service issued by the National Archives in St. Louis, Mo., to Whitfield and Post Commander Tiffany Robinson.

"As veterans we are all connected by a common bond," said VFW Quartermaster General Debra Anderson, a member of the WWI Centennial Commission. "It's important to remember our comrades who served in previous conflicts. By naming a Post after a WWI veteran and telling their stories, it unites us all and reminds us of our history. It reminds us of sacrifices made over 100 years ago in the name of freedom and liberty."

The overwhelming joy and gratitude from Post 287 and the VFW as a whole, Felice noted, made the six-month journey to uncover the powerful bond between Eck and Sahler worth it.

"I cannot think of a better moment to restore their legacy," he said. "Their lives are a valuable reminder that we cannot allow adversity to deter us from being of service to our families, friends and community. It's up to us now to preserve that legacy." ✪

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org

Stand Up Straight and Feel Better

Discover the Perfect Walker, the better way walk safely and more naturally



It's a cruel fact of life, as we age, gravity takes over. Our muscles droop, our bodies sag and the weight of the world seems to be planted squarely on our shoulders. We dread taking a fall, so we find ourselves walking less and less- and that only makes matters worse.

Well, cheer up! There's finally a product designed to enable us all to walk properly and stay on the go. It's called the Perfect Walker, and it can truly change your life.

Traditional rollators and walkers simply aren't designed well. They require you to hunch over and shuffle your feet when you walk. This puts pressure on your back, your neck, your wrists and your hands. Over time, this makes walking uncomfortable and can result in a variety of health issues. That's all changed with the Perfect Walker. Its upright design and padded elbow rests enable you to distribute your weight across your arms and shoulders, not your hands and wrists. Helps reduce back, neck and wrist pain and discomfort. Its unique frame



gives you plenty of room to step, and the oversized wheels help you glide across the floor. The height can be easily adjusted with the push of a button to fit anyone from 5' to over 6'. Once you've reached your destination you can use the hand brakes to gently slow down, and there's even a handy seat with a storage compartment. Its sleek, lightweight design makes it easy to use indoors and out and it folds up for portability and storage.



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Walking with PTSD

An Army vet of Iraq turns his personal experiences with survivor's guilt into a platform to help others open up about PTSD.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

PHOTO COURTESY OF INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY



Army veteran Stephen Meyers checks out Indianapolis Motor Speedway in Indiana on March 4 during his PTSD walk that began on Feb. 15 in Kansas City, Mo. Meyers is walking 6,000 miles through 20 states to talk about PTSD in an effort to help those afflicted by the unseen illness. He hopes his walk starts a national conversation about the stigmas surrounding PTSD.

On Feb. 15, 20-year Army veteran Stephen Meyers embarked from the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Mo., on a 6,000-mile walk across 20 states. His goal is to start a national conversation about PTSD and the stigma that surrounds it.

Meyers, a Gold Legacy life member of Post 5789 in Lee's Summit, Mo., knows firsthand how PTSD haunts the mind. He also knows what it's like to have no one to talk to about it — no one who can relate.

While serving in Iraq on a Military Transition Team in the role as advisor to the Iraqi Army in July 2007, Meyers was driving the second vehicle in a convoy in Baghdad. The first vehicle hit a roadside bomb. Meyers was immediately charged with driving the dead to Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah.

He recalls driving at a high speed to get there with one of his closest buddies lying dead in the seat behind him.

"All of the things that happened at that moment, I just compartmentalized and moved on because that's what you do," Meyers said.

Not long after, he returned home to Tampa, Fla. He and his fiancée, Jessica, were watching a graphic horror movie. At some point during the movie, Meyers had a flashback to that day in Baghdad.

"My flashback was more of a fainting spell," Meyers said. "I was mentally transplanted back to Iraq. It was like I was in that Humvee staring at the face of one of the people who had just died."

Meyers said his senses of smell, taste and fear were very real in that flashback moment. He didn't seek help for that flashback and others until March 26, 2008, but the "treatment" was a negative experience, he said, so he didn't pursue it.

In the midst of this, Jessica was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer and died in 2009 at age 31.

"I wanted to blame everyone," Meyers said. "I was leading the charge to help her, and I failed."

In December 2009, Meyers was having suicidal thoughts. He was fully gripped by survivor's guilt. He gave away most of his possessions.

"I was grieving and someone had to be held accountable," Meyers said. "So I blamed myself. I held court inside my head and was the judge, jury and pros-

ecutor, but I was not the defense. I did this over and over and it was like a never-ending punishment. Mentally, I kicked the shit out of myself"

In January 2015, with the encouragement of his girlfriend, Vicki, Meyers sought help at a vets center. In 2016, he retired from the Army.

A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Meyers equates his experience of PTSD with a journey of self-discovery. He found people just do not want to talk about PTSD because most people do not understand it.

"I went through a lot of hurdles and a lot of ups and downs," he said. "In the beginning, I didn't have anyone I could turn to and ask questions. It has not been a straight path nor an easy one."

This is why last Thanksgiving, Meyers announced that he was going to walk across the country to speak to people about PTSD. He wants to let those he encounters know what he has been through, with the hope that he can help others.

His walk began in Kansas City, Mo., and continued east across the state into Illinois then Indiana and Ohio followed by Kentucky and Tennessee. He was in Nashville, Tenn., on March 17 when he realized the country was shutting down because of the COVID-19 virus.

He knew he could continue walking, but that he would not be able to talk to anyone along the way if everyone was on lockdown as instructed.

He made his decision to go back home to Lee's Summit but plans to resume the walk on Aug. 15. Having already met so many police officers, firefighters and others overcoming great personal trage-

dies, Meyers is eager to begin again.

"On my walk, I was very open and forthright about everything I've been through," he said. "I would stop in different towns and talk for a couple of hours and just try and give people hope."

He met a woman in Kentucky who, as a child, witnessed the beating and rape of her mother and the murder of her younger brother and sister. She and her mother survived, and she suffers from survivor's guilt all these years later.

"The No. 1 thing I offered to her is



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHEN MEYERS

Iraq War vet Stephen Meyers shows a fan the map of his route in Indianapolis on day 20 of his PTSD walk on March 5. Meyers plans to resume his 6,000-mile walk on Aug. 15 after it was delayed due to stay-at-home orders following the COVID-19 outbreak.

relatability," Meyers said. "I also had dealt with and continue to deal with those emotions."

Meyers plans to stay on track to walk 20-plus miles each day. When he started out in February, he planned on 30. While the walking itself is not hard, he does not want to shortchange the point of the walk — to talk about PTSD.

"I don't want to ignore people just to get my miles in," Meyers said. "Plus, it starts to get dangerous at night on the road."

To follow Meyers' walk, which he hopes to conclude in San Diego, visit www.ptsd-walk.com.

★
EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

A VFW partnership with a non-profit group gives the opportunity to promote the importance of mental health.

©GIVE AN HOUR/LLOYD WOLF PHOTOGRAPHER



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VFW Washington Office staff and volunteers team up with Give an Hour supporters at the Armed Forces Retirement Home in Washington, D.C., in October 2016 for the inaugural Day to Change Direction. The fifth annual event, which focuses on the importance of mental health, will be Sept. 19 at VFW Posts across the country.



Sept. 19 marks the fifth annual Day to Change Direction. Since 2016, VFW and Give an Hour have partnered to bring about change in the way the world views mental health.

Founded in 2005 by Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, Give an Hour is a Bethesda, Md.-based non-profit group that offers the skills of professional mental health providers to active-duty troops, veterans and their families.

When a Day to Change Direction was introduced at VFW Posts around the world four years ago, the goal was, and still is, to bring communities together for a day of service, such as picking up trash, planting trees or cleaning parks.

More importantly, though, it is a time to further the conversation about mental health awareness — something Give an Hour has been doing since its inception.

When Van Dahlen was named executive director of the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS), her husband, Dr. Randy Phelps, was appointed CEO.

Phelps is no stranger to mental health issues affecting veterans. During his 25 years with the American Psychological Association, he was the organization's

liaison to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Early on in his career, Phelps did his internship at the VA.

Calling VFW one of Give an Hour's "most treasured partners," Phelps said the two groups working together has been a good thing for the mental health community.

"VFW is like the Post Office — it is in every community," Phelps said. "We are looking forward to the future."

Phelps noted that a major part of the Day to Change Direction is the public awareness of the Five Signs of Emotional Suffering: personality change, agitation, withdrawal, poor self-care and hopelessness.

Give an Hour produces wallet-sized cards of the five signs as well as posters and flyers for VFW Posts to use throughout the year, not just on the day of service.

"The five signs card was a stunning success," Phelps said. "I still carry the original card in my wallet."

FOCUS ON HEALTHY HABITS

VFW Director of Programs Lynn Rolf said the 2020 Day to Change Direction is Sept. 19, and not only does he want VFW Posts to get involved, he wants to hear about it after the fact.

"We need better communication," Rolf

Know the Five Signs of Emotional Suffering



Personality Changed?

Feeling Withdrawn?

Feeling Hopeless?

Feeling Agitated?

Poor Self-Care?

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HEALTH CARE EMPLOYEES RECEIVE FREE CARE DURING PANDEMIC

During the height of COVID-19, Give an Hour quickly created Hospital Heroes to provide free mental health services for hospital employees in New York City, New Jersey and Connecticut.

"We wanted this program to be available for anyone working in a hospital," Phelps said.

"About 1 out of 5 of these people are veterans."

Hospital Heroes allows for six free sessions to each employee as well as their family members. It is offered via telehealth.

To learn more, visit www.giveanhour.org/hospitalheroes.

said. "This program saves people's lives. VFW is leading this fight, but it would be better to have more grassroots efforts."

Director of VFW's National Veterans Service Ryan Gallucci agrees. He said he has seen on social media where certain Posts are participating in the Day to Change Direction, but then they do not report it.

"Give an Hour created a web page specifically for VFW Posts to report events," Gallucci said. "It's ready-made and easy to use."

According to Nickie Silverstein, programs manager for the Campaign to Change Direction at Give an Hour, VFW Posts are encouraged this year to focus on the Healthy Habits of Emotional Well-being: take care, check in, engage, relax and know the five signs.

"Taking care of our mental health is just as important as taking care of our physical health," Silverstein said. "This is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic. A lot of us may be experiencing the five signs of emotional suffering and thus need to pay extra attention to how we are taking care of ourselves."

Silverstein said she's most pleased that the partnership with VFW has provided a starting point for Posts and Auxiliaries to discuss mental health.

Healthy Habits of Emotional Wellbeing



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"A Day to Change Direction has given members the opportunity to discuss their own mental health along with a way for them to start a conversation with others that they may be concerned about," she added.

Silverstein said Posts should visit www.changedirection.org/day-to-change-direction to view the resources available to plan and promote an event for Sept. 19.

"We are seeing great success," Rolf said. "I've received notes from people who have passed out the five signs cards. In some cases, it was the right time as that person was about to take their life."

'NEW ENERGY FOR OUR MISSION'

For Gallucci, who heads VFW's vast service officer network, the VFW/Give an Hour relationship has been nothing but positive.

"Give an Hour has trained our service officers twice," Gallucci said. "When we started out, the objective was to promote mental well-being in an effort to stem the tide of veteran suicide. I'm very proud that it seems to have changed the mindset of some of our service officers. They have been receptive."

Part of that training, Gallucci said, was having a Give an Hour social worker provide an in-depth module of understanding while not internalizing the stress the clients may be experiencing.

"Give an Hour has been an excellent partner," Gallucci said. "They have

always leaned forward to advance our shared mission. We've done the same."

Phelps said he is working with Gallucci now on a pilot program involving emotional life skills training. About 12 people in VFW's Washington, D.C., office took part in an abbreviated version of the program.

"Those of us who sat through it were in awe of what we took away from it," Gallucci said. "The way I felt after the training, is that we had built a strong emotionally supportive team ready to run through a brick wall for one another."

Phelps said the six, two-hour sessions over six weeks is ideal for VFW Posts.

"This new program is about emotional well-being for the average person," Phelps said. "It would help the community and be an extension of VFW's established mental health initiative."

POSTS WILL BE THE PILOT

Gallucci said VFW will be looking at Posts in which to pilot this program. He added that it will be unique to each community in which it's deployed and should reflect the available community resources.

"Our Posts already try to do some of this," Gallucci said. "While NVS already has a comprehensive training program, I have never sat through anything like this before. It brings new energy for our mission."

To learn more about Give an Hour, visit www.giveanhour.org.

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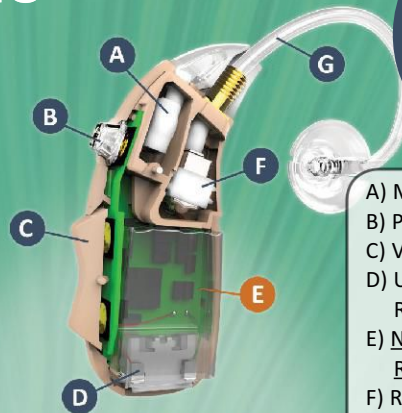
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‘Largest Study of Its Kind’ Focuses on Combat Concussions

VA and the Department of Defense awarded a \$50 million grant to a Virginia university last year in order to learn more about the effects of concussions sustained by troops in combat.

BY DAVE SPIVA

A university in Virginia is trying to learn more about the effects of the most common injuries sustained in combat — concussions and TBIs (traumatic brain injuries).

On Oct. 1, 2019, Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va., launched a study titled *The Long-term Impact of Military-relevant Brain Injury*. Funded through a \$50 million grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense, the study focuses on the impacts of combat concussions sustained from blasts, bullets and hand-to-hand fighting. It also will cover concussions caused from events such as vehicle accidents, sports injuries and falls. The project, which started in 2019, will last for nearly four more years, according to the university.

Virginia Commonwealth University researchers already have discovered links between combat concussions and diseases such as Parkinson’s and dementia, as well as chronic pain, opioid usage and suicide, according to a Department of Defense press release.

“This is the largest study of its kind that is entailing a deeper dive and more

thorough investigation than any person, patient or even research participant could get,” said Dr. David X. Cifu, a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and VA’s senior TBI specialist. “[Individuals] being studied [are] getting the most comprehensive evaluation

Injury and Psychological Health. The order directed DoD and VA to award a \$62 million grant to Virginia Commonwealth University to lead the research.

The new federal grant will help “expand” on the past work that the university has already done on the subject, according to a Virginia Commonwealth University press release.

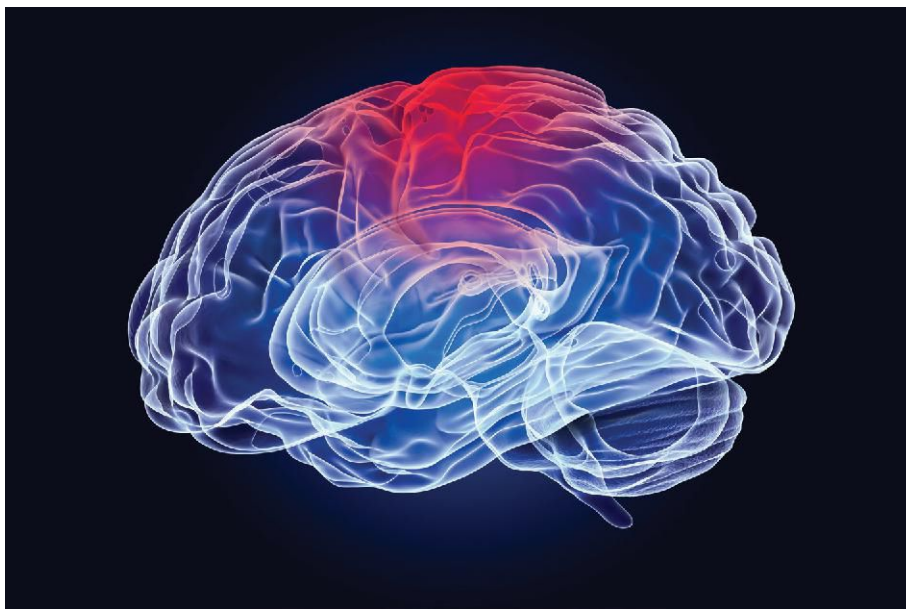
During the VFW Legislative Conference in March, then-VFW Commander-in-Chief William “Doc” Schmitz expressed concern about the injuries during a joint hearing of the House and Senate VA committees.

“Now more than ever, we are seeing service

members who are returning from combat with injuries as a result of their exposure to explosions,” Schmitz said. “VA has been slow to provide a long-term solution that would address these injuries, despite the overwhelming evidence that suggests service members who were exposed to explosions or sustained concussions may experience delayed onset of symptoms ranging from headaches and cognitive impairments to even more severe neurological complications.”



EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org



of its kind because that is exactly what is required to finally understand these combat concussions and their linkages to symptoms and secondary conditions, like dementia.”

According to the grant, the university and Virginia VA hospitals will work together on the study. Over the past several years, Virginia Commonwealth University has worked with VA to study combat-related TBIs and concussions.

In 2012, an executive order by President Barack Obama created the National Research Action Plan on Traumatic Brain

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Lung Cancer Risk Highest Among Veterans and Military

Smoking is overwhelmingly the leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. Veterans smoke at a higher rate than their civilian counterparts.

BY JANICE PHELAN

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths at close to 155,000 annually in the U.S., according to the Lung Cancer Alliance, with military men and women especially at risk. Not only is the rate of lung cancer higher among veterans, survival rates are lower when compared to civilians.

The major cause of lung cancer — 85 percent of cases — is smoking, said Dr. Martin J. Edelman, professor and

served on ships that were built before that time and had ratings such as boiler technician are at increased risk.”

Other military-related exposures include Agent Orange, radon, beryllium, chromium, exhaust, pesticides and pollutants and particulate matter from burn pits, according to the Lung Cancer Alliance.

“Tobacco abuse is overwhelmingly the most common cause of lung cancer (as well as heart and lung disease) and the

ing the risk of death from lung cancer,” Edelman said. “However, it must be emphasized that it is not a substitute for smoking cessation.”

A low-dose CT (computerized tomography) scan uses a computer to create a three-dimensional image of the inside of a body.

Thanks to anti-tobacco legislation and decreased smoking, the incidence of lung cancer is decreasing in the U.S., Edelman added.

“Additionally, improvements in treatment have improved the outlook for patients who are diagnosed with lung cancer,” he said.

Treatment for lung cancer is complex and depends on the type and stage of lung cancer. Edelman said there are three major approaches to lung cancer treatment — surgery, radiation and drugs. He added that many patients will benefit from combinations of treatment.

The disease’s stage is the most important factor in a patient’s prognosis.

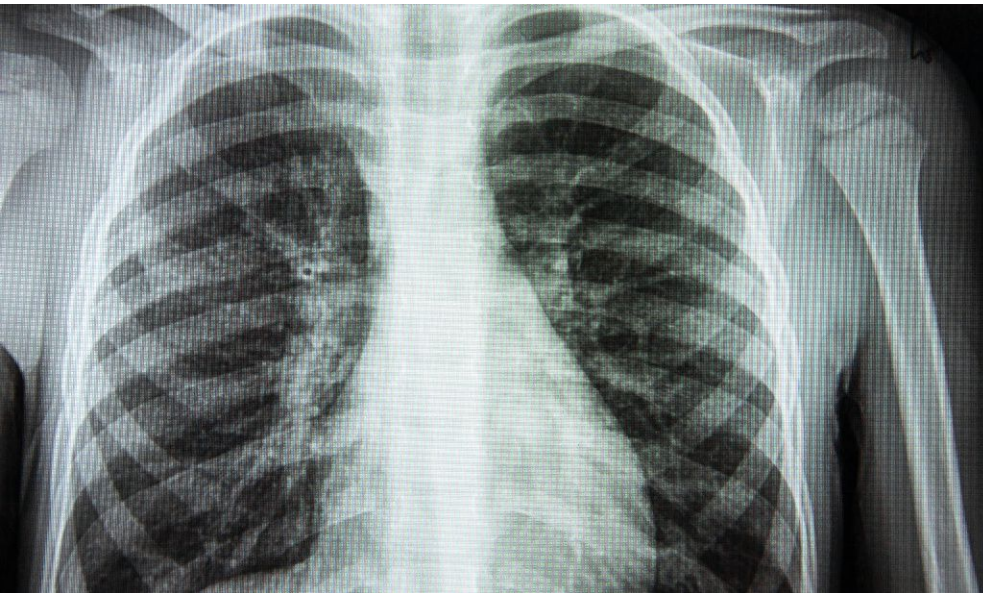
“Patients with localized disease (stages I and II) are frequently cured (approximately 50 percent),” he said. “Those with locally advanced disease (stage III) can be cured, and the rate of cure may be as high as 30 to 40 percent, even for patients who are considered ‘inoperable.’”

The Lung Cancer Foundation offers numerous resources for patients, including the Hope With Answers video series, lcfa.watch/hopewithanswers, and podcast, lcfa.chat/hopewithanswers.

“Research into better screening techniques for lung cancer as well as to improve therapies for those with lung cancer is continuing,” Edelman said. “Advances in the past 10 years have been remarkable. However, much remains to be done.”



EMAIL magazine@vfw.org



chair of the Department of Hematology/Oncology Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia. He also is the chair of the Lung Cancer Foundation of America Scientific Advisory Board.

“Other carcinogens, most notably asbestos, can also cause lung cancer,” added Edelman, a retired captain in the Navy Medical Corps.

“Those who served, particularly before the mid-1980s, frequently had exposure to asbestos (often used as a fireproofing material in construction in the 1970s until its dust was recognized as a health hazard). Navy veterans who

primary preventable cause of death in the United States,” Edelman said. “Don’t smoke, and if you do smoke, stop.”

Smoking is more prevalent within the armed forces. Approximately 32 percent of active-duty personnel smoke, compared to 20 percent of civilians, according to the Lung Cancer Alliance, with the incidence jumping to 50 percent among those who have been deployed. Prior to 1976, cigarettes also were provided free in military rations.

“For those who have smoked, screening using low dose CT scans has been demonstrated to be effective in reduc-

CBD Shocker: 94% Is Wasted Without Just One Ingredient

New CBD technology delivers 15X more relief

BREAKING NEWS Royal Palm Beach, FL — Users of a new breakthrough CBD technology are reporting astonishing results.

"I feel instant calm, and I'm sleeping better now than I have in years. Day or night, I carry this with me for whenever I need it," says Rachel H.

CBD is sweeping America. It's transforming the way we support joint health, improve mood, and get better sleep.

No fewer than 12,782 studies have found that CBD supports better health in 295 ways. That's 295 different health benefits — just by taking CBD alone.

But researchers at the New York University School of Medicine have made a shocking discovery.

They report that without this new approach to taking CBD, **94% of this "miracle molecule" is wasted.**

CBD's Life-Changing Health Benefits

Millions of Americans age 50+ are reporting miraculous results from using CBD.

And peer-reviewed studies by scientists at prestigious medical institutions like Oxford, Johns Hopkins and the Salk Institute confirm CBD's ability to support:

- Healthy neural stem cell growth to give you a "young again" brain
- Healthy blood pressure
- Comfortable joint function
- Healthy pancreatic b-cells, to promote healthy insulin levels
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- Healthy blood sugar

But you won't get these life-changing results by taking just any CBD oil on the market today.

The NYU researchers found that when CBD oil was administered, only 6% of it actually got past the cell membrane. In other words... 94% of the CBD was completely wasted.

It did not get to our cells... where all the real health effects happen.

That's why our team has spent the last 24 months working on something very important: a way to do what all CBD oils fail to achieve.

And that's to get the maximum amount of CBD inside our cells... in a fraction of the time.

And now they've done it. They've developed a new technology that unleashes total CBD relief... **15 times more**, to be exact. Instantly. With a single 1-second spray.

The choice is clear: you can get some help for mood, discomfort or appetite using regular CBD oil. Or you can get nearly 300 remarkable benefits that will change your life — thanks to this unique CBD technology.

And the best part? This technology...

- Has no side effects
- Needs no prescription

So whether you're already taking CBD — or just thinking about trying it — you need to know about this new discovery.

"With one spray, I [felt calmer] and slept through

the night, which has not happened in a very long time," says Kris R. "I'm very excited about using this product going forward."

Why So Much Excitement About CBD?

Why is CBD such a powerful health rejuvenating tool? For years, researchers searched for the answer.

Finally, in the early 1990s, they made a remarkable yet overlooked discovery. It's called the endocannabinoid system — the hidden cellular network in your body that's designed to work with CBD.

This cellular network exists in our brains, nervous systems and peripheral nervous tissue — almost everywhere in our bodies. And it's made up of receptors that bind specifically to cannabinoid molecules like CBD, enabling these compounds to penetrate the cells.

This system promotes "homeostasis" — restoring our body's functions to their natural, healthy state. This is how cannabinoids — found in the hemp plant — work wonders.

And the most powerful, proven compound in the hemp plant is CBD.

Cannabinoid receptors play a significant role in regulating many bodily functions like sleep... discomfort... appetite... mood... memory... and many more.

Over time, though, after years of exposure to toxins, our internal cannabinoid production suffers from burnout. We become deficient in these vital compounds.

And we no longer produce the necessary amount of cannabinoids we need to maintain our health, vitality and well-being.

As a result, our memory fades, our metabolism slows, our immune system weakens, joint discomfort becomes more frequent, our mood sours and our sleep worsens.

In short, we become unhealthy and aged.

This is why cannabinoids — like CBD — are so important. They recharge the cannabinoid system when our internal mechanisms slow down, helping our bodies to their healthy, youthful state.

One researcher compared it to "turning back the molecular clock."

How It Works

A new formula combines three new technologies to maximize CBD's health rejuvenating potential, starting with "Nano CBD" for maximum cellular absorption.

It's called **Cool Relief**.

First, **Cool Relief** shrinks the 2,000 nanometer molecules found in most CBD oils to just 80 nanos. No bigger than a grain of sand. This is important because it's all that can fit in your cell membrane. Any more gets discarded.

This nanotechnology gets 1,500% more CBD past the cell membrane... rejuvenating your cells to their young, healthy state.

Second, **Cool Relief** adds vaporizing technology for lightning-fast absorption that delivers CBD to your cells



in seconds after swallowing.

Finally, every bottle of **Cool Relief** contains a lab-confirmed 310 mg of high-potency CBD, giving you the same amount used in the clinical studies. A CO2 process extracts pure CBD from the hemp plant while eliminating toxins, impurities and chemicals.

The three technologies in **Cool Relief** transform a healthy plant compound into a superior health rejuvenating technology... one that supports "young again" heart, eyes, brain, lungs and more.

Overnight memory reboot...

Lilly H., age 92, had age-related memory loss, was confused, occasionally falling down and couldn't speak clearly. She often spent her days lying in bed.

After trying "Nano CBD," everything changed — overnight! Lilly says, "I know it sounds crazy, but it seems like I was given back a life."

Healthy blood sugar in 7 days...

David M., age 69, worked to have healthier blood sugar for 25 years. He tried exercise, eating right and just about everything else — and nothing worked.

After stumbling on to "Nano CBD," he enjoyed deep, refreshing sleep, healthy joints and healthy blood sugar levels — in just one week!

Back discomfort gone in 1 week...

Kelly H., age 49, reports that despite trying everything for her back aches and mental stress over 20 years, nothing worked.

Then she found "Nano CBD" — and ended her 20-year battle with back discomfort and mental stress — in just one week. "I have so much more energy," she says. "I'm a different person."

How to Order Cool Relief Today

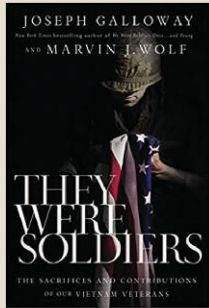
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We feel so strongly about this product that we offer a 100% money-back guarantee on every order. Just send back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days of purchase, and we'll send you your money back. The Hotline will be open for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number will be shut down to allow us to restock.

Call 1-866-246-5568 to secure your limited supply of **Cool Relief**. You don't need a prescription, and those who call in the first 24 hours qualify for a significant discount. Use Promo Code VFW0820CR when you call in. If the lines are busy, keep trying — all calls will be answered.

STAFF PICK

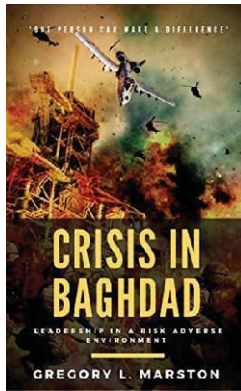


They Were Soldiers By Joseph Galloway and Marvin J. Wolf

This book, written by two *New York Times* bestselling authors, reveals the private lives of those who returned from Vietnam to make astonishing contributions in science, medicine, business and other areas to change America for the better. These profiles are touching, courageous and often startling. They capture the story of veterans both known and unknown, including Frederick Wallace Smith (founder of FedEx), Marshall Carter (who became chairman of the New York Stock Exchange) and Eileen Moore, an appellate judge in California. Engrossing, moving and eye-opening, this tribute gives a long overdue honor and recognition to the soldiers of this “forgotten generation.” *Nelson Books at HarperCollins*

BOOK CORNER SUBMISSIONS

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



Crisis in Baghdad

By Gregory L. Marston, life member, VFW Post 175, Doylestown, Pa.

This book describes combat leadership in an environment of risk aversion, which characterized the atmosphere in Iraq between 2006 and 2007. The non-fiction account from Gregory Marston, an A-10 “Warthog” pilot and wing commander, not only offers an historical account of that time, but a primer in how to provide proper leadership when the stakes are high. *Self-Published*

Reflections on the Vietnam War: A Fifty-Year Journey

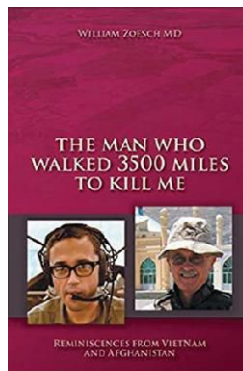
By Warren E. Hunt, life member, VFW Post 9656, Lambertville, Mich.

The author, Warren Hunt, chronicles his long struggle to come to grips with the meaning of the Vietnam War, and how it affected him before, during and after his tour. Seeking answers to the questions that haunt his daily life, the author’s quest leads him to the unveiling of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., where his emotions emerge to initiate a healing process. *CreateSpace Publishing*

National Flowers: The Battle of Verdun in 1916

By Kermit R. Mercer, VFW Post 6703, Hamlin, N.Y.

This novel follows a company of French soldiers arriving in the city of Verdun one month after the initial German attack in February 1916. The 300-day battle was one of the most catastrophic in history. The author, Kermit Mercer, lived in Verdun for 18 months between 1955-56 while serving in the U.S. Air Force. In doing so, he had the opportunity to study and spend time interviewing veterans of the Battle of Verdun, which served as the seed for the novel. *Self-Published*



The Man Who Walked 3,500 Miles to Kill Me

By William Zoesch, VFW Post 10692, Grafenwohr, Germany

The author, William Zoesch, transformed two diaries from two separate wars into a memoir that captures his thoughts during his time in Vietnam and Afghanistan. With 33 years in between the combat tours, the author ties many similarities and opportunities lost in the two conflicts. *Lulu Publishing Services*

What a Soldier Gives

By David L. Hartline, life member, VFW Post 6688, Summerville, Ga.

This book tells the story of a Southern farm boy’s experience in the bloody, forlorn rice paddies of Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Plainly, but graphically recalled by David Hartline, the story offers the reader a first-hand account of the Vietnam War saga from the steamy jungles and ramshackle bordellos of Saigon to coming home to a divided America. *Wallis Publishing Co.*

Sadie’s Boys

By Larry Lewis, VFW Auxiliary member at-large

The author, Larry Lewis, pieces together his grandmother’s recollections of his father’s and uncle’s time during World War II. *Sadie’s Boys* tells the story, through letters and official documents, of two poor Jewish soldiers from Brooklyn who fought for their country and of the mother who fought for her sons after one became a POW and the other was MIA. *Shires Press*



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Retention Remains Strong During Pandemic

Reaching out to our membership and doing “buddy checks” is crucial now more than ever.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

When COVID-19 hit the U.S., VFW Posts leapt into action making face masks, delivering supplies and doing wellness checks on members. As a new membership year gets under way, VFW’s Membership Department wants to ensure that same spirit of goodwill continues in earnest.

to order membership materials. One of the most essential features, Hunt said, is the ability to view a Post’s unpaid member list.

“What better way to know who to reach out to than checking over this list,” Hunt said. “It’s important to check in with your entire membership. This includes contacting unpaid members and see if there are underlying reasons dues haven’t been paid. Instead of asking for dues, it’s good to simply ask, ‘How’s it going?’ Let the member know he or she is missed at the Post.”

All members can log in to VFW’s OMS to update personal information such as address, phone, email and contact preferences. Creating an account is easy by following the steps found at www.vfw.org. Click on “login” and follow the prompts for creating an account using ID.me.

VFW’s website is easy to navigate and in many cases is your one-stop-shop for your membership needs.

“Our unpaid members are important to VFW,” Hunt said. “Please encourage those folks to revisit the reason they became members in the first place. Then, make sure they know about using the Quick Renew link on VFW.org/renew. It is very efficient.”

When a member uses the Quick Renew link, he or she will need their membership number. If the number cannot be located, a quick call or email to VFW’s Member Service Center will take care of that. Call, 1-833-839-8387, or email, MSC@vfw.org.

Hunt added that life members are important, too. He says they play an integral role in membership recruiting and encourages all life members to do their part in this new membership year.

“Our life members are proud and do an amazing job of telling their VFW story,” Hunt said. “Life members are recruiters at heart and are in a unique position to help shape the future of the VFW by referring outstanding veterans for membership.” ★

EMAIL jdhouse@vfw.org



Checking in on VFW members few have heard from in a while is always a good idea. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, these “buddy checks” proved beneficial for membership retention. VFW’s Membership Department encourages Post leaders to ask the question, “How are you doing?”

“Please encourage your unpaid members to revisit the reason they became members in the first place.”

Corey Hunt, VFW Membership associate director in charge of Post development and revitalization

“Our membership has shown its strength even in the midst of cultural changes brought on by the pandemic,” said Corey Hunt, VFW Membership associate director who is in charge of Post development and revitalization. “Central to our strong membership retention through the Coronavirus pandemic was the ‘all call’ to conduct buddy checks. This effort could prove to be a significant factor in Post retention rates.”

Hunt said that as things slowly return to normal throughout the country, it’s important to continue the outreach to all our members.

He added that using the same approach to retention used during the height of the pandemic should be continued throughout the membership year.

One approach is putting the Online Membership System (OMS) to good use. In OMS, there are recruiting materials to download as well as a quick link

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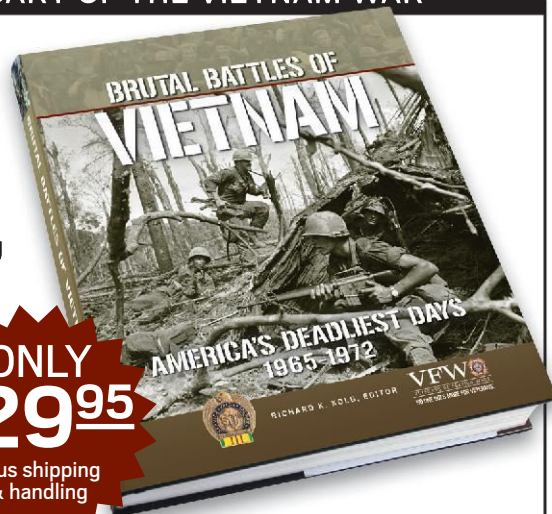
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REUNIONS

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AIR FORCE

F-106 All Troops: Bob Kwiecinski (734) 771-9501; bobski9933@aol.com

ARMY

2nd Bn., 16th Inf. Regt., 1st Inf. Div., 1967-70: Don Dignan (734) 525-0157; dondignan@sbcglobal.net
7th Finance, Vietnam, 1964-1966: Tony Topper (717) 359-0713; atopper27@comcast.net
119th Assault Helicopter Co., Vietnam 1962-70: Spencer Gardner (817) 329-3155; spencerhgardner619@gmail.com
191st Assault Helicopter Co.: Harrell Guidry (409) 626-1480; kgid@gt.rr.com
314th & 315th Inf. Regt. Assn., 79th Div., WWII: Tommy Howe (301) 475-2716; thowe50@gmail.com
630th Eng., L.E. Co., Vietnam: Cecil Brown (731) 415-6460; cecilbrown@charter.net
864th Eng. Bn., Pacemakers: Zak Grogan (615) 516-1119; 864ebaacord@gmail.com
Co. B, 2nd Bn., 327th Inf. Regt., 101st Abn. Div.: Bill Spielman (402) 432-0635; bsp17607@aol.com
OV-1 Mohawk Surveillance Airplane Veterans: Paul Jacobsen (612) 244-7267; pej@reagan.com

MARINES

Arizona's USMC Boot Camp Plt. 3019, MCRD, July 1967 - Sept. 1967: Keith Much; marine.keith0351@gmail.com
Marine Air Traffic Control Assn.: Steve Harris (509) 499-8137; sandkh2@gmail.com

NAVY

Assn. of Minemen: Don Moody (626) 824-0727; assocminemen@yahoo.com or www.minemen.org/wp
National Assn. of Naval Photography: Sammy Solt (321) 362-5806; nanppres@gmail.com
USS Albert David DE/FF-1050: Mike Gillespie (708) 771-9428; mtg7749@yahoo.com
USS Arlington AGMR-2: Michael "Skipper" Ferderer (952) 935-8162; mpferderer@gmail.com
USS Belknap DLG/CG-26 Assn.: Mike Reeves (434) 944-1376; reevescm@comcast.net
USS Bon Homme Richard CVA-31: Jim Barton (814) 652-0085; ejbarton122@aol.com
USS Cleveland LPD-7: Gil Eaton (631) 669-2963; gkeaton@optonline.net
USS Enterprise CVAN/CVN 65: Bruce Mooberry (316) 619-1268; brucemooberry@gmail.com
USS Franklin D Roosevelt CVB/CVA/CV-42 and Sqdn.: Bill Solt (321) 362-5806; sisbill@aol.com
USS KAWISHIWI AO-146: Marlon D. Dynesius (651) 346-9403; mddynesius@hotmail.com
USS Leonard F. Mason DD-852: Frank "Dusty" Distefano; dd852reunion@hotmail.com
USS Mc Morris DE-1036: Jules Galbreth (972) 219-9674; julorgal@gmail.com or <http://www.ussmcmorris.org>
USS Miller DE/FF-1091: Warren Smith (781) 608-9247; millerreuniondeff1091@gmail.com
USS Missouri BB-63: John McKinney (207) 799-8513; jmckinney1maine@yahoo.com
USS Mountrail APA-213: Don DiCoio (973) 725-1974; dicoio44@aol.com
USS Neches AO-47: Johnny Hanlon (918) 760-7371; johnnyhanlon@cox.net
USS Scamp SSN-588: Rodney Stark (702) 582-1424; scampreunion2021@virtualmemorypix.net

PROPOSED

Any unit attached to the Atlantic Base Section, The 5th Army, The Peninsula Based Section, The 7th Army, or anyone who served in an EFPF, Beaches on Southern France on D+1: James G. Davis; r11@hawaiiintel.net

CANCELLED

Marine Barracks, Sasebo, Japan: Bob McCarthy (515) 274-9110; coach430@aol.com
DE-534, DE-361, DE-634 & DE-59: David Cregut (785) 828-3446; ksstick@embargmail.com

(Continued on p. 59)

Understanding Hospital Indemnity Plans



Hospital costs are continuing to rise, and there is currently no end in sight. According to the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project, the average price of a hospital stay in the U.S. costs patients age 45-84 upwards of \$14,000.

Hospital expenses are typically great enough to surpass your annual health insurance deductibles for most major medical plans. Even though these costs associated with a hospital stay can be overwhelming, it can be valuable to know what additional coverage is available that could help you and your loved ones.

INDEMNITY PLANS AS A 'SAFETY NET'

Having a hospital indemnity plan (HIP) is like having a safety net. This type of insurance is often referred to as supplemental insurance that typically offers policyholders a payout when they have been admitted for in-patient care to a hospital. When you are evaluating this type of coverage, it's important to cover a few crucial questions:

1. Do I have to get a medical exam to apply for coverage?

The necessity of a medical exam depends on the insurance provider. You might find that some require it while others do not. This will be clear as you research the plans on the market.

2. Will I still qualify if I have had health problems in the past?

Unfortunately, this also depends on the provider, but you can usually find a dependable carrier that will bind coverage. The good news is that with this type of supplemental coverage, you typically get covered for any new injuries

or sickness. Some plans even allow you to cover your pre-existing conditions after a certain amount of time and improvement.

3. How much does a plan like this usually cost?

These plans are more affordable than you think. Costs typically depend on age and health status.

4. What kind of benefits come with these plans?

Many plans come with cash benefits that can be used to help pay for the unexpected expenses that might come up as the result of a hospital stay, including:

- Medical plan deductibles
- Prescription drug co-pays
- Any out-of-network costs
- Everyday bills

Additionally, some plans pay out cash benefits regardless of any additional benefits you might receive from medical insurance, Medicare or any other coverage you might have.

Generally, Medicare and medical insurance don't pay all your hospital costs. They tend to add up quickly. When you go to the hospital, Medicare, and most major medical insurance plans, require you to pay a deductible, co-payments, balance billing and other costs that are not covered by your health insurance policy.

It's imperative to know how all aspects of a supplemental policy work so that you can be knowledgeable to make important decisions for you and your loved ones and consider if an HIP policy would benefit your family.

For more information, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-833-VFW-VETS.

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Fulfilling His Daughter's Final Wish

This VFW Post in California has helped raise more than \$100,000 toward treating pancreatic cancer.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Alex Athans remembers that day six years ago when his daughter, Christina, first urged him to do something. It was March 4, 2014, and Alex's wife, Pat, had walked out of Christina's room at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena, Calif., to get food.

Six years have passed since that day, but the conversation remains vivid in Athans' mind. He recalls pulling up a chair and sitting at his 42-year-old daughter's bedside.

"Dad, I want to talk to you," his daughter began. "Let's face it. We're not in Disneyland here. You and I both know I am going to die from this cancer."

As the Vietnam War veteran followed his daughter's every word, Christina, who was in the terminal stages of pancreatic cancer, made her final request.

"What I would like is for people to donate money in place of flowers to help find a cure so others don't have to

suffer like you and mom," she told him.

After Christina passed away three days later, the Athans family began carrying out their daughter's dying wish — one that has since raised \$103,629 for pancreatic cancer research and awareness.

"What we've accomplished so far is remarkable, but we're not alone," said Athans, a life member and quartermaster of VFW Post 12114 in Tehachapi, Calif., about 115 miles north of Los Angeles. "This wouldn't have been possible without the support, effort and dedication of every single member of Post 12114."

With support from his fellow Post

members, Athans and his wife created a webpage through the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCan) to begin receiving donations on behalf of Christina.

"When this all began, Christina's page ranked 2,267th," Athans said. "With the help of our community and others chipping in from across the country, her page now ranks first."

Most of the donations are either received online or via checks paid out to Post 12114, which then donates 100 percent of the money to PanCan for research.

To date, the Post has received money from individuals in more than 21 states, which notably includes a \$5,000 check from a person in Wisconsin in the spring of 2019.

Post 12114 also hosts annual fundraisers in Tehachapi, a tradition that began when the family first auctioned off Christina's property following her funeral in 2014.

With annual donations from local businesses and a five-month advertising campaign each year that targets Tehachapi and the surrounding areas via newspapers and radio stations, Post 12114 has raised more than \$56,000 locally, according to Athans.

"It's through the businesses and people of Tehachapi, members of our Post, family and friends that we continue to wage hope in finding a cure," Athans said. "They've become heroes."

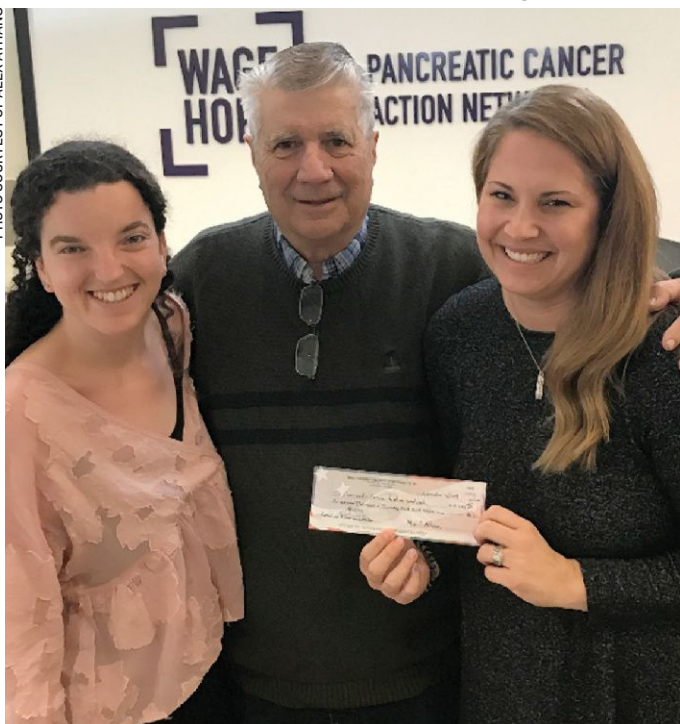
Athans, however, encourages VFW Posts across the country to become more proactive in helping fight cancer.

"We sent out emails and letters to all Posts in California to donate at least \$5 each, and that's all we got — \$5 from just one Post," Athans said. "But we're not discouraged. We challenge all Posts across the nation to simply donate \$5 to help us find a cure."

For more information, visit Christina's webpage at support.pancan.org/goto/athans.

✉ **EMAIL** irodriguez@vfw.org

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEX ATHANS



Alex Athans, center, presents a check in December to representatives of the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCan) in Manhattan Beach, Calif. Athans, a life member and quartermaster of VFW Post 12114 in Tehachapi, Calif., lost his daughter, Christina, to pancreatic cancer in 2014. Since her passing, Athans, with help from Post 12114, has raised \$103,629 for pancreatic cancer research and awareness. Athans also encourages other Posts across the country to help fight cancer by donating just \$5.

REUNIONS, CONT. FROM P. 56

USS Harry E. Hubbard DD-748: John Kraft (262) 361-4421;
jkraftus@gmail.com
USS Salisbury Sound AV-13: Victor Fischer (630) 257-2710;
duffer664@sbcglobal.net
USS Warrington DD-843: Stan Prager (916) 791-6700;
stashuman843@msn.com

CLAIMS

Readers are urged to help these vets seeking claim substantiation statements. Respond directly to the person listed at the end of the claim assistance request. This service is provided for VFW members who are in the process of filing a VA claim. Please email your claim to magazine@vfw.org.

Air Force

23rd FMS, 46250, Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, Feb.-Mar. 1971 – Seeking anyone who can substantiate me being sent on temporary duty assignment to Quang Tri, Vietnam to support Lam Son 719. I was working as a 46250 on OV-10 and O2A aircraft. Jim Sensbach (330) 432-1159; jsensbach1@roadrunner.com

Security Policemen, Suwon Air Base, Korea, 1969-70

Seeking any Security Police Personnel who recalls going to small weapons training at DMZ to substantiate a claim. Martin M. Harper (843) 546-2279; lharper@sccctv.net

Army

2nd Bn., 11th Arty, B Btry., 101st Air Mobile, LZ Bastogne, Vietnam, 1968 – Seeking Sgt. Rodriguez, Sgt. Soria or anyone else who can substantiate an injury to my right leg during an artillery mission. Sgt. Gilberto Sotelo (830) 719-2287

141st OBAM Bn., Pacific, June 1943-46 – Seeking anyone who served with Thomas R. Massaro. Leslie Massaro; leslejean123@gmail.com

Marines

2nd Bn., 9th Marines, 1st Plt., Gulf Co., 1967-68 – Seeking Doc Benson and Doc Paul to substantiate a claim. Doc Eric Hefright; erlichefright@yahoo.com

3rd Bn., 4th Marines, H & S Co., Operation Hastings, July 27, 1966 – Seeking anyone to substantiate a mortar attack in the first week of Operation Hastings. I received mortar shrapnel to hand and arm. Cpl. Terry L. Grimes (209) 406-0518; qcsterry@gmail.com

A Co., 1st Shore Party Bn., 1st Marine Div., Feb. 1968-Mar. 1969, Khe Sanh, Vietnam – Seeking anyone to substantiate a claim for "shell shock", post combat emotion-noise, and terrible sleep dreams. William C. Drake (505) 220-8829

H & MS-24 Air Sqdn., Marine Aircraft Group-24, Vietnam, June 2, 1969-May 21, 1971 – Seeking anyone who served with Howard Dean Bay to substantiate a lung cancer claim. Widow Linda Bay lindabay1503@gmail.com

Miscellaneous

947th Medical Co., Colorado/151st Arty Div., La Junta, Colorado, June 1988-1999, Active 1991-92 – Seeking Tom J. Florez or anyone who can substantiate a hardship discharge changed to a medical discharge. While in the National Guard, I received 100% disability. Johnny Daniel Camacho (719) 275-4092; fatcat527@charter.net

Navy

USS Clarion River LSMR-409, After TET, 1968 – Seeking Calvin J. Albrecht, Larry Blackman and Jose Welsh or anyone else I served with who can substantiate a rocket incident. While firing rockets, one rocket separated in the tube sending the other rocket out. When the elevator returned for the second salvo it had part of the split rocket on it. I pulled the rocket away and later found myself on the deck, then I woke up in a hospital in the Philippines. Michael J. Schmitz okeydokee@hughes.net

Seabees, EO's, Adak, Alaska, June 1966-67 – Seeking anyone who served to substantiate a claim for health issues related to radiation exposure. David W. Truesdale (607) 785-5407; seabeesadak@gmail.com

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'The Journey Has Just Begun'

This VFW Post commander in New York experienced life as a homeless veteran as he walked across America to raise awareness and funds against veteran suicides and homelessness.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Tommy Zurhellen's journey began out of frustration in the spring of 2018, when he first became commander of VFW Post 170 in his hometown of Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

The Navy veteran, who served from 1991 to 1997 and deployed as a nuclear electrician and a gunner during the Persian Gulf War, found himself answering an overwhelming amount of phone calls from local organizations and fellow veterans seeking financial help.

"I was getting what felt like a call every day from some non-profit or an individual wanting help, but I couldn't help everybody," said Zurhellen, who served aboard the *USS Truxtun* and later the *USS California*.

"I got really frustrated because there was little I could do at the time."

The frustrations only intensified when he began scavenging for data and statistics, arriving at a sobering fact — the national veteran population was fighting an uphill battle against suicide and homelessness prevention.

"It really opened my eyes to what our veterans were going through," Zurhellen said. "I

had no idea about the 22 veteran suicides a day, or the 40,000 homeless vets each night. I had to do something."

Then it dawned on him.

As a tenured English professor and award-winning novelist at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, about 85 miles from New York City, Zurhellen would use a five-month sabbatical in 2019 reserved for writing to instead "walk the walk."

"I just took the plunge," Zurhellen said. "It was something I always wanted to do,

and I couldn't be happier that I did it."

On a morning following his 50th birthday in April of last year, with nothing more than a backpack and a walking stick, Zurhellen took the first of many steps on behalf of VetZero, a service project by Zurhellen and Post 170 to raise awareness and money for local veterans.

He went on to complete the 2,860-mile, eight-state transcontinental walk that began in Portland, Ore., and ended at the gates of Marist College in 131 days. In the process, he also secured more than \$50,000 for veteran-based non-profits in his hometown of Poughkeepsie.

Walking 22 miles a day and assisted by the kindness of other veterans, strangers and passersby for five months, the professor-turned-temporary-homeless veteran witnessed first-hand the struggles that consume a portion of his fellow veterans.

"Doing it every day for five months, being a homeless veteran, really put things into perspective," Zurhellen admitted. "Be it going to the bathroom or sleeping in your own bed; food, shelter and talking to the ones you love are all things I learned to never again take for granted."

Zurhellen said that when he returned home, people asked him if he was happy to sleep in his own bed again.

"But the truth is that I couldn't sleep for the first month. I was so used to being alone, sleeping here or there," he said. "It put all things in perspective."

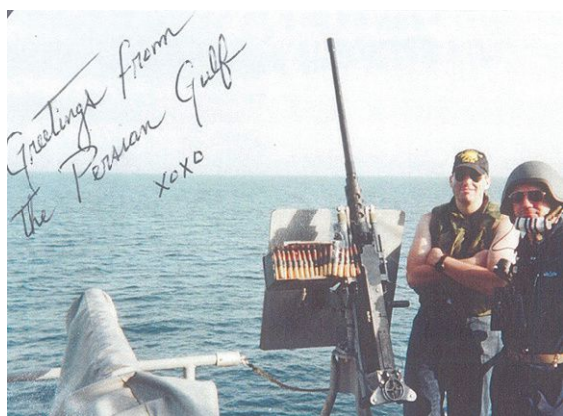
Zurhellen donated his walk's proceeds on behalf of his VetZero initiative to Hudson River Housing and the Mental Health America's Vet2Vet program, both located in Poughkeepsie and geared toward helping local veterans.

Zurhellen, however, added that the journey is far from over.

"This just made me want to do more for our local veterans," Zurhellen said. "The walk has ended, but the journey has just begun."

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOMMY ZURHELLEN



ABOVE: VFW Post 170 Commander Tommy Zurhellen stops to take a photo last year near Randolph, Neb., during his eight-state, transcontinental walk that began in Portland, Ore., and ended at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

BELOW: Zurhellen, left, poses by a .50 caliber machine gunner in 1996 aboard the *USS California* in the Persian Gulf. Zurhellen served in the Navy from 1991 to 1997 and deployed as a nuclear engineer and a gunner during the Persian Gulf War. He served aboard the *USS Truxtun* and later the *USS California*.

Better read this if you are 62 or older and still making mortgage payments.

It's a well-known fact that for many older Americans, the home is their single biggest asset, often accounting for more than 45% of their total net worth. ***And with interest rates near all-time lows while home values are still high, this combination creates the perfect dynamic for getting the most out of your built-up equity.***

But, many aren't taking advantage of this unprecedented period. According to new statistics from the mortgage industry, senior homeowners in the U.S. are now sitting on more than 7.19 trillion dollars* of unused home equity.

Not only are people living longer than ever before, but there is also greater uncertainty in the economy. With home prices back up again, ignoring this "hidden wealth" may prove to be short sighted when looking for the best long-term outcome.

All things considered, it's not surprising that more than a million homeowners have already used a government-insured Home Equity Conversion

Mortgage (HECM) loan to turn their home equity into extra cash for retirement.

It's a fact: no monthly mortgage payments are required with a government-insured HECM loan; however the borrowers are still responsible for paying for the maintenance of their home, property taxes, homeowner's

It's times like these that your largest asset can be a life saver.

insurance and, if required, their HOA fees.

Today, HECM loans are simply an effective way for homeowners 62 and older to get the extra cash they need to enjoy retirement.

Although today's HECM loans have been improved to provide even greater financial protection for homeowners, there are still many misconceptions.

For example, a lot of people mistakenly believe the home must be paid off in full in order to qualify for a HECM loan, which is not the case. In fact, one key advantage of a HECM is that the

proceeds will first be used to pay off any existing liens on the property, which frees up cash flow, a huge blessing for seniors living on a fixed income. Unfortunately, many senior homeowners who might be better off with a HECM loan don't even bother to get more information because of rumors they've heard.

In fact, a recent survey by American Advisors Group (AAG), the nation's number one HECM lender, found that over 98% of their clients are satisfied with their loans. While these special loans are not for everyone, they can be a real lifesaver for senior homeowners - especially in times like these.

The cash from a HECM loan can be used for almost any purpose. Other common uses include making home improvements, paying off medical bills or helping other family members. Some people simply need the extra cash for everyday expenses while others are now using it as a safety net for financial emergencies.

If you're a homeowner age 62 or older, you owe it to yourself to learn more so that you can make the best decision - for your financial future.



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Reverse mortgage loan terms include occupying the home as your primary residence, maintaining the home, paying property taxes and homeowners insurance. Although these costs may be substantial, AAG does not establish an escrow account for these payments. However, a set-aside account can be set up for taxes and insurance, and in some cases may be required. Not all interest on a reverse mortgage is tax-deductible and to the extent that it is, such deduction is not available until the loan is partially or fully repaid.

AAG charges an origination fee, mortgage insurance premium (where required by HUD), closing costs and servicing fees, rolled into the balance of the loan. AAG charges interest on the balance, which grows over time. When the last borrower or eligible non-borrowing spouse dies, sells the home, permanently moves out, or fails to comply with the loan terms, the loan becomes due and payable (and the property may become subject to foreclosure). When this happens, some or all of the equity in the property no longer belongs to the borrowers, who may need to sell the home or otherwise repay the loan balance. V2020.03.16

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