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NOV./DEC. 2020

Vol. 108 No. 3

COVER IMAGE: Nick Ceraldi, a VFW life member from the Department of New York, enjoys the calming waters off the coast of Honduras in January 2020. Ceraldi was diving courtesy of Warhorse SCUBA, an organization that provides all-expenses paid trips for veterans.

Photo by Sharon Patterson

14 A 'LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE'

A New Jersey-based scuba-diving organization offers veterans dealing with PTSD, traumatic brain injuries and other conditions a therapeutic method of recovery. One Marine recounts his trip earlier this year to the Caribbean Sea with Warhorse SCUBA.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

FEMALE RANGERS MAKE HISTORY

More than 50 women have earned the Army's coveted Ranger tab since 2015. Here's the story of the first two to graduate, as well as the first African American woman, who completed the training last year and has set big goals for the future. BY JIM SERVI



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'WE WANT TO HELP VETERANS'

A Vietnam veteran and VFW member from Florida launched a radio show in February to provide veterans with helpful information. Spreading VFW's message through weekly interviews of VFW's national public affairs director has become a staple of the show's content. BY DAVE SPIVA



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VALOR COMMON AT CHOSIN RESERVOIR

Surrounded and outnumbered 70 years ago at the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War, elements of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 7th Infantry Division were in a desperate situation. Fighting their way out was the only solution. BY RICHARD "DICK" CAMP





COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
Hal Roesch II

Thank a Vet on Veterans Day

Happy Veterans Day to all those who have worn the nation's military uniform. Nov. 11 is a special day reserved to recognize all American veterans. And while we also pause on Memorial Day in May to honor those who paid the ultimate sacrifice defending our nation, Veterans Day is distinct and different.

Veterans Day recognizes our living veterans, as well as those who have passed. It is a time to celebrate the service of all veterans, and that includes those who are still on active duty. Regardless of age or background, our military service binds us all, and that shared experience, that devotion to duty, is what we are honoring on Veterans Day.

It will be more challenging to recognize Veterans Day this year, as we're all dealing with the isolation forced upon us by social distancing and local regulations.

But that shouldn't stop any of us from offering our thanks. Reach out to all veterans you know and tell them you appreciate their service.

Pick up the phone, send an email or broadcast a message on social media. For other ideas, check out this issue's "Member Corner" on page 52.

Veterans Day, originally known as Armistice Day, has been celebrated in this country since Nov. 11, 1918, the day World War I ended. The national holiday was renamed Veterans

Day in 1954 to honor WWII and Korean War veterans.

This year would be a great time to reconnect with your Post's WWII vets, who in September celebrated the 75th anniversary of the end of that war. On behalf of VFW, I extend my heartfelt appreciation for their courage, selfless duty and sacrifice in nearly every corner of the world during that cataclysmic event.

A lot of our veterans have observed or will recognize significant anniversaries this year and next. Our Korean War vets marked the 70th anniversary of the beginning of their war in June. Our Vietnam War veterans — VFW's largest demographic segment of members — are in the midst of observing the 50th anniversary of that war.

Our Gulf War vets will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the beginning of *Operation Desert Storm* in January. And our Afghanistan War veterans will observe the 20th anniversary of the beginning of that war next fall.

As veterans, we know that a phone call or a card on Veterans Day can mean a lot. Reach out and thank a vet on Nov. 11 and encourage others to do the same.



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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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VFW National Home

Phenomenal article on the VFW National Home. I was commander of Post 2717 in

Ely, Minn., on three different occasions. As such, I was very familiar with the blessing for our National Home. As we would be reciting it, I would think and wonder what was occurring there. Once the prayer was complete, so was my thought. Your article just put a tremendous light on what has been accomplished there. Thank you. Your research and testimonials made for an extremely uplifting read — something this country really needs at this time. Fantastic job!

LARRY POLYNER
ELY, MINN.

Thank you so much for the awesome cover and article in the VFW magazine this month.

PATTI MARRIOTT
VFW NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN
EATON RAPIDS, MICH.

I want to thank and compliment the staff for the cover photo and story published. It was researched and published with great detail, giving a history of its long-established presence. I hope all VFW and Auxiliary members will gain insight about the National Home and how its mission can assist our veterans and their families. Executive Director Fred Puffenberger and his staff do an amazing job to support those who reside on the campus and help to educate those who have an interest to learn more. The VFW and its Auxiliary can be very proud of this wonderful place.

SAM COMPTON
VFW NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN
BOARD OF TRUSTEES PRESIDENT
EATON RAPIDS, MICH.

Remembering the End of World War II

On page 34 there is a picture of Lee Lamphier, who served on the *USS Guam*, along with my brother, John Franklin Curd, now deceased. If Lee sees this, I would like to find out if he knew my brother. I know my brother would have enjoyed the article because he hosted several reunions of the *USS Guam* (CB-2) before he passed away.

PAT M. CURD
MILAN, TENN.

I appreciated the coverage of the victory in the Pacific Theater. My father, Staff Sgt. Dalton Mullins, was one of those called to fight island to island against a determined enemy. He was an artillery forward observer in B Battery, 2nd Bn., 1st Field Artillery, 6th Infantry Division. The 6th was under the command of MacArthur and fought in New Guinea and the Philippine islands. They made multiple amphibious landings. I was dismayed to see that the 6th Infantry Division was not mentioned on page 32. Many never returned, many were wounded, many scarred for life and many lived productive lives upon returning.

JOHN E. MULLINS
FRASER, MICH.

My dad fought in WWII in New Guinea. I was very disappointed in how difficult it was to read the information on the map. It is too bad because the article was very good and the map itself was very helpful in understanding WWII in the Pacific.

SHILA WORDEN
LENEXA, KAN.

I was extremely interested in this article. Fortunately, I was too young to serve in WWII. I joined the Navy in 1949 and served on the *USS New Jersey* (BB-62) during its second cruise to Korea in 1953. Very few people knew or even heard of the day the Japanese bombed the U.S.

mainland. I wrote an article for the USS New Jersey Veterans Organization. Your audience might be interested in knowing that our mainland was bombed by the Japanese on Sept. 9, 1942.

NICKOLUS O. RASCH
TRIANGLE, VA.

Subject article was nice, but the summary of significant battles in the Pacific Theater was incomplete. I was incredulous that the battle for Peleliu from Sept. 15-Oct. 15, 1944, was omitted. It is considered the toughest fighting the American military experienced during WWII.

The percentage of casualties for total combatants was extraordinarily high compared to any other Pacific Theater battle. "With the Old Breed," by E.B. Sledge, a private first class during this battle and that on Okinawa, is one of the top five books on epic 20th century battles.

WILFRED J. CLIFFORD
WATERTOWN, MASS.

How could you leave the 1st Cav out of the article?

LLOYD GRABLE
SUN CITY CENTER, FLA.

"Happy as Hell?" Is that good or bad? Is anything connected with hell good?

VICTOR ROLANDO
BENNINGTON, VT.

Burnout Rate is High

Thank you so much for writing such a wonderful article. I have received a lot of calls about the article from long lost friends, and I've noticed that suddenly more people are buying the book. You did a great job on reporting our sentiments.

We expect that this article will help us continue to advance the family support issues we are trying to fix. We really appreciate your kindness and engagement on this.

KEVIN AND SUSAN DELLICKER
BREINIGSVILLE, PA.



"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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First Woman Takes Command of Army Reserve

Army Lt. Gen. Jody J. Daniels assumed command of the Army Reserve on July 28. She is the first woman to lead an Army component.

“I want to foster a mindset of teamwork, continuous learning and growth, with a particular focus on junior talent so they have a desire to continue to serve and to lead,” Daniels said during the live-streamed assumption-of-command ceremony at Fort Bragg, N.C. “This culture of teamwork will be essential to shaping our future.”

Daniels has more than 36 years of active and reserve military service. Her most recent position was commanding general of the 88th Readiness Division at Fort Snelling, Minn., and Fort McCoy, Wis. During her Army career, she has deployed to Kosovo and Iraq.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said at the ceremony that it was “a special day” as Daniels is now the first woman to not only lead the Army Reserve, but the first woman to lead any Army component — active-duty, Reserve or National Guard.

Daniels, a life member of VFW Post 5633 in Potomac, Md., will command nearly 200,000 Army Reservists, about 20 percent of the total force.



PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. EDGAR VALDEZ/U.S. ARMY RESERVE

Army Lt. Gen. Jody J. Daniels, the new commanding general and chief of U.S. Army Reserve, speaks on July 28 during her assumption-of-command ceremony at Fort Bragg, N.C. Daniels, a life member of VFW Post 5633 in Potomac, Md., is the first woman to lead an Army component.

USS Indianapolis Crew Receives Gold Medal



PHOTO BY MC2 LINDSAY A. PRESTON/U.S. NAVY

Harold Bray, chairman of the USS Indianapolis CA-35 Survivors Organization, looks at his certificate of appreciation presented during the 2018 USS Indianapolis (CA-35) reunion at the Columbia Club of Indianapolis. The crew of the USS Indianapolis received a Congressional Gold Medal earlier this year on the 75th anniversary of the cruiser's sinking during World War II.

The *Indianapolis* was sunk by a torpedo launched from a Japanese sub on July 30, 1945, two days after departing Guam on its way to the Philippines. It had completed its mission of delivering components of the Little Boy atomic bomb to Tinian, about 130 miles northeast of Guam, and was headed west to train for a possible invasion of Japan. The Little Boy was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on Aug. 6, 1945.

About 900 sailors and Marines aboard the *Indianapolis* survived the initial torpedo attack. After five days of floating in the sea, only 316 were rescued. The wreck was discovered in 2017.

“All Americans owe you a forever debt of gratitude,” Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite told the survivors during the award presentation’s virtual ceremony. “We can never forget the astounding grit and bravery shown by those who lived to tell the tale.”

He added that the Navy learned “important lessons ... from the tragedy.”

The loss of 879 *Indianapolis* crew members is the worst loss of lives in any one incident in the Navy’s history.

The crew of one of the most famous and tragic warships of World War II received the Congressional Gold Medal on July 30. It was the 75th anniversary of the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis (CA-35)*, the Navy’s largest loss of lives in one incident.

The youngest surviving member of the crew, Harold Bray, 93, said it was “an honor” to receive the award on behalf of the 1,195 sailors and Marines who served aboard the *USS Indianapolis*.

“Eight survivors remain today, and we are proud to represent our shipmates who are no longer with us,” Bray, chairman of the USS Indianapolis CA-35 Survivors Organization, said in a statement to the U.S. Naval Institute earlier this year. “We are very grateful to Congress for this special recognition.”

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VA Hospitals Report More than 50,000 COVID-19 Cases

VA officials say they are combating the spread of the coronavirus by encouraging patients to use online resources.

BY DAVE SPIVA

As of Aug. 26, VA had recorded more than 50,000 COVID-19 cases at VA Hospitals since the beginning of the year. The statistics include patients and staff. VA health care centers encountered a spike in active cases through June and July 2020, but the number of cases had slowed down as of the end of August.

More than 2,600 known COVID-19 deaths occurred, with more than half being those who were not inpatients at the hospital, according to VA data from Aug. 26. A total of about 1,270 inpatients had died at VA facilities from COVID-19 as of press time.

VA'S CURRENT COVID-19 NUMBERS To see the number of VA's current COVID-19 cases and deaths, visit www.accesstocare.va.gov.

COVID-19 deaths from VA employees also are being reported. As of Aug. 26, at least 49 employees had died from COVID-19. The VA noted that its statistics are self-reported by VA facilities since most of those individuals received care outside the VA.

As of press time, the five VA health care systems with the most known COVID-19 deaths since March are:

1. New Jersey Health Care System, 115 deaths.
2. New York Harbor Health Care System, 113 deaths.
3. Bronx, N.Y., Health Care System, 87 deaths.
4. Boston Health Care System, 85 deaths.



VA PHOTO

5. Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System, 71 deaths.

Overall, VA hospitals have accounted for less than 1 percent of the known 5.7 million COVID-19 cases across the country. However, VA also had about 1.5 percent of all COVID-19 deaths in the United States as of Aug. 26.

One way VA has been able to combat the spread of COVID-19 among its staff and patients is by increasing online tools for its patients. According to a VA press release, VA's online tool, called My HealtheVet, has had an increase in patient interaction

during the COVID-19 pandemic. The tool lets veterans request prescription refills, review medical records and ask health care providers questions.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said that veterans had made more than 11.2 million prescription refill requests through My HealtheVet from January to June of this year.

"VA's long-standing priorities to make sure veterans have a convenient way to manage their health through telehealth technologies is proving successful," Wilkie said. "Investing in the development of the infrastructure early gives us the ability to quickly adapt to the current health care environment." ★

EMAIL dsplva@vfw.org

The VA East Orange Medical Center in East Orange, N.J., located about 15 miles west of New York City, is a part of the VA New Jersey Health Care System. The system accounted for the largest number of coronavirus deaths of all VA hospitals, with 115 fatal cases as of press time.

VA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE BY THE NUMBERS

576,213: Number of veterans and employees tested for COVID-19 at VA.

50,137: Number of VA's cumulative cases of COVID-19.

43,276: Number of veterans diagnosed by VA with COVID-19.

37,293: Number of VA patients who recovered from COVID-19.

2,655: Number of known COVID-19 deaths at VA.

Information from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs COVID-19 Pandemic Response Weekly Report: Aug. 18–24, 2020, and www.accesstocare.va.gov. (Statistics as of Aug. 26, 2020.)

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VA Expands Caregiver Eligibility to Vietnam War Veterans

VA issued new regulations on Oct. 1 that grant stipends to the caregivers of veterans of World War II, the Vietnam War and the Korean War.

The new regulations give eligibility to veterans with a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher. This includes all disabilities, whether it resulted from a wound, injury, illness or disease, according to VA.

VFW has long advocated for the expansion to the VA Caregiver Assistance Program, which offers stipends for family caregivers of veterans with serious injuries.

In 2011, the program was implemented specifically for seriously injured veterans who served on or after Sept. 11, 2001. VA gives eligibility to veterans who served on or before May 7, 1975.

There will be even more eligible vets in two years, according to VA. The second phase of the VA Caregiver Assistance Program



will open up eligibility to veterans of all eras, Cold War and Persian Gulf War veterans, with a 70 percent VA disability rating, according to VA.

Besides monthly stipends, the VA Caregiver Assistance Program also offers support services, such as training, mentoring and a support line, to caregivers who are part of the program.

To check a caregiver's eligibility for the VA program, visit www.va.gov or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

VFW Receives Mask Donation from Taiwanese Government

The government of Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China, donated 250,000 face masks to the VFW during an Aug. 27 meeting at the VFW Washington Office on Capitol Hill.

During the meeting between VFW Washington Office Executive Director B.J. Lawrence and Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the U.S., Lawrence thanked the government of Taiwan for its "wonderful and generous" donation.

The masks were delivered to several VFW Departments to help keep members and community members safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also during their meeting, Lawrence told Hsiao that VFW Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch pledged the organization's support to the government of Taiwan.

"The VFW has long enjoyed a relationship with Taiwan," Lawrence said. "We have enjoyed working with the government of Taiwan by offering our assistance to how we all can take better care of our military, veterans and their families. That was the mission VFW was founded on, and we have continued that mission since 1899."

Lawrence shared that the VFW National Council of Administration passed resolutions in August that gives organizational support to the government of the East Asia republic.

"We urge the Administration and Congress to strictly



PHOTO BY B.J. LAWRENCE/VFW

VFW Washington Office's Director of Communications and Public Affairs Terrence Hayes (left) and Director of Operations and Economic Opportunity Anthony Lowe organize a donation of 250,000 masks from the government of Taiwan on Aug. 27 at the VFW Washington Office on Capitol Hill. The masks were delivered to several VFW Departments to help assist during the COVID-19 pandemic.

adhere to the concepts of a *Taiwan Relations Act*, by approving the sale of state-of-the-art military equipment, weapon and technology to maintain an adequate defensive capability," Lawrence said. "We call upon the Administration and Congress to support the admission of the Republic of China on Taiwan into the United Nations."



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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VFW Demands More Conditions be Added to Agent Orange List

VFW was represented at an August press conference to persuade Congress to add additional conditions to the VA's presumptive list of afflictions related to Agent Orange exposure.

The VFW Washington Office participated in a virtual press conference hosted by Rep. Josh Harder (D-Calif.). During the conference, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Matthew Doyle urged members of Congress to approve the addition of three diseases — including bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism — to the VA's Agent Orange conditions list through the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2021* (S. 4049).

"Many of our Vietnam War veteran members believe that VA thinks it's too expensive to care for them," Doyle said. "The evidence regarding these conditions is conclusive — no more studies are needed. Any additional, unnecessary delay is a breach of our nation's promise to care for its veterans."

As of Sept. 4, House and Senate proposals for next year's *National Defense Authorization Act* include the addition of the four Agent Orange-related diseases — bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, Parkinsonism and hypertension — to the VA's list of presumptive conditions.

14 PRESUMPTIVE AGENT ORANGE CONDITIONS

As of Sept. 4, to qualify for Agent Orange-related benefits, a veteran must have one or more of the 14 conditions VA presumes to have been caused by exposure to the herbicide, which are:

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



New VFW Podcast Available Now

VFW's newest communications platform is available to all members, veterans and the public. Listeners of the VFW podcast can expect to have a new episode available every first Wednesday of the month through the remainder of 2020.

The podcast will start airing twice a month starting in January, available on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The first episode of 2021 will be on Jan. 6.

VFW Washington Officer Director of Communications and Public Affairs Terrence Hayes said that the podcast is just another way for the public to learn about VFW and give important news to our members.

"It's an exciting time for us as we find new audiences to share what's happening at the VFW,"

Hayes said. "VFW is in the midst of a paradigm shift. It's an exciting time to be a part of this transformational change within our organization."

The VFW podcast will cover current information on key veterans' legislation, education and financial assistance programs, as well as national veterans' services and VFW's critical initiatives, according to Hayes.

VFW podcast listeners can expect to hear from congressional leadership and officials from the Department of Defense and VA, as well as everyday veterans, on issues affecting military and veteran communities, Hayes said.

Episodes of the podcast will be available at www.vfw.org/podcast. The VFW podcast also can be found on the following platforms:

- Google Play
- Apple Podcasts
- Pandora
- Spotify
- Stitcher
- Deezer

"We hope VFW members and others join us as we tackle tough issues affecting our military and the veteran community," Hayes said.

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



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

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

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

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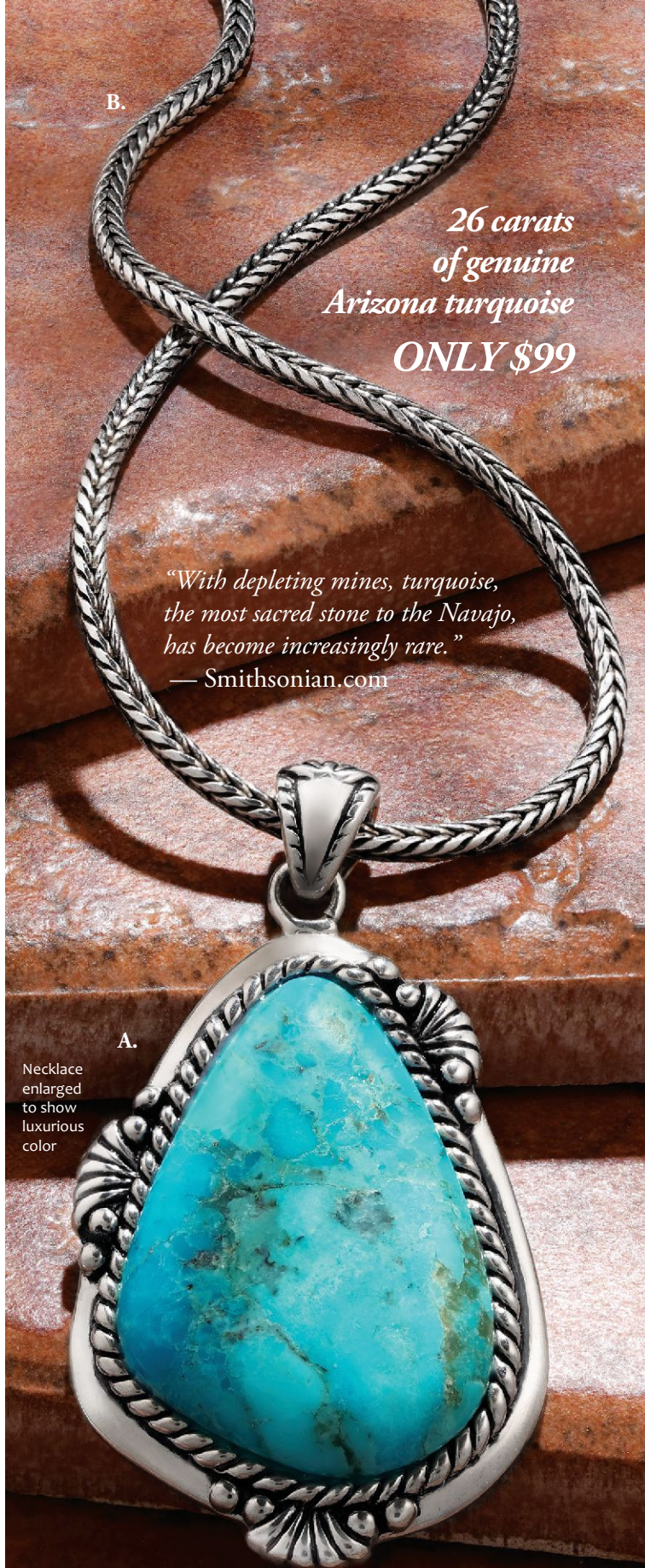
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PHOTO COURTESY OF WARHORSE SCUBA



TOP LEFT: Nick Ceraldi, bottom right, joins seven wounded veterans and Warhorse SCUBA founder John M. Gannaio (on the right holding sign), a veteran and Brick Township, N.J., police officer, on a trip to the island of Utila in Honduras on Jan. 19. The week-long trip consisted of two hours of scuba diving per day.

TOP RIGHT: Nick Ceraldi, pictured off the coast of Honduras in January 2020, came across Warhorse SCUBA after a New York police officer and fellow marathoner urged him to give the organization dedicated to helping wounded combat veterans suffering from PTSD, TBI and other disabilities a try. With all the stresses of daily life, Ceraldi said he "couldn't be happier" about the opportunity.

BOTTOM: Nick Ceraldi, pictured near a sunken ship, didn't know what to expect when diving in the Caribbean Sea off the coast of Honduras. He said the experience helped him focus on his breathing, allowing his mind to relax while underwater. When diving, Ceraldi found, the main focus is to breathe until it becomes "soothing to not have a care in the world."

PHOTO BY SHARON PATTERSON



-Changing'

A Marine and VFW life member from New York plunged into the depths of the sea to cope with the stresses of daily life. It became a revelation.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Nick Ceraldi was in limbo last December. At 45, he found himself in between jobs when a New Jersey-based scuba diving organization dropped its safety net and reeled him into the opportunity of a lifetime.

It began when Ceraldi, a Marine who deployed as a radio operator with Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, during *Operation Desert Storm* and *Operation United Shield* between 1993 and 1997, received disheartening news.

The San Jose Police Department in California had called and rejected his application after five months of training to become a police officer.

Ceraldi's failed attempt at trading in an engineering job in Peekskill, N.Y., and relocating his family to California, where he met his wife while stationed at Camp Pendleton in the 1990s, soon uncorked a slew of emotions that grew darker and darker.

"I was in one hell of a state of depression after spending five months working my tail off to not get it," said Ceraldi, a life member of the VFW Department of New York. "It really crushed me because all throughout the process, they had told me I was a shoe-in. Imagine being told that, and then you get that gut-wrenching call."

In need of support, he shared the sad news on Facebook with his friends and family. And in less than an hour, comments laden with support poured under his post and filled his inbox.

Then Ceraldi's phone rang, and a familiar voice came on. It was Sharon Patterson, the vice president of Warhorse SCUBA.

'PERFECTLY TIMED'

Ceraldi was first introduced to Warhorse SCUBA while challenging himself earlier in 2019 to complete the New York City marathon, about 50 miles south of Peekskill.

Ceraldi met a New York Police Department officer and fellow marathoner named Erin Elizabeth, who urged him to give the four-year-old organization dedicated to helping wounded combat veterans suffering from PTSD, TBI and other disabilities a try.

"After the marathon, I started driving two hours into New Jersey once a week to take the scuba diving classes," Ceraldi said. "They offered me a scholarship to cover the cost of certification, and that's how I met Sharon, who soon friend-requested me on Facebook."

Patterson's phone call in December changed everything, Ceraldi noted.

"She told me that she was sorry I hadn't gotten the

PHOTO BY SHARON PATTERSON

job, seeing as I had worked really hard to get it,” Ceraldi said. “Then she followed that up by asking me what I was doing the week of Jan. 19.”

Ceraldi shrugged at the question and asked why.

Patterson didn’t answer. She simply asked another question, and then another.

“She asked if I had a valid passport, and would I like to go on an all-expenses paid trip to Utila, Honduras,” Ceraldi said. “It’s not bad enough I try my best to get through each day, struggling to pay my bills, and suddenly this nonprofit organization swoops in and puts a smile back on my face.”

But Ceraldi didn’t smile at first. He cried, which is something he doesn’t do often. The timing of the phone call, he figured, was a godsend.

“It was like somebody up above was writing a book and decided, ‘This is what we’re going to do for this guy, for his disappointment,’” Ceraldi said. “It was so perfectly timed.”

‘I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT’

On Jan. 19, 2020, Ceraldi joined Patterson, six wounded combat veterans and Warhorse SCUBA founder John M. Gannaio, a veteran and Brick Township, N.J., police officer, on the trip to the island of Utila in Honduras.

The week-long trip consisted of two hour-long sessions of scuba diving per day, which quickly became a revelation for Ceraldi, who had never dived into the depths of the sea.

“I didn’t know what to expect, but I can say now that the experience was life-changing,” Ceraldi said. “Once you’re underwater and focusing on your breathing, your mind doesn’t wander off into things like paying bills or your time at work. Your life depends on your focus to remain calm, relaxed and breathing. Not only does it make your air source last longer, but it becomes soothing to not have a care in the world.”

The Marine also paralleled scuba diving with aspects of the military, from the camaraderie among his companions to the unwritten rules of diving.

“There were a couple of other veterans from other branches, but there were three or four other Marines like me,” he said.

“It was like somebody up above was writing a book and decided, ‘This is what we’re going to do for this guy, for his disappointment.’ It was so perfectly timed.”

Nick Ceraldi, VFW Department of New York life member



Nick Ceraldi, left, converses with fellow Marine Johnny Granados in Mogadishu, Somalia, during Operation United Shield in March 1995.

“And it was like family again. I felt like I was back in my unit again — with my brothers.”

When diving, Ceraldi had the benefit of being partnered with Gannaio, who showed the other veterans the benefits of scuba diving. Under his guidance, the crew ate, slept and toured the island of Utila, one of the Bay Islands of Honduras, north of the mainland.

“What he’s done for myself and other veterans is just amazing,” Ceraldi said. “For me, personally, he taught me that scuba diving is about making sure you buddy-up with someone. It’s very military-esque in concept. When you go out into combat, you need your buddy to check on you the way you’re checking on them. John and I really hit it off by being partners in that way.”

After the trip, Ceraldi was compelled to return to his engineering job through The Local Union No. 3 in Westchester County. He returned to his family, challenging himself with obstacles to overcome.

The trip had given him a renewed sense of self, a taste of adrenaline and adventure.

“It’s hard to put into words unless you’ve experienced it as a veteran,” Ceraldi said. “Once I got back, I tried my best to spread the word. This is one of the best things a veteran can do to unwind the mind.”

Despite the ongoing pandemic affecting people worldwide, Ceraldi is expected to join Warhorse SCUBA again in late November for a trip to the Bahamas, where he’ll live aboard a boat with other veterans for a week-long scuba diving retreat.

“With the stresses lately working in New York City, the epicenter of this pandemic, another scuba diving trip couldn’t come at a better time,” Ceraldi said. “I feel very blessed and extremely grateful to my Warhorse SCUBA family.”

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Army 1st Lt. Shaye Haver participates in 2015 during the Florida phase at the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga. Haver, now a captain, was one of the first two women to graduate — along with Army Capt. Kristen Griest — from the school in 2015 and earn the coveted Ranger tab.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAYE HAVER



More than 50 women have graduated from the Army's grueling Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga. One recent graduate said it's possible for other women to do the same, but they'll have to work hard to earn their Ranger tab.

BY JIM SERVI

Only the best get the opportunity to wear the coveted Ranger tab proudly on their uniform, and prior to 2015, this opportunity was only available to men.

That all changed with a message that came out from the Army in 2014, saying that women would get the opportunity to attend the famed Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga., on a trial basis.

One of the two women who became the Army's first female Rangers in 2015 was Shaye Haver. As an Army first lieutenant, Haver, now a captain, was an aviation officer flying Apache helicopters and leading a platoon at Fort Carson, Colo., when a serendipitous meeting with one of the deputy commanding generals occurred.

"When the message came out opening Ranger School up to females, I thought, 'Wow, that's really great, good luck to

those girls,' never thinking that I would have the opportunity," Haver said.

"I was getting ready and trying to prove myself at our annual gunnery when my battalion commander, who was such a great advocate, introduced me to the deputy commanding general, giving a little about my background."

Haver recalled that the deputy commanding general said, "You're a great athlete" and asked her if she wanted to attend Ranger School.

"I was blown away," Haver said.

As the deputy commanding general departed, her battalion commander smiled and said, "You know that wasn't a joke. You're going to be trying out."

DARBY, MOUNTAIN, FLORIDA

Ranger School is said to be one of the most rigorous courses that the military has to offer. With three phases, Ranger

School is a 62-day ordeal that focuses on leadership and small unit tactics.

The first phase is called Darby — focused on squad-level battle drills, patrolling and other field craft. The second phase is named Mountain — testing a student's ability to endure in a rugged environment and execute platoon level combat operations. The third and final phase is Florida — the culmination where students lead patrols through a complex scenario amid swampy muck and heat.

However, before students even get that far, they have to make it through the Ranger Assessment Phase, also known as RAP. Among other challenging requirements, students must pass the Ranger Physical Fitness Test. It includes a five-mile run in under 40 minutes, a 12-mile ruck march with all their gear in under three hours, and the day and night land navigation course during RAP.

Only then are they allowed to enter the remaining phases where they will spend the next two months — more if they recycle — sleeping an average of less than four hours per day while consuming minimal meals and training for upwards of 20 hours per day.

Although it is a U.S. Army course, it is open to all U.S. military services as well as selected individuals from countries allied with the United States.

‘DO YOUR 49 PUSH-UPS’

In 2014, the 4th Infantry Division, to which Haver was assigned, began recruiting top female candidates. Together, those selected trained and competed for the top slot on the order of merit list (OML). Haver had just arrived at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., excited at the opportunity to fire hellfire missiles for the first time when she got the call.

“Pack your bags,” her battalion commander said. “You have to leave tomorrow. You were selected for the No. 1 slot to attend Ranger School for 4th ID.”

A short time later, she reported to the National Guard Pre-Ranger course and emerged as one of the 19 women approved for Ranger School.

The excitement soon wore off,

replaced by disappointment during the first phase. During Darby, Haver received a no-go and would have to recycle. Put on the spot, she had a choice: go to the board, try to continue and recycle or call it quits.

As she contemplated her decision, two thoughts went through her mind.

“If I left, I would have never gotten that opportunity again, and if I didn’t make it through, females might never have gotten the opportunity again,” Haver recalled.

At that point, she steeled her resolve and told the board she would do anything to stay.

“We don’t think you can make it through,” the board members responded frankly.

The other woman who would join Haver as the Army’s first female Ranger, Army Capt. Kristen Griest, stood before the board along with Haver as her battle buddy. Both women replied in unison that given the opportunity, they would make it through.

“Prove it,” the board challenged. “Do your 49 push-ups right here.”

Both got down and muscled their way through the minimum number of push-ups to continue through Ranger School. They would start over at Day One.

“Going through that ignited a new fire and passion in me,” Haver said. “I knew it was my last chance, and I went from asking myself, ‘Can I do this?’ to telling myself that I am going to do it.”

MORE THAN 50 WOMEN HAVE GRADUATED

The rest is history. On Aug. 21, 2015, then-1st Lt. Shaye Haver and Capt. Kristen Griest became the first women to graduate from Ranger School. Their graduation set the stage for others to follow.

Since that day in 2015, more than 50 women have graduated from Ranger School. Sgt. 1st Class Janina Simmons was a senior drill sergeant leader at the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy at Fort Jackson, S.C., when she got the opportunity. Simmons jumped at the prospect.

“I wanted to attempt the most challenging school the Army had to offer,” Simmons said. “I was curious to know if I could step out of my comfort zone and not only attempt but achieve the unimaginable.”

And she did just that, becoming the first African American woman to graduate the elite school. Simmons got through the rigorous course in only 62 days without recycling a single phase, which an estimated 34 percent of Ranger



U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. NIKAYLA SHODEEN

Army Capt. Kristen Griest (center) carries another trainee on April 20, 2015, during a course at the Army’s Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga. After graduating from Ranger School, Griest became the Army’s first female infantry officer on April 7, 2017, when she took command of B Co., 2nd Bn., 505th Inf., 82nd Abn. Div.

graduates do. Keep in mind that this 34 percent is only from the candidates that remain, since 50-60 percent of those who start Ranger School never finish. Some classes have less than 25 percent graduate.

“Mountain phase was the most challenging part of Ranger School,” Simmons acknowledged, saying that when things got tough, she looked to T.D. Jakes, Oprah Winfrey and David Goggins for inspiration.

Mountain phase, she said, was when the hunger and sleep deprivation started to add up. Others who have participated say this phase also is when the likelihood of injuries increases as candidates operate in more rugged terrain. Plus, they have several weeks in front of them, and motivation can wane.

‘I NEVER FELT SO ACCOMPLISHED’

“Graduation day at Victory Pond was the most rewarding part,” Simmons said. “I have never felt so accomplished.”

Simmons and the other 50 female graduates have become inspirations to other aspiring female Rangers, with a class earlier this year graduating five female Rangers and the first female Ranger now serving with the 75th Ranger Regiment.

“I’d like to let other women know that it is possible, and if you work for it, you can achieve it,” Simmons said, “but you need to come in with the mindset that it will not be handed to you, and you have to fight.”

That is exactly what Sgt. 1st Class Simmons is continuing to do. She is currently deployed to Qatar supporting operations in the Middle East as a platoon sergeant in an air defense artillery battery. Next, she plans to finish her bachelor’s degree and become a first sergeant.

Eventually, Simmons wants to become the Sergeant Major of the Army, and having Ranger School on her resume will certainly help that. Although she’s looking ahead to big goals in her career, Simmons confessed that “Ranger School made me appreciate the little things more.”

Like Simmons, Haver instantly put her new skills to work as an infantry officer. Beginning in 2016, women were authorized to serve in combat specialties, such as combat engineer, cavalry scout or in the infantry for the first time.

Haver took command of C Co., 1st Bn., 508th Inf., 82nd Abn. Div., and then took command of the Battalion Headquarters Company under the same famed division, this time deploying to Afghanistan.

“It was a wonderful opportunity,” Haver said. “With an HHC (Headquarters and Headquarter Company), we had mortars, and our medics worked throughout Afghanistan with different units,



Army Sgt. 1st Class Janina Simmons (standing in uniform) gathers with friends, family and members of the Columbus Army Recruiting Battalion in April 2019 to celebrate Simmons' graduation from the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga. Simmons is the first African American woman to successfully complete the rigorous 62-day training course at the school.

so we got to interact with a lot of different people. Plus, we were the theater response force, so we got to see a lot of the country.”

Now, Haver is heading for another unique assignment with The Old Guard at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. After that, she wants to get back to being light infantry with either the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) or the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Italy.

Haver expressed why she choose infantry over aviation following Ranger School graduation.

“In the infantry, you are managing people rather than a machine,” she said. “Ever since I graduated from West Point, that is what I’ve been looking for. People are what really matters.”

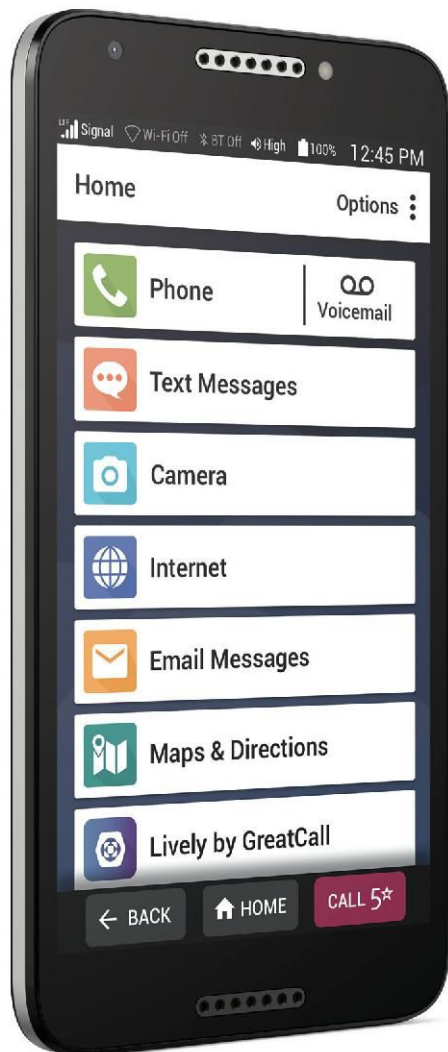
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Jim Servi is a member of VFW Post 10203 in Hamburg, Wis. A veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Servi is a frequent contributor to VFW magazine.

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‘Huge VFW Supporter’ Starts Radio Show for Veterans

A Vietnam War veteran and career broadcaster started producing the Cup of Joe Radio show earlier this year. The VFW member aims to help and support veterans, troops and their families through music and informational programing.

BY DAVE SPIVA



Mike Spotswood, producer of Cup of Joe Radio, and his wife, Irene, record an episode of the show in their mobile studio while traveling in Maine. Spotswood, a member of VFW Post 2420 in Lake Wales, Fla., said he believes it's "important" to give veterans' service organizations, such as the VFW, a platform on his show.

Every week, Mike Spotswood enters his home studio in Lakes Wales, Fla., or his portable studio to produce a two-hour-long radio show with his wife, Irene, and colleague, Doug Bradley.

Together, they host a show called Cup of Joe Radio which started airing in February. Their mission, they say, is to provide comfort to those who served on deployments and give much-needed information to the veterans' community.

"My heart has always been in radio," said Spotswood, a member of VFW Post 2420 in Lake Wales. "We are in the latter part of our lives, and all we want to do is help veterans."

Spotswood, who was a force reconnaissance Marine, and Bradley, a former soldier, served tours in the Vietnam War and later become correspondents

with the American Forces Network. Spotswood also worked at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa.

Spotswood said that after he retired, he decided that he wanted to start a radio show, receiving help from his wife and others he had met during his career in media.

Cup of Joe Radio started on WREZ 106.3 FM in Rochester, N.Y., and currently airs from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. every Friday. Cup of Joe Radio also is available on www.tunein.com for listeners around the world.

ADDING PARTNER IS 'GOOD NEWS'

In August, Cup of Joe Radio announced it partnered with Wreaths Across America Radio, an internet streaming platform. Each week, Wreaths Across America Radio now airs Cup of Joe

Radio. (See sidebar for more information on Wreaths Across America Radio.)

Spotswood said this is "good news" for Cup of Joe Radio. He said that the addition of the new platform expands the show's reach so more listeners can be entertained by music and interviews on the program.

"And it's important to tell our listeners about veterans' service organizations such as the VFW," Spotswood said. "A lot of veterans don't understand that our organizations are where our lobbying power in Washington is. Veterans need to realize that they need to join these organizations, and we are trying to do that through our radio program."

SPREADING VFW'S MESSAGE

Every Friday, Cup of Joe Radio allows the VFW to promote the organizations

Wreaths Across America Radio, founded in 2014, is an online platform that offers its listeners patriotic music and content concerning troops, veterans and their families around the world.



Wreaths Across America, a nonprofit organization, started the internet radio stream. The nonprofit was founded in 2007 and continues to hold annual wreath-laying ceremonies in December at Arlington National Cemetery and almost 1,500 veterans' cemeteries in the U.S. and overseas.

The organization was founded by Morrill Worcester, owner of the Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, Maine. In 1992, Worcester began donating wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

For more information on Wreaths Across America Radio and where to listen, visit www.wreathsacrossamerica.org/radio.

“It’s important to tell our listeners about veterans’ service organizations such as the VFW.”

— Mike Spotswood

to its listeners. VFW Washington Office Communications and Public Affairs Director Terrence Hayes said you can hear him regularly on the show.

“The guys at Cup of Joe Radio give me the opportunity to talk about the hot topics going on within the Veterans of Foreign Wars,” Hayes said. “The time on the show allows us to educate the audience about VFW and its programs.”

Hayes said that Spotswood, as well as the other contributors to Cup of Joe Radio, is a “huge VFW supporter” and helps out the organization with free airtime on the show each week.

“They actually contacted us to see if we were interested in being on the show,” Hayes said. “Since their audience is a lot of service members and veterans, they thought it was fitting to have us offer VFW’s perspective. They do this show on their dime, and the Cup of Joe Radio folks truly care about the military and the veteran community.” ★

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VFW Sponsors ‘Prestigious’ Award for Top Army School Graduates

The *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* recognizes the top graduate of the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Sponsoring the award gives VFW the opportunity to recognize and support active-duty troops.

BY DAVE SPIVA

PHOTO BY MARK WIGGINS/CGSS FOUNDATION



Army Col. Scott Green, director of the Command and General Staff School (CGSS), presents the VFW-sponsored *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* to Maj. Sarah Gerstein during an awards ceremony on June 11 in the Marshall Lecture Hall at the Lewis and Clark Center in Fort Leavenworth, Kan. *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* recipients, such as Gerstein, are recognized for being the most distinguished graduates in the CGSS officer course class.

An Army intelligence officer received this year’s coveted VFW-sponsored *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* on June 11 during an awards ceremony at the Lewis and Clark Center in Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

Army Maj. Sarah Gerstein earned the award for being the top graduate of the Command and General Staff School (CGSS), which features a curriculum focused on leadership training for officers.

After graduating from CGSS earlier this year, Gerstein was assigned as the executive officer of the 741st Military Intelligence Battalion at Fort Meade, Md.

Each year, VFW funds the CGSS’s *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* through the CGSS Foundation. Due to this year’s COVID-19 restrictions, CGSS had to con-

duct a smaller awards ceremony that included a presentation of the *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* at Fort Leavenworth. Other students and guests were not allowed to be present at the ceremony.

The next day’s graduation ceremony also had to be conducted online through a virtual ceremony. Gerstein was recognized during the ceremony by Army Lt. Col. Patrick VanKirk, an instructor at CGSS. He said that this year’s class was “encouraged and challenged” to compete for the “prestigious” *Gen. George C. Marshall Award*.

“Although there is only one winner,” VanKirk said, “those who competed for the award are commended for stepping up to the challenge.”

VFW Programs Director Lynn Rolf, a former Army officer, said supporting the

WWII’S ‘ARCHITECT OF VICTORY’

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Army Gen. George C. Marshall as the Army Chief of Staff in 1939 at the beginning of World War II in



DOO PHOTO

Europe. Marshall, born on Dec. 31, 1880, in Uniontown, Pa., was later appointed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1942. The Army general, described by President Harry Truman as the “architect of victory” in World War II, is credited for building up America’s defenses and preparing the Army for action in Europe.

Former Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall

Later in life, Marshall served as the 50th Secretary of Defense under Truman from 1947 to 1949. His appointment, much like that of retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis to the same post in 2017, required a special congressional waiver. The *National Security Act* requires a seven-year waiting period before military personnel can assume the role of Secretary of Defense.

Marshall also was the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 for his role in developing the European Recovery Program, also known as “The Marshall Plan.” The former Defense secretary died on Oct. 16, 1959, in Washington, D.C. He is interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Information from history.defense.gov.

award is just another way VFW shows appreciation for America’s troops.

“Giving recognition to our future leaders through the *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* is the least we can do,” Rolf said. “VFW congratulates Maj. Gerstein for being this year’s top graduate.”

VFW, which has funded the *Gen. George C. Marshall Award* since 2018, will do so again in 2021.

EMAIL dsplva@vfw.org

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‘VFW was a Pheno

PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL LEBEAU



PHOTO COURTESY OF CUP OF JOE RADIO

VFW's Department of Massachusetts organized Posts across the state to help the governor's COVID-19 Command Center in a time of need.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

The call came in on a hectic Saturday morning in March. Bill LeBeau, the adjutant general for the VFW Department of Massachusetts, didn't recognize the number and considered letting it ring a few times.

Then he answered the call.

A woman's voice came on and identified herself as Mary Joyce, a member of Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker's COVID-19 Command Center.

"It was out of nowhere," LeBeau recalled. "I picked up, Mary Joyce introduced herself while literally sitting in on a meeting, and asked if we had Posts willing to let them use the parking lot to store medical equipment."

Joyce explained that there was an immense statewide shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) for doc-

tors, nurses and first responders helping fight COVID-19, which was sweeping through Massachusetts at a rapid rate.

At the time of the phone call between LeBeau and Joyce on March 21, the Command Center had acquired the services of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and the state's National Guard in collecting and supplying additional PPE across the state.

However, MEMA and the National Guard needed a middleman, another organization to help store and protect small PPE contributions arriving from individual donors, companies and organizations.

"They realized that they could get immediate donations, but they had trouble with geography and warehousing for small amounts at a time," LeBeau said. "Because of all the work that we do, the Command Center thought of us first."

Receiving VFW Department Commander Russell K. Jobe's blessing, LeBeau agreed on behalf of the VFW to help the Command Center in any way it could.

"Now the Command Center's idea was to collect bins and store them in our parking lots, but that was a bad idea because it ran the risk of people stealing them," LeBeau said. "Instead, I talked to our line officers, and we decided it made more sense to offer our buildings, provided the Posts agreed."

LeBeau sat in his home in Boston and began calling Posts around the state.

In less than two hours after accepting Joyce's proposal, LeBeau secured agreements from 10 local Posts. And by Monday morning, that number skyrocketed to 31 Posts, with more than 40 volunteers securing drop-off sites on

menal Partner'

PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL LEBEAU



ABOVE: Trucks belonging to the Massachusetts National Guard collect PPE products from VFW Boston Police Post 1018 in Dorchester, Mass., in April.

LEFT: Bill LeBeau (left), VFW Department of Massachusetts adjutant and Post 7556 commander, stands alongside Post member Paul Lemerise and two members of the Massachusetts National Guard outside of Post 7556 in Rochdale, Mass., on April 14.

behalf of MEMA and coordinating pickups by the National Guard.

“What made me proud was that not a single Post asked what we as an organization were going to get out of this,” LeBeau said. “In every conversation I had, there was only one question asked — when do we start?”

Tasked with directing private donors to their nearest VFW Post, LeBeau planned on strategically spreading drop-off centers across all 10 VFW Districts in the state, identifying at least three Posts per District.

“It was efficient to do it this way,” LeBeau said. “It made it easier on MEMA for us to direct the donors to their nearest Post via one or two VFW members who were on call. Then at a later time, our Posts would notify the National Guard when they had enough PPE to pick up.”

From March through June, the VFW provided the only pipeline linking small MEMA-organized donations to the National Guard on behalf of the Command Center. The Department of

Massachusetts secured more than 430 donations for the National Guard to pick up during that time, according to MEMA statistics provided to Joyce at the Command Center.

“Best cold call I ever made,” Joyce said. “The VFW was a phenomenal partner, and you could see how bad they wanted to help Massachusetts in its time of need. They were great throughout this process and always asked if they could do more.”

Although donations and distributions have slowed in recent months, Massachusetts VFW members continue to assist the governor’s COVID-19 Command Center in storing small PPE donations for distribution if needed.

“We don’t know when all this will end, but we are always here to assist,” LeBeau said of the department’s efforts. “The way we have responded is what makes me most proud. It’s inspiring to be part of an organization that jumps at the opportunity to serve their communities without a moment’s hesitation.”

✉ irodriguez@vfw.org

VFW Department of Massachusetts built a network of local Posts across the state to work with the governor’s COVID-19 Command Center. Below is a list of the 30 Posts involved in this endeavor:

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20 Junction Street
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VFW Post 3402
1034 Pond Street
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95 Essex Street
Whitman

VFW Post 523
10 Allen Street
Clinton

VFW Post 5663
20 Federal Hill Road
Oxford

VFW Post 1526
123 Holliston Street
Medway

VFW Post 1788
22 Church Street
Rockland

VFW Post 6539
67 West Prescott Street
Westford

VFW Post 6556
21 Taylor Street
Littleton

VFW Post 1524
95 Derby Street
Salem

VFW Post 1385
13 Cross Road
Uxbridge

VFW Post 6538
491A Main Street
Townsend

VFW Post 872
151 Point Grove Road
Southwick

VFW Post 7352
63 Veterans Way
Springfield

VFW Post 8006
18 Meadow Street
Florence

VFW Post 8503
10 Water Street
Shelburne Falls

VFW Post 3291
55 Leighton Street
Pepperell

VFW Post 662
190 Plain Street
Lowell

VFW Post 2331
311 Pleasant Street
Ashland

VFW Post 6643
89 Middleboro Road
Freetown

VFW Post 529
351 Summer Street
Somerville

VFW Post 1822
22 Seven Hills Road
Plymouth

VFW Post 1046
284 N. Quincy Street
Brockton

VFW Post 448
174 Elm Street
Pittsfield

VFW Post 8349
26 River Street
Methuen

VFW Post 4524
61 Lucia Avenue
Revere

VFW Post 7556
713 Pleasant Street
Rochdale

VFW Post 5594
15 Milford Street
Upton

VFW Post 5988
180 Shore Road
Buzzards Bay

This is an excerpt from Brutal Battles of Vietnam: America's Deadliest Days 1965-1972, VFW's official account of the most lethal battles of the eight-year war. Praised by veterans who served in Vietnam, as well as military historians for its research and first-hand accounts, Brutal Battles commemorates the war's 50th anniversary and the troops who fought it. Make it part of your library.

DARING POW RAID AT SON TAY

On Nov. 21, 1970, top officials in Washington held their breath as a joint U.S. Army-Air Force **rescue team attempted to free U.S. POWs** from captivity in North Vietnam.

BY AL HEMINGWAY

“We are going to rescue 70 American prisoners of war, maybe more, from a camp called Son Tay,” announced Col. Arthur “Bull” Simons, combat veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam. “You are to let nothing interfere with this operation. Our mission is to rescue prisoners, not to take prisoners. If there’s been a leak, we’ll know it as soon as the second or third chopper sets down... We’ll make them pay for every foot.”

When Simons finished his speech, the room fell silent for a brief moment. Then

every man applauded. The raid on Son Tay Prison Camp — deep within North Vietnam — was under way.

In May 1970, two POW camps were identified by the Interagency Prisoner of War Intelligence Committee (IPWIC). This committee, formed in 1967, was responsible for identifying POWs and the camps they were interned in and to veer bombing missions away from those areas.

The two camps were Ap Lo, about 30 miles west of Hanoi, and Son Tay, 23 miles from North Vietnam’s capital, situated at the junction of the Song Con and Red Rivers. It was determined that

Son Tay was being enlarged because of the increased activity at the camp. Intelligence also confirmed that 55 POWs were being confined at Son Tay. Photo reconnaissance discovered the letters SAR (Search and Rescue), apparently spelled out by the prisoner’s laundry, and an arrow with the number 8, indicating the distance the men had to travel to the fields they worked in.

On May 25, IPWIC briefed Army Gen. Earle Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), on a tentative plan to free the POWs at Son Tay. By 1970, the war was in its fifth year. Public sup-

Surprise at Son Tay by Ronald Wong. On Nov. 21, 1970, the Army Special Forces pulled off a perfectly executed raid on the Son Tay POW Camp in North Vietnam. Not a single American was killed. But unknown to the would-be rescuers, the U.S. prisoners had been moved.



VFW FILE PHOTO

Seated in the cabin of a C-130, Capt. Richard Meadows and his 14-man assault group "Blueboy" prepare for the coming raid during a training exercise in September 1970.

burn, began the planning stage of the operation. Blackburn, no stranger to special operations, was the special assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities. He conceived the idea for the raid and then appointed a panel.

Reconnaissance photos taken by SR-71 "Blackbirds" revealed that Son Tay "was active." The camp itself was in the open and surrounded by rice paddies. In close proximity was the 12th North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment totaling approximately 12,000 troops. Also nearby was an artillery school, a supply depot and an air defense installation.

Five hundred yards south was another compound called the "secondary school," which was an administration center housing 45 guards. To make matters more difficult, Phuc Yen Air Base was only 20 miles northeast of Son Tay. It was evident that the raid would have to be executed swiftly. If not, the Communists could have planes in the air and a reactionary force at the camp within minutes.

Son Tay itself was small and was situated amid 40-foot trees to obstruct the view. Only one power and telephone line entered it. The POWs were kept in four large buildings in the main compound. Three observation towers and a seven-foot wall encompassed the camp. Because of its diminutive size, only one chopper could land within the walls. The remainder would have to touch down

outside the compound.

Another problem the planning group had to consider was the weather. The heavy monsoon downpours prohibited the raid until late fall. Finally, November was selected because the moon would be high enough over the horizon for good visibility, but low enough to obscure the enemy's vision.

OPERATION IVORY COAST

With the planning stage completed, the next phase of the raid, called Ivory Coast, was ready to swing into action. Air Force Brig. Gen. Leroy J. "Roy" Manor, a stickler for organization, led the group. The National Security Agency (NSA) tracked the NVA air defense systems and artillery units nearby. Also, in addition to the Blackbirds, unmanned Buffalo Hunter "Drones" flew over the camp as well, although they had to cease flying because many feared that the NVA would spot them.

In July, an SR-71 photo recon mission depicted "less active than usual" activity in the camp. On Oct. 3, Son Tay showed very little signs of life. However, flights over Dong Hoi, an NVA port and base southeast of Son Tay, were picking up increased activity. The planners were scratching their heads. Had the POWs been moved? Had the NVA picked up signs that a raid was imminent?

In fact, the POWs had been relocated to Dong Hoi July 14, but not for the

port was waning, and a daring rescue of POWs would be a much-needed morale booster militarily; not to mention a political victory for President Richard M. Nixon who was under fire for his recent incursion into Cambodia.

OPERATION POLAR CIRCLE

Wheeler granted the request. Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, the new JCS chairman, sat in on the meeting. The first phase of the plan, dubbed *Operation Polar Circle*, was approved.

On June 10, a 15-man group, headed by Army Brig. Gen. Donald D. Black-



ABOVE: A North Vietnamese photo taken after the raid shows the wreckage of HH-3E that carried the Blueboy assault team, *Banana 1*. The helicopter was destroyed by the team before they were extracted.



LEFT: An aerial view of the Son Tay prison camp shows prisoner housing within the walled area.

reasons the planners had anticipated. The Song Con River, where Son Tay was located, had begun to overflow its banks. So because of the flooding problem, the prisoners were transported to Dong Hoi.

OPERATION KINGPIN

Operation Kingpin, the final component of the raid, was approved by Nixon on Nov. 18. Next day, however, Adm. Moorer was notified that it was suspected that the POWs had been transferred. Unfortunately, the planners nixed the idea to move on Dong Hoi. Their reasoning was that the raiders had rehearsed on Son Tay all this time and changing to Dong Hoi at the last minute might cause catastrophic results.

On Nov. 21, 1970, at approximately 11:18 p.m., the Son Tay raiders, accompanied by C-130Es called Combat Talons, departed Udorn, Thailand, for the final phase of their mission. At the same time, the U.S. Navy began a huge carrier strike against North Vietnam to divert attention away from the raiding party.

As the group neared the prison, the two "Jolly Greens," dubbed "Apple 4"

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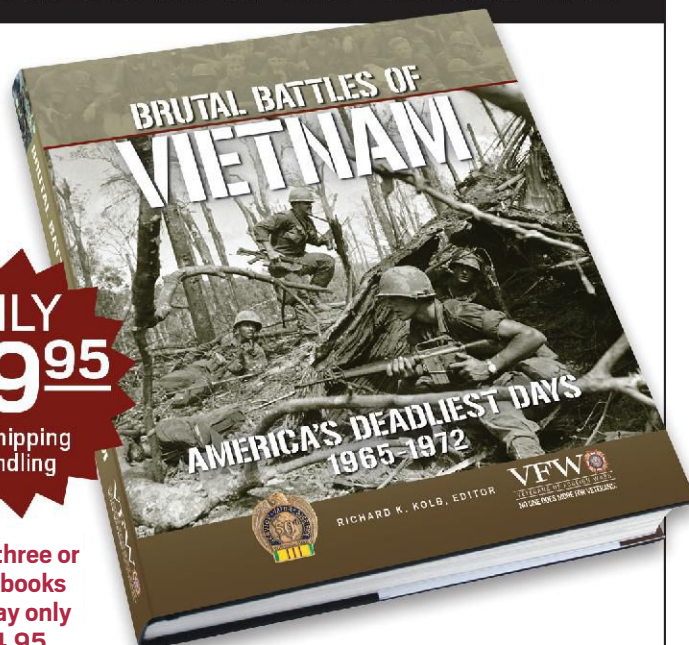
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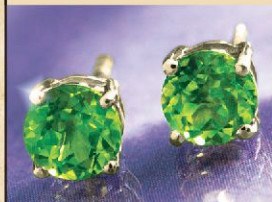
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and “Apple 5,” hovered at 1,500 feet to act as reserve flareships in the event the C-130s’ flares did not ignite. Suddenly, Col. Frederic M. “Marty” Donohue’s HH-53 helicopter, call sign “Apple 3,” developed trouble. Without warning, a yellow trouble light appeared signaling transmission problems.

Donohue calmly informed his co-pilot, Capt. Tom Waldron, to “ignore the SOB.” In a normal situation, Donohue would have landed. But this was no normal mission. “Apple 3” kept going. As Donohue’s chopper “floated” across Son Tay’s main compound, the door gunners let loose 4,000 rounds a minute from their mini-guns. The observation tower in the northwest section of the camp erupted into flames. With that, Donohue set down at his “holding point” in a rice paddy just outside the prison.

As Maj. Herb Kalen tried to negotiate a landing inside the compound, he almost lost control of his chopper, call sign “Banana 1,” that was carrying the assault group code-named “Blueboy.” The 40-foot trees that surrounded Son Tay were, in actuality, much larger. “One tree,” a pilot remembered, “must have been 150 feet tall . . . we tore into it like a big lawn mower. There was a tremendous vibration . . . and we were down.”

Luckily, only one person was injured; a crew chief suffered a broken ankle. Regaining his composure, Special Forces Capt. Richard Meadows scurried from the downed aircraft and said in a calm voice through his bullhorn: “We’re Americans. Keep your heads down. This is a rescue. Keep your heads down. We’re Americans. Get on the floor. We’ll be in your cells in a minute.”

No one answered back, though.

The raiders sprung into action immediately. Automatic weapons ripped into the guards. Other NVA, attempting to flee, were cut down as they tried to make their way through the east wall. Fourteen men entered the prison to rescue the POWs. However, to their disappointment, none were found.

FURIOUS FIREFIGHTS

As the raiders were neutralizing the compound, Lt. Col. John Allison’s helicopter, call sign “Apple 2,” with the “Redwine” group aboard, was heading toward Son Tay’s south wall. As his door gunners



On Dec. 4, 1970, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird presented Silver Stars to the Son Tay raiders at Ft. Bragg, N.C. Earlier, on Nov. 27, Col. Arthur Simons and Sgt. First Class Tyrone J. Adderly each received the Distinguished Service Cross at the White House.

fired their mini-guns on the guard towers, Allison wondered where “Apple 1” was. Code-named “Greenleaf,” it was carrying Simons. Allison put his HH-3 inside the compound and the Special Forces personnel streamed down the rear ramp.

Wasting no time, they blew the utility pole and set up a roadblock about 100 yards from the landing zone. A heated firefight ensued. Guards were “scurrying like mice” in an attempt to fire on the raiders. In the end, almost 50 NVA guards were killed at Son Tay.

“Apple 1,” piloted by Lt. Col. Warner A. Britton, was having troubles of its own. The chopper had veered off the mark and was 450 meters south of the prison and had erroneously landed at the “secondary school.” Simons knew it wasn’t Son Tay. The structures and terrain were different and, to everyone’s horror, it was no “secondary school”—it was a barracks filled with enemy soldiers—100 of whom were killed in five minutes.

As the chopper left, the raiders opened up with a barrage of automatic weapons. Capt. Udo Walther cut down four enemy soldiers and went from bay to bay

riddling their rooms with his CAR-15. Realizing their error, the group radioed “Apple 1” to return and pick up the raiders from their dilemma. Simons, meanwhile, jumped into a trench to await the return of Britton when an NVA leaped in the hole next to him. Terrified and wearing only his underwear, the Vietnamese froze. Simons pumped six shells from his .357 Magnum handgun into the trooper’s chest, killing him instantly.

Britton’s chopper quickly returned when he received the radio transmission that Simon’s group was in the wrong area. He flew back to Son Tay and deposited the remainder of the raiders there. Things were beginning to wind down. There was little resistance from the remaining guards. Meadows radioed to Lt. Col. Elliott P. “Bud” Sydnor, the head of the “Redwine” group on the raid, “negative items.” There were no POWs. They had been on the ground exactly 27 minutes. The Son Tay Raid was over.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Why had the raid on Son Tay failed? According to historian Dale Andrade: “The fact that initially the CIA, DIA and

NSA would all be involved sounded like a good idea. But, in reality, they only muddled the waters of the planning and got in each other's way."

Another important factor was the seemingly never-ending poor weather. That's why the POWs had been relocated from Son Tay in the first place; because of the rapidly rising waters near the camp. Even Manor wrote in his after-action report that "five years of typhoons moved into the area of North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Laos" in the months just prior to the raid.

What most did not know was that a top-secret "weather modification" experiment named *Operation Popeye* was responsible for some of the inclement weather. (Col. Keith Grimes, an Air Force meteorologist, was on the raid.) Aircraft had been dropping "cloud-seeding paraphernalia" in the region, and the missions over Laos had doubled in 1970.

"Why didn't top officials in the CIA and Air Force tell the JCS and the *Ivory Coast Task Force* about *Operation Popeye*?" wrote Dale Andrade. "That gap in the knowledge of the planners could have endangered not only the lives of

POWs in the area, but also the lives of the raiders."

After the raid, the NVA moved POWs from outlying POW camps to the Hanoi Hilton.

"What really stands out in my mind," remarked Special Forces Sgt. Terry Buckler, a member of the raiding party, "was the dedication the guys had. I was the youngest person on the raid, so I felt my life was unimportant. But the others had family. And they could have gotten off the mission at any time. But they stayed. That impressed me. These guys were willing to lay down their lives for their comrades. They were true professionals."



EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

15 CROSSES

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS

Adderly, Tyrone J.	Sgt. 1st Class
Kemmer, Thomas J.	Master Sgt.
Meadows, Richard J.	Capt.
Powell, Thomas E.	Staff Sgt.
Simons, Arthur D.	Col.
Sydnor, Elliott P.	Lt. Col.



AIR FORCE CROSS

Allison, John V.	Lt. Col.
Britton, Warner A.	Lt. Col.
Donohue, Frederic M.	Maj.
Kalen, Herbert D.	Maj.
Wright, Leroy M.	Tech. Sgt.



DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS: 4

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THE TOKTONG RIDGE RUNNERS

A narrow road overlooked by high ridges was the only way out for some 8,000 Marines surrounded and outnumbered at the Chosin Reservoir. It would take Medal of Honor-type courage and valor to overcome the odds.

BY RICHARD “DICK” CAMP

After the successful landings at Inchon in October 1950, U.S. and United Nations forces advanced rapidly into North Korea. That thrust ended at the Chosin Reservoir in late November when allied forces found themselves surrounded by 120,000 communist Chinese troops.

It was in this situation that Marine Lt. Col. Raymond G. Davis found himself when he received a summons to the command post near Yudam-ni in present-day North Korea. Davis, commanding officer of 1st Bn., 7th Marines, hustled in the bitter cold to meet his regimental commander, Marine Col. Homer L. Litzenberg.

“Litz sent for me,” Davis recalled, “and told me about the desperate situation.”

Litzenberg told Davis, “Ray, we’re in serious trouble. We’ve got to get the pass open and that company rescued.”

‘THE ONLY ROAD WAS BLOCKED’

Litzenberg was talking about North Korea’s Toktong Pass, a vital terrain feature that was absolutely essential to keep in Marine hands.

Toktong Pass is in rugged country south of the Chosin Reservoir, a man-made lake some 200 miles north of Seoul. Through the pass ran the only road connecting Yudam-ni, southwest of the lake where elements of three Marine regiments were located, with Hagaru-ri, about 10 miles east where the 3rd Bn., 1st Marines were guarding an airstrip, as well as the route to the port of Hungnam

on North Korea’s east coast, about 78 miles away.

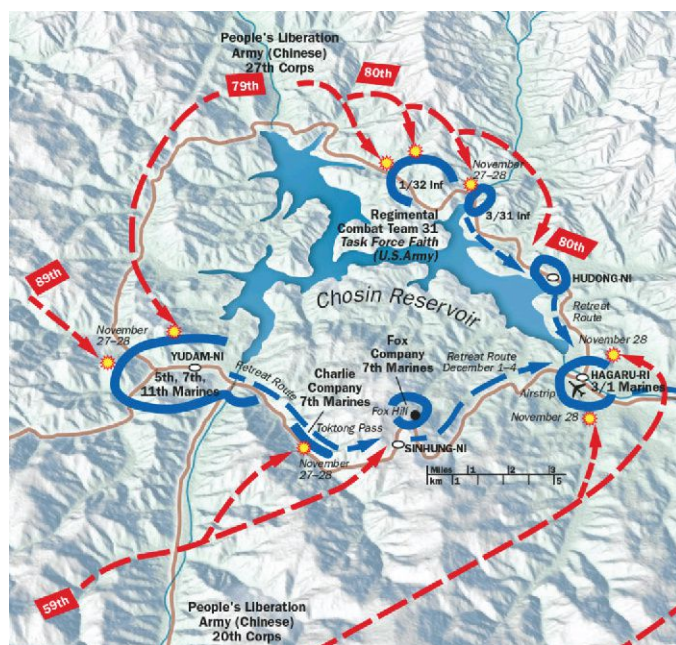
The fate of some 8,000 Marines rested with control of the ridges overlooking that route.

At the time, Fox Co., 2nd Bn., 7th Marines, held Toktong Pass. Capt. William E. “Bill” Barber, who commanded Fox Company, earned the Medal of Honor for leading his company’s six-day defense of the high ground. Litzenberg knew Barber and his Marines were in a perilous position.

“We were in a valley with five Chinese divisions around us,” Litzenberg said. “The only road was blocked. The pass was the key to the situation. Without that in our possession, we didn’t feel we could fight our way up the road.”

Litzenberg ended the conversation by telling Davis, “You have got to get to them. Come back here in 20 minutes with a plan.”

Davis knew that a road approach to



Elements of the 1st Marine Division and the Army’s 7th Infantry Division were in a perilous situation in late November 1950 at the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. Surrounded by 120,000 communist Chinese troops, they had to fight their way to Hagaru-ri at the southeast corner of the lake and then 78 miles east to the port of Hungnam.

Barber’s position was hopeless.

“Instead, I planned a bold, night cross-country march over the ridges to the high ground overlooking Fox Company’s position,” he said.

In effect, Davis’ battalion would have to march through knee-deep snow, in darkness, over treacherous mountain slopes and in temperatures registering 16 degrees below zero.

“We streamlined the battalion,”



Marine Lt. Col. Raymond G. Davis, joined by his wife and children, receives the Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman on Nov. 24, 1952, at the White House. Davis retired as a four-star general in 1972 after 33 years in the Corps.

Davis explained, “leaving all vehicles, all wounded and disabled, six of my heavy mortars, and heavy machine guns, all supplies and equipment not carried by the troops.

“Riflemen carried a full belt and two bandoleers of ammunition. Gun crews were doubled up, ammunition was strapped to litters, men carried a spare mortar round in their big parka pockets and some carried extra belts of machine gun bullets. We carried one hand-crank ANGRC-9 radio, because our battery-powered sets were dead, with rare exceptions.”

Davis briefed Litzenberg, who with characteristic bluntness growled, “Plan approved, get going!”

‘ABSOLUTELY NUMB WITH THE COLD’

The lead platoon moved out, followed by a single file of men that formed a column half a mile long. The difficult advance in knee-deep snow forced the rotation of the exhausted men. The newly formed path froze and became ice-glazed. The treacherous footing caused serious falls among the heavily loaded men and made it difficult to climb the snow-covered slopes.

The head of the column needed a direction to guide on.

“At one point,” Davis said, “I got myself

all hunched down in an abandoned Chinese hole with my map, compass and flashlight. Naturally, we didn’t want the enemy to know we were there, so before I turned on the flashlight, I made sure I was tucked in under a poncho.”

Davis added that he then got oriented to the azimuth in relation to the next hill mass, turned off the light and climbed out.

“The three company commanders were standing there shivering, waiting for orders — and suddenly I couldn’t recall what I had done down in the hole,” he said. “The temperature was so severe that I found it difficult to think.”

He had to repeat the process, this time with another officer.

“Everybody had to repeat back to you two or three times to be sure of what was supposed to happen,” Davis explained. “We were absolutely numb with the cold. It was hard to believe.”

Company B’s men were so numb from the cold that their commander had them jog in place to get their blood flowing. At one point, Davis sensed the column was going off course.

“I passed the word to stop the column to get everyone back in line,” he said. “No response.”

He sent his runner forward, and still nothing happened. In desperation, Davis

left the trail with his radio operator and beat a parallel track toward the head of the column.

“We couldn’t believe it,” recalled a veteran of the battle. “Here was Col. Davis going up and down the column. I was in good shape, and I was dying.”

As Davis pressed forward, he found out why the men had not reacted to his orders — with parka hoods tied tightly around their ice-covered faces, they simply could not hear.

‘FUNCTIONING NOW ON INSTINCT’

Davis rallied his exhausted Marines and led them on Dec. 1 in an assault on Hill 1520, about three miles from Yudam-ni near the southwest corner of the Chosin Reservoir. After capturing it, Davis was shown several Chinese who had frozen to death. One was totally frozen, except for his eyes, which showed only a flicker of movement. The capture of the hill had been so debilitating that he called a halt.

As the combat-induced adrenaline rush wore off, the Leathernecks were completely spent after five exhausting hours on the move. Davis found one platoon completely immobile.

“It struck me that they were all in a state of a coma,” he said. “We had to shake them physically to get them moving. The men had long passed the point of exhaustion. They were functioning now on instinct.”

Two hours later, at first light, the battalion moved out toward its final objective: high ground overlooking Barber’s position. The Chinese opened fire with long-range small-arms fire from four directions, but the Marines advanced through it and took the objective.

“We had sustained a dozen casualties, including three dead, in the firefight,” Davis recalled. “We buried the latter in the snow and brought the wounded along on stretchers and canvas fold-up litters. We had no choice but to leave the dead behind.”

As Davis reached the crest of a hill, he

THE CHOSIN 17

A total of 17 U.S. troops received the Medal of Honor for their actions during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

Marine Capt. William Barber
 Marine Pfc. William Baugh*
 Marine Pvt. Hector Cafferata Jr.
 Marine Staff Sgt. Robert Kennemore
 Marine Maj. Reginald Meyers
 Marine Capt. Carl Sitter
 Marine Sgt. James Johnson*
 Marine 1st Lt. Frank Mitchell*
 Army Lt. Col. John Page*
 Navy Lt. (jg) Thomas Hudner
 Marine Sgt. James Poynter*
 Marine Cpl. Lee Phillips*
 Marine Lt. Col. Raymond Davis
 Marine Staff Sgt. Archie Van Winkle
 Marine 2nd Lt. Robert Reem*
 Marine Staff Sgt. William Windrich*
 Army Lt. Col. Don Faith Jr.*

*received posthumously

U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO



Marine Gen. Raymond G. Davis, who commanded 1st Bn., 7th Marines at the Chosin Reservoir, led his battalion in a two-day fight over steep ridges in knee-deep snow to reach Fox Co., 2nd Bn., 7th Marines, which had been surrounded by enemy troops. Inspiring his Marines with his bravery, Davis later admitted that the temperature was so cold "that I found it difficult to think."

DDO PHOTO



Marine Col. William E. "Bill" Barber received the Medal of Honor for leading the men of Fox Co., 2nd Bn., 7th Marines, in their defense in late November and early December 1950 of an escape route for some 8,000 Marines at the Chosin Reservoir. He and his company fought for six days in the bitter cold, and only 82 of Barber's original 220 Marines were able to walk away when finally relieved.

62 TROOPS IDENTIFIED SINCE 2018

As of Aug. 21, 7,578 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War, according to the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). DPAA estimates that approximately 5,300 sets of U.S. remains are in North Korea.

During a summit meeting in June 2018 in Singapore, President Donald J. Trump secured a commitment from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to return U.S. remains. In August of that year, North Korea handed over 55 boxes of comingled bones and artifacts.

According to DPAA, a total of 62 U.S. troops had been identified from those remains as of June 2020.

Since that breakthrough, however, Kim has rejected U.S. requests to continue recoveries.

spotted Fox Company's perimeter.

"There it was, plain as day, about 800 yards off," he said.

After trying to reach Barber's Fox Company for two days, the battalion finally got through.

"Bill Barber brought tears to my eyes," Davis recalled.

The trek had been too much for two of Davis' Marines who died from the physical and mental strain in the freezing cold.

Litzenberg was overjoyed when he heard that Davis had reached Fox Company's position.

"When I received word that the 1st Battalion had possession of the pass, I no longer had any doubts about our ability to come out of Yudam-ni with our guns, our wounded and our vehicles, because I knew possession of that key terrain meant that we could open the road," Litzenberg said.

"The tactical maneuver of Davis' battalion unlocked the gate and let us out of Yudam-ni. This was one of the most difficult operations Marines have ever been called upon to perform."

In 1952, Davis was awarded the Medal of

Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty.

After the battle, the U.S. X Corps and the Republic of Korea I Corps reported 10,495 battle casualties. This included 4,385 U.S. Marines and 3,163 U.S. Army personnel, as well as 2,812 South Koreans and 78 British Royal Marines attached to U.S. units. But the breakout from the Chosin Reservoir was successful.

In what some historians called the "greatest evacuation movement by sea in U.S. military history," a 193-ship armada commanded by Navy Adm. James H. Doyle under his Task Force 90 assembled at the port of Hungnam on North Korea's east coast. The ships evacuated about 105,000 troops, 98,000 civilians, 17,500 vehicles and 350,000 tons of supplies from Hungnam to Pusan in south-east South Korea. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Richard "Dick" Camp resides in Fredericksburg, Va. Camp, a former Marine who served in Vietnam, is the author of 16 books and a past contributor to VFW magazine.

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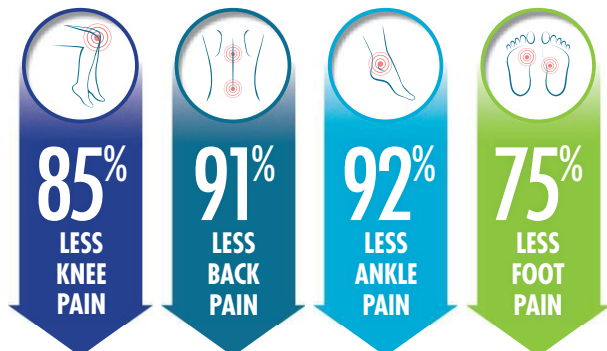
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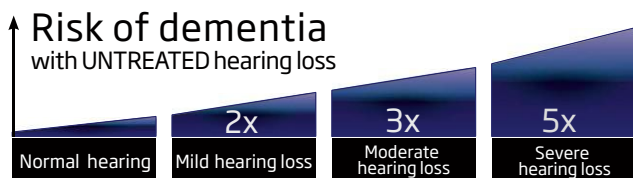
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Each year, chair officers are elected and other leaders are appointed for the forthcoming year. The chair officers are selected from various conferences, so each region has a turn at being represented in the ranks of the national leadership. In recent years, VFW's leadership has reflected the changing demographics of veterans in general and VFW in particular. Two of the chair officers served in the Persian Gulf War and one in the Iraq War. Here are VFW's 2020-2021 national officers.

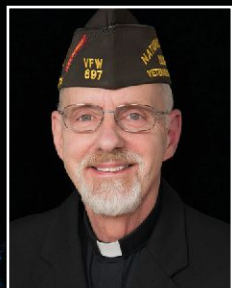


Kevin Jones
Adjutant General
Post 7356, Parkville, Mo.



Debra Anderson
Quartermaster General
Post 7356, Parkville, Mo.

The "20/20 Vision for Veterans" team from left, Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch II, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Fritz Milhelcic and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland.



Father Joseph J. Gallick
National Chaplain
Post 697, Whitman, Mass.



Bobby Cox
Judge Advocate General
Post 2715, McPherson, Kan.



Renee Simpson
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—Jeff Garrett

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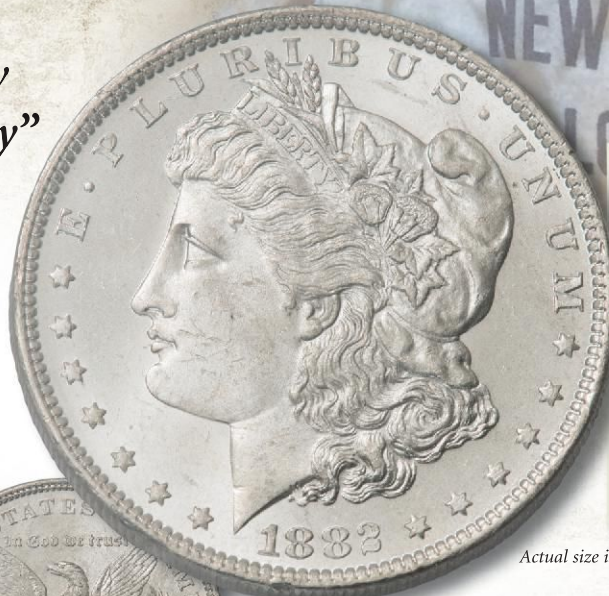
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2020-21 National Council of Administration

The National Council of Administration also includes VFW national officers (see p. 40).



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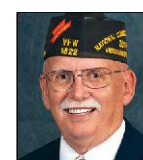
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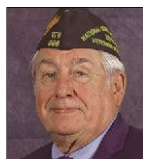
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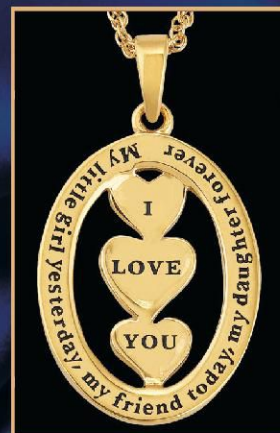
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'A Really Bad Addiction to Road Racing'

This Iraq War veteran broke gender barriers in both the military and the world of motorcycling, becoming the first woman to run operations at a California-based racing association.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Niccole Cox's indoctrination into the world of motorcycling began in 2008 with a challenge from a college friend who said she would never own one.

Taking her friend's good-natured ribbing in stride, Cox, who had been a National Guard member since enlisting in 2002, used her student loan money to buy her first motorcycle that January.

"But I had nowhere to ride because it was snowing in Indiana," said Cox, who was set to graduate from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., with a degree in neuroscience. "So I had to have it trailered to Bike Week in Daytona."

While in Daytona Beach, Fla., for the coveted annual Bike Week that runs in early March, Cox found herself at the epicenter of the motorcycling world leading up to the famed Daytona 200 motorcycle races.

But it wasn't until she eluded the gridlocked traffic around the Daytona International Speedway and got the chance to watch a practice run that Cox caught motorcycle fever.

"I rode my bike to a track day, which is like a practice, to see what it was about," Cox recalled. "I was then kind of forced by the track company to get on the track for a ride."

The infectious, more or less addicting, thrill in accelerating down a track, speeding to a low-slung weave from side to side as the motorcycle kissed the pavement before springing back up, quickly captivated Cox.

"Once I got on the track, it was over," Cox said. "My competitive nature just took over, and I told myself right then and there that I wanted to race. And you can say I've had a really bad addiction to road racing ever since."

Cox returned to Indiana and commissioned a local shop to build her a motor-



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICCOLE COX

Iraq War veteran Niccole Cox sits on her motorcycle in October 2019 at Chuckwalla Valley Raceway in Desert Center, Calif., about 70 miles from Palm Springs. Cox is the first woman to work for MotoAmerica, a motorcycle racing association based in Costa Mesa, serving as its senior operations manager. As of press time, she is the association's only woman on staff.

cycle for racing, although it would be more than a year before she could race.

Upon graduating from Purdue, Cox received word that she would be deployed in August 2008 to Iraq and later Kuwait. At the time, Cox was classified as an Army chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear operations specialist (CBRN).

"I knew I didn't want to sit in a supply room all day, so I went after an oppor-

tunity to become a Blackhawk gunner," Cox said. "There were only eight spots in a battalion, and it was a pretty sought-after position."

Cox applied and eventually secured a role as a Blackhawk gunner, becoming the only woman in her division at a time when female combat roles garnered controversy and backlash.

"I really didn't anticipate the negative feeling from the guys around me," Cox



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said. “I had always been one of the guys, but this was different. They weren’t happy for a while, but they eventually accepted me, and it ended up being an awesome experience.”

When Cox returned from Iraq in October 2009, she began racing in her spare time, while looking into medical school. After some calculation, however, Cox opted for another deployment with the National Guard near the Mexican border in 2011.

“As soon as I got there, I wanted to change things, make them better,” Cox said. “I wanted to push the limit, so I befriended one of the patrol supervisors and let him integrate us even more, which ended up allowing my team to secure 25 percent of total apprehensions for the year.”

Upon her military discharge in 2013 as a staff sergeant, Cox pivoted again, this time moving to San Francisco, a booming hotbed for biotech companies, where she could apply her degree in neuroscience.

Later, she began working for Genoptix, Inc., in Carlsbad, Calif., about 35 miles

north of San Diego, as a cytogenetics technician. After a year on the job, however, the motorcycling lifestyle beckoned her to devote more time.

Torn between her passion and the security of a biotech career, Cox faced a tough decision.

“I knew it was going to be a risk, and I struggled trying to leave the security of a biotech company with a great 401k for something that wasn’t promised as a contractor in racing,” Cox said. “But it was my friend Sophia who told me to chase the dream and not the money. And that’s pretty much what I did.”

Cox left the biotech world in April 2014 and took a leap of faith that November with an up-and-coming motorcycle racing association called MotoAmerica, based in Costa Mesa, Calif., about 40 miles from Los Angeles.

Being the only woman on the MotoAmerica staff today, Cox serves as a senior operations manager and the driving force behind the country’s premier motorcycle road racing series.

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICOLE COX

Nicole Cox stands by a Blackhawk helicopter in Iraq in August 2008, where she served with the Indiana National Guard’s A Co., 2nd General Support Aviation Bn., 238th Aviation Regt., 38th Inf. Div., as a Blackhawk gunner. Cox also deployed with the National Guard to the Mexican border in 2011. There, her unit secured 25 percent of all Border Patrol apprehensions for the year.





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Offer 'Thanks' to all Vets on Veterans Day



PHOTO BY DARREN MARK WITH SCENIC ROAD PRODUCTION

On this holiday, reach out to veterans and their families to show VFW's appreciation for their service and sacrifices. While the pandemic may prevent in-person gatherings in a lot of areas, there are myriad opportunities to simply say, 'Thanks.'

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

Across the country and around the world, Veterans Day may look a bit different this year. In some communities, annual Veterans Day parades have been canceled due to health concerns related to COVID-19. Wreath-laying ceremonies at local veterans' memorials in some areas have been called off as well.

According to VFW Membership Director Rick Butler, with the country experiencing unprecedented times, it's more important than ever to remember our nation's veterans and thank them — particularly those who may feel forgotten or isolated in recent months.

"This sentiment should extend all month long, and for that matter, all year long," Butler said. "Take this opportunity to remind the members of your Post as well as all veterans that they are important. If your Post is open, invite vets to stop by."

Butler said this is especially critical in states that are still somewhat locked down due to the virus. There are mem-

bers who have not been able to venture far from their homes.

Rick McKenna, deputy director of VFW Membership, echoed these sentiments.

"We are asking our members to make it a habit of checking in on those who have not been seen or heard from in a while," McKenna said. "Thanking veterans and helping veterans every day is truly what VFW is all about."

McKenna said reaching out with a phone call, text, email, letter in the mail or a visit are all good avenues in which to say, "Thank you."

"In whatever way you feel comfortable in your community, that is what you should do," Butler added.

Corey Hunt, VFW Membership associate director who is in charge of Post development and revitalization, said Veterans Day is a good time to check in on lapsed members.

"Lapsed members may be feeling especially isolated during this time," Hunt said. "Reach out, welcome them back into

the Post and ask what their needs are."

Butler said when thanking veterans, it's equally important to thank the families of veterans.

"Families sacrifice, too," he added. "Invite the family to the Post so that it becomes a family affair."

Posts are encouraged to use social media on Veterans Day as well. Log in to vfw.org where a Veterans Day speech will be available about two weeks prior. This year, it will be written to be delivered virtually.

With that in mind, McKenna said Post leaders could deliver the speech via Facebook or host a Zoom call and address veterans that way.

Matt Nute, VFW Membership Department eligibility coordinator, summed up the message succinctly.

"It's about telling our fellow veterans that no matter when and where they served, that they matter," he said. "Sometimes just the reassurance from a fellow veteran of, 'Hey, I'm here for you,' can be a literal lifesaver. Regardless of our differences, we all share a bond of selfless service, and that didn't end when we took off the uniform."

We'd love to hear how you celebrated Veterans Day. Email jdyhouse@vfw.org to share your stories of offering thanks. 🌟

EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

ABOVE: Afghanistan War veteran Brad Zollmann is welcomed home at VFW Post 7356 in Parkville, Mo., on June 18. Zollmann's family coordinated the welcome home with Post leadership. VFW Membership Director Rick Butler said to remember families on Veterans Day when thanking vets, adding that families sacrifice, too.

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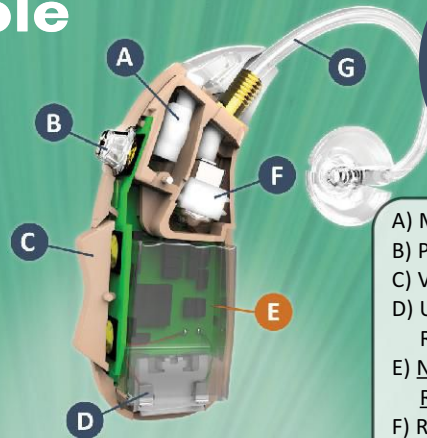


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Understanding the Differences in Supplemental Health Insurance Coverage

As a veteran, there are many health insurance plans and options available, but not all coverage is equal. Even with the best coverage on the market, you may find you need supplemental insurance coverage.

While normal health insurance is rather broad and general, supplemental insurance plans tend to be more specific. Often, supplemental health insurance is an added layer of protection used to cover what a traditional health insurance plan does not.

Some forms of supplemental health insurance can cover some out-of-pocket expenses like copayments, coinsurance and deductibles. Depending on the type of supplemental plan, it will pay out either periodic benefits or a lump sum of cash to the customer. This money can be used to pay for lost wages, transportation, medication or anything else resulting from an injury or illness.

Just as with normal health insurance, there's much consumers need to know about supplemental insurance.

DIFFERENCES IN SUPPLEMENTAL INSURANCE

Like traditional health insurance, there are many types of supplemental insurance plans. For example, some common supplemental insurance plans include:

- Dental insurance
- Vision insurance
- Hospital insurance
- Critical illness insurance
- Accident insurance
- Disability insurance

For adults over 65, there also is supplemental Medicare coverage, such as:

- Medigap — Helps pay for health

care costs, such as co-payments, co-insurance, deductibles and other costs.

- Medicare Advantage — An enhanced Medicare coverage, often giving you more benefits than Medicare A and B.
- Medicare Part D — Helps with the cost of prescription drugs.

SUPPLEMENTAL PLANS DESIGNED FOR VETS

Tricare and CHAMPVA (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs) are supplemental medical programs for veterans. Tricare is a medical program available to uniformed service members — including those on active duty, in the National Guard or Reserve, and retired service members — and their families.

The Tricare plan can help with expenses such as prescription co-pays, office co-pays and cost-sharing for in- and out-of-network care and excess out-of-network charges.

CHAMPVA is available for the spouse or widow(er) and children of a veteran who was permanently disabled doing work associated with their military service. This program is open to anyone who fits these criteria and is not eligible for Tricare.

Even if you have existing Tricare or CHAMPVA supplemental coverage, it's a good idea to occasionally research your coverage options and make sure your plan meets your current needs, especially if there has been a change to your status.

For more information about VFW member benefits such as supplemental insurance, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-833-VFW-VETS (1-833-839-8387).



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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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*Source: <https://reversemortgagedaily.com/2019/12/17/senior-housing-wealth-reaches-record-high-of-7-19-trillion>

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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AAG
Retire Better



BREAKING NEWS...

CoQ10's Failure Leaves Millions Wanting

Use this pill to supercharge your brain and think better than ever.

BREAKING NEWS: Millions of Americans take the supplement CoQ10. It's the "jet fuel" that supercharges your cells' power generators, known as mitochondria.

As you age, your mitochondria begin to die. In fact, by age 67, you lose 80% of the mitochondria you had at age 25. But if you're taking CoQ10, there's something important you should know.

As powerful as CoQ10 is, there is a critical thing it fails to do. It can't create new mitochondria in your cells.

Taking CoQ10 is not enough

"There's a little-known NASA nutrient that multiplies the number of new power generators in your cells by up to 55%," says Dr. Al Sears, owner of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Royal Palm Beach, Florida. "Science once thought this was impossible. But now you can make your heart, brain and body young again."

"I tell my patients the most important thing I can do is increase their 'health span.' This is the length of time you can live free of disease and with all your youthful abilities and faculties intact."

Medical first: Multiply the "power generators" in your cells

Al Sears, M.D., recently released an energy-boosting supplement based on this NASA nutrient that has become so popular, he's having trouble keeping it in stock.

Dr. Sears is the author of over 500 scientific papers on anti-aging and recently spoke at the WPBF 25 Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people listened to Dr. Sears speak on his anti-aging breakthroughs and attended his book signing at the event.

Now, Dr. Sears has come up with what his peers consider his greatest contribution to anti-aging medicine yet — a newly discovered nutrient that multiplies the number of tiny, energy-producing "engines" located inside the body's cells, shattering the limitations of traditional CoQ10 supplements.

Why mitochondria matter

A single cell in your body can contain between 200 to 2,000 mitochondria, with the largest number found in the most metabolically active cells, like those in your brain, heart and skeletal muscles.

But because of changes in cells, stress and poor

diet, most people's power generators begin to malfunction and die off as they age. In fact, the Mitochondria Research Society reports 50 million U.S. adults are suffering from health problems because of mitochondrial dysfunction.

Common ailments often associated with aging — such as memory problems, heart issues, blood sugar concerns and vision and hearing difficulties — can all be connected to a decrease in mitochondria.

Birth of new mitochondria

Dr. Sears and his researchers combined the most powerful form of CoQ10 available — called ubiquinol — with a unique, newly discovered natural compound called PQQ that has the remarkable ability to grow new mitochondria. Together, the two powerhouses are now available in a supplement called *Ultra Accel II*.

Discovered by a NASA probe in space dust, PQQ (Pyrroloquinoline quinone) stimulates something called "mitochondrial biogenesis" — a unique process that actually boosts the number of healthy mitochondria in your cells.

In a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition*, mice fed PQQ grew a staggering number of new mitochondria, showing an increase of more than 55% in just eight weeks.

The mice with the strongest mitochondria showed no signs of aging — even when they were the equivalent of 80 years old.

Science stands behind the power of PQQ

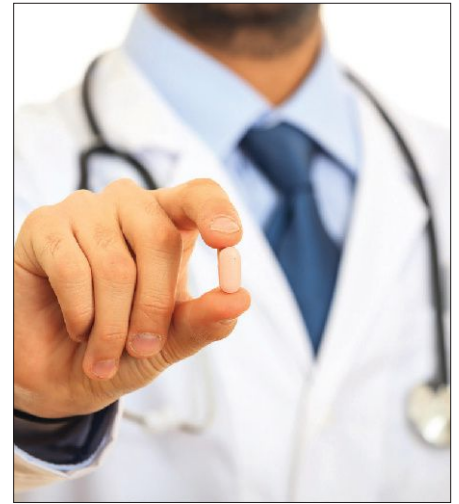
Biochemical Pharmacology reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants.

"Imagine 5,000 times more efficient energy," says Dr. Sears. "PQQ has been a game changer for my patients."

"With the PQQ in *Ultra Accel II*, I have energy I never thought possible," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears' patients. "I am in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearer, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

It works right away

Along with an abundance of newfound energy, users also report a sharper, more focused mind and memory, and even younger-looking skin and hair. Jerry M. from Wellington, Florida, used *Ultra Accel II* and was amazed at the effect.



NASA-discovered nutrient is stunning the medical world by activating more youthful energy, vitality and health than CoQ10.

"I noticed a difference within a few days," says Jerry. "My endurance almost doubled. But it's not just in your body. You can feel it mentally, too," says Jerry. "Not only do I feel a difference, but the way it protects my cells is great insurance against a health disaster as I get older."

Increase your health span today

The demand for this supplement is so high, Dr. Sears is having trouble keeping it in stock. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling or looking older than their age... or for those who are tired or growing more forgetful."

"My favorite part of practicing anti-aging medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. *Ultra Accel II* sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies... and they actually feel young again."

Where to find *Ultra Accel II*

Right now, the only way to get this potent combination of PQQ and super-powered CoQ10 is with Dr. Sears' breakthrough *Ultra Accel II* formula.

To secure bottles of this hot, new supplement, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-877-353-0632 within the next 48 hours. "It takes time to get bottles shipped out to drug stores," said Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to the customer."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about this product, he offers a 100%, money-back guarantee on every order. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days, and I'll send you your money back," said Dr. Sears.

The Hotline will be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number will be shut down to allow them to restock.

Call 1-877-353-0632 to secure your limited supply of *Ultra Accel II*. You don't need a prescription, and those who call in the first 24 hours qualify for a significant discount. To take advantage of this great offer use Promo Code **VW1120UA** when you call in.

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Model® .45
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Overall Length: 8 1/4"

**"I would go again. I definitely
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- an American Vietnam Veteran

From the Delta to the DMZ, young Americans answered the call to duty and proudly served- many with "Old Slabsides," better known as the ".45." In military nomenclature, Uncle Sam called it the "M1911A1 Service Pistol." It was the most powerful military sidearm ever issued in the world. And with it in Vietnam, American servicemen drove more nails in the coffin of Communism, which would lead to its eventual fall.

But Vietnam would be the .45's last war as America's official military sidearm. Soon afterwards, so America could comply with NATO ammo logistics, it was retired and replaced by the less-powerful 9mm. So now, the ".45 era" and our Veterans who fought with it are passing into military history.

As America honors the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War, The American Historical Foundation is proud to salute those who served in the Armed Forces during the Vietnam War, by appropriately issuing this firing museum-quality Limited Edition on the classic Colt .45 military pistol. Each Vietnam Tribute .45 is a working Colt® Government Model® pistol and fires .45 ACP ammo.

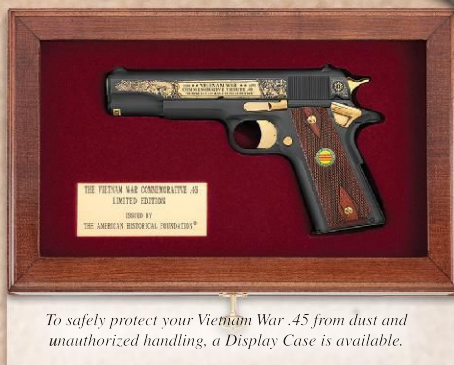
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When you pick up this almost two and a half pound slab of steel and gold, you will know you are holding a special, firing Limited Edition, custom finished to museum quality.

Like the polished black granite of the Vietnam Memorial, you can see your reflection in its mirror-polished steel, blued to gloss black and richly plated with genuine 24-Karat Gold.

Historical Symbolism

Craftsmen commissioned specifically for the Tribute by the Foundation polish and decorate each pistol. Deep bas relief etchings, selectively plated with 24-Karat Gold, form the central panoply, with borders of strapped bamboo and dragons, the Asian symbol of power and protection. Historical inscriptions include the dates of the war and General Westmoreland's praise of all who served,



To safely protect your Vietnam War .45 from dust and unauthorized handling, a Display Case is available.

along with the Republic of Vietnam Service Medal surmounted on napalm flames. The Asian-motif artwork of bamboo and dragons continues, in etching and 24-Karat Gold plating, across the reverse of the slide.

The trigger, hammer, slide stop, magazine catch, safety lock and grip screws are 24-Karat Gold plated.

The grips are finely checkered in the classic "Double Diamond" pattern. Inset in each grip is a full-color, cloisonné medallion, incorporating the flag of the Republic of Vietnam (South).

The Vietnam War Tribute .45 is strictly limited to only 2,500 pistols, worldwide. Each pistol is engraved with its special Registry Number between 0001 and 2500, with the prefix VN for Vietnam; and a Certificate of Authenticity will accompany your Tribute.

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This museum-quality .45 is available exclusively from The American Historical Foundation. You can reserve with a small deposit, and a convenient monthly payment plan is available. To place your reservation, please return the Reservation Request or call our Member Relations Staff, toll free, at 1-800-368-8080.

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Airman is ‘Thankful and Blessed’ for *Help a Hero Scholarship*

An Air National Guardsman is working toward his dream job and studying for a college degree with the help of VFW’s *Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship*.

BY MADELINE MAPES

When Traevonne Greene isn’t training with his Air National Guard unit, he is studying at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan., to attain double majors in business and computer science while minoring in music and theater.

Greene is able to work toward his educational goals with help from VFW’s *Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship*.

After graduating from Topeka High School, Greene joined the Air National Guard in May 2018.

“The main reason was so that I could go to college for free,” Greene said. “It was an experience to try and get away and travel — meet new people and learn about myself.”

Greene said that training for two days a month to go to college for free was a “no-brainer.”

Greene is an Airman 1st Class in the Kansas Air National Guard. He serves with the 190th Air Refueling Wing at Forbes Field Air National Guard Base in Topeka, about 65 miles west of Kansas City, Mo.

Last year, Greene traveled to Dodge City, Kan.; Garden City, Kan.; and Silver Lake, Kan., between April 16 and May 31, fulfilling assignments and duties with the Air National Guard.

“The good thing about being in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAEVONNE GREENE

Airman Traevonne Greene is a recipient of a VFW *Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship*, which he plans to use while pursuing dual degrees from Washburn University in Topeka, Kan. With the Air National Guard, Greene serves with the 190th Air Refueling Wing at Forbes Field Air National Guard Base in Topeka.

informed Greene of the *Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship*, which led him to search for more information about it.

“I would have never known about it if Heather would have never told me about it,” Greene said.

Greene plans to use the *Help a Hero Scholarship* to help pay for living expenses.

Despite double majoring in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) field and in business,

sustain him while he starts his career in the entertainment business.

After college, he hopes to move to a bigger city, such as Atlanta, Los Angeles or New York, to increase his success in the entertainment industry.

Greene became interested in modeling and acting in 2016 while attending Paul Quinn College in Dallas.

After leaving Dallas, Greene found the closest modeling agency to his home. He signed with the agency a few months before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By reapplying for the *Help a Hero Scholarship*, Greene will be able to work toward a career in modeling.

“I am just super thankful and blessed,” Greene said. ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

Madeline Mapes is a freelance writer based in Kansas City, Mo.

VFW’S SPORT CLIPS HELP A HERO SCHOLARSHIP HAS AWARDED MORE THAN 1,600 SCHOLARSHIPS TOTALING \$7.2 MILLION SINCE JANUARY 2014.

military is meeting people that are like-minded and are just good people,” Greene said.

As a health service management specialist in the Guard, Greene met fellow airman Heather Rice, who also happened to work at Sport Clips.

While on Guard duty together, Rice

Greene’s minor in music and theater is where his heart lies.

“I’m a pretty animated person, so I want to get into acting and modeling — entertainment,” Greene said.

Greene chose the STEM field of study because he knew jobs in these career fields are in high demand and also can

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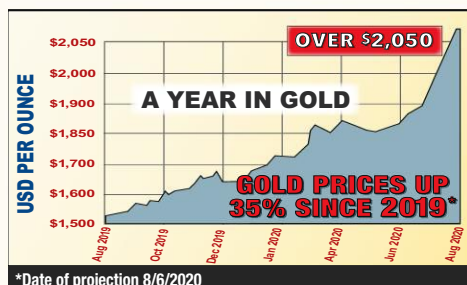
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