

JANUARY 2024

VFW

M A G A Z I N E



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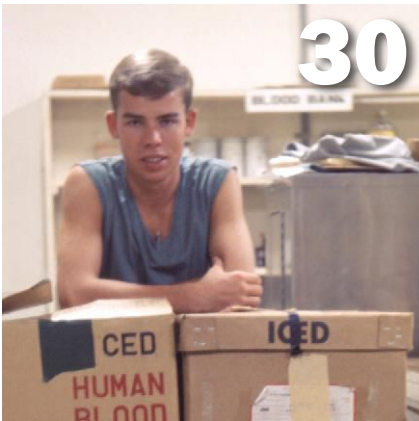
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COVER IMAGE: From left, Craig Hokenstad, an intake veteran benefits specialist at the Waupaca County Veterans Service Office; Jesse Cuff, the director of the Waupaca County Veterans Service Office; and Joshua Kampert, a life member of VFW Post 11346 in Waupaca, Wis., gather in October in Iola, Wis. Photo by Holly Neumann

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 2 Command Post
- 4 Mail Call
- 6 Now Hear This
- 8 Issues Up Front
- 10 Washington Wire
- 39 Reunions and Claims
- 41 Book Corner
- 42 VFW In Action
- 43 Member Benefits
- 46 Member Corner

IN THIS ISSUE

- 21 Feature Photo
- 22 LeRoy Torres
- 24 VFW Videos
- 26 VFW Honors WWII Vet
- 34 NASA Student
- 36 Belgium Trip
- 38 Pet Pantry
- 40 Food Pantry
- 44 Sturgis

14 'MY FAMILY AND I ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL'

An Iraq War veteran with health problems from his service turned to a VFW service officer for help. After undergoing brain surgery, he said it takes just "one phone call" to save someone's life. **By Dave Spiva**

18 'WE SUPPORT VFW AND ITS MEMBERS'

VFW has identified two law firms that have agreed to reduce their rates for veterans seeking compensation for the *Camp Lejeune Justice Act*. One attorney said he is "damn proud" of doing it. **By Dave Spiva**

30 'WE DID MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

While serving in Vietnam in 1967, a VFW member from Missouri took up the hobby of photography. His collection is now featured at the U.S. Army Medical Department Museum in San Antonio. **By Madeline Mapes**

46 NEW POST ON GITMO

In October, VFW established a new Post at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Based in a country where VFW's founders fought in the Spanish-American War, the facility will offer VFW's programs and services to the 6,000 veterans and Americans living there. **By Janie Dyhouse**



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COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
Duane Sarmiento

A 'Powerful' Way to Say Thank You

One of VFW's most productive partnerships recently celebrated a significant milestone. In October, VFW and Sport Clips Haircuts marked 10 years of providing college scholarships for troops transitioning to civilian life.

Our joint *Help A Hero Scholarship* program has awarded more than \$12.3 million in scholarships to more than 2,700 young veterans since 2013. This program, the largest of its kind in the country, is funded solely through donations from Sport Clips team members, clients, individual supporters and corporate sponsors.

Sport Clips Founder and Chairman Gordon Logan, who is an Air Force veteran and VFW life member, joined with

VFW in 2013 to create this meaningful option for troops wanting to pursue higher education after leaving the service. Logan said it is a "powerful" way to say thank you to those who have worn the nation's uniform.

He also said Sport Clips recognizes that most Americans want to support companies that give back

to the nation's veterans. Logan added that it is his and his employees' honor to support those who serve our country, and the *Help A Hero Scholarship* program is part of their overall dedication to showing that support.

I agree and thank Logan and his team for their commitment to this wonderful program. The costs of higher education continue to soar, so ensuring that our nation's service members and veterans have the aid and support they need to be successful after their military career is over continues to be a top priority for the VFW.

Last August, the *Help A Hero Scholarship* program awarded nearly \$750,000 to 162 service members for the fall 2023 semester. A recent recipient of a *Help A Hero Scholarship*, Air Force veteran Ely Esparza, said the opportunity allowed him to focus on his schoolwork without the stress of worrying about how to pay for it.

Esparza is working on his Ph.D. in educational psychology at the University of Arizona. He told VFW that the scholarship has provided him with a "psychological boost to keep going" toward his goal. That is exactly what this program is all about.

All of us at the VFW are incredibly proud of the assistance and relief that this scholarship, and our work with Sport Clips, can provide to our nation's service members and veterans.

To learn more about the program or to apply for a scholarship, visit <https://www.vfw.org/scholarship>.

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VFW OBJECTIVES

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

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

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Beirut Bombing

Your article on the Beirut bombing reminded me of my own related experience. I served as executive officer of the 709th MP Battalion located on Biggs Kaserne in Frankfurt, Germany. Casualties from Beirut were being evacuated through Rhein Main AFB to the 97th

General Hospital, which was about a block from our kaserne. The remains of the deceased were shipped to the Army mortuary, which was across the street from us. Several days after the bombing, I heard a knock on my door and saw the mortuary commander standing there. I invited him in, and he explained that he had a problem. He had several teams of forensic pathologists trying to identify the remains stored in refrigerated vans parked in his parking lot.

His problem was that he didn't have enough manpower to move the remains in a manner that would keep the teams busy. He asked if we could help him out. One of our companies, the 284th MP Company, was collocated with our headquarters. I asked the mortuary commander to accompany me, and we walked to the company orderly room. I

introduced him to the MP commander, and he explained his problem. The MP commander called in his first sergeant and told him to muster the troops in the barracks. After they had formed up, the first sergeant explained the situation and asked for volunteers to assist with the task of moving the human remains.

Every soldier in the formation volunteered, and they moved out across the street to help. I was extremely proud of those young soldiers and was proud that our unit could contribute to the recovery efforts being conducted alongside what the Frankfurt Military Community and the Rhein Main community were doing to house, transport and care for the family members who were arriving to their loved ones at the 97th.

DAVID L. PATTON

PORT ORANGE, FLA.

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

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56 Vietnam Veterans Receive Bronze Stars

Members of a military police company who fought as infantrymen in the Vietnam War were awarded the Bronze Star in July. In all, 56 former members of B Co., 720th MP Bn., 18th MP Bde., were recognized during a July 24 ceremony at the U.S. Capitol.

The members of B Co., also known as the “Bushwackers,” were reportedly the first Army MPs to be assigned infantry missions during the Vietnam War. They operated from 1967 to 1970 around Long Binh, north of Saigon.

During their time in Vietnam, B Company lost 13 members killed in action and earned 24 Purple Hearts. Aided by the 212th MP Scout Dog Company, which would take point on ambush and recon patrols, the Bushwackers were responsible for a 22-square mile tactical area around Long Binh, the largest military installa-

tion in South Vietnam.

In total, 35 of the 56 recipients of the Bronze Star attended the medal presentation ceremony in July in Washington, D.C. That included then-Capt. Daryl Solomonson, B Company’s former commander.

“They accepted the mission,” Solomonson told *Military.com* after the presentation. “Guys would come in, they would go out and learn on the job. We had to do a lot of improvising. We just trained everybody as they came in.”

Rep. Bob Latta (R-Ohio), who pushed for the Bushwackers’ recognition, said four more Bronze Stars are pending review,



PHOTO BY JOE GROMELSKI (SPECIAL TO STARS AND STRIPES)

Daryl Solomonson, left, former commander of B Co., 720th MP Bn., 18th MP Bde., shakes hands with Darwin Wall, one of his former troops, on July 24 at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. The two Vietnam War veterans were there to receive Bronze Star medals, which were awarded to 56 members of the company, for their actions around Long Binh, South Vietnam, from 1967-70.

Presidential Unit Citation Awarded for Afghanistan Evacuation

The Pentagon announced in August that more than 30 Army and Marine Corps units have been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for their participation in the evacuation of Afghanistan in August 2021. The medal is the military’s highest unit award and recognizes “exceptional heroism.”

During the roughly two-week long operation, U.S. troops helped evacuate more than 124,000 civilians. A suicide bombing attack during the evacuation killed 11 Marines, a Navy corpsman and a soldier.

The units recognized were elements of the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, the Marine Corps’ 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force Crisis Response-Central Command. Here are the individual units:

Army units

Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division
1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 82nd Abn. Div.
2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div.

1st Attack Bn., 82nd Combat Avn. Bde.
2nd BCT, 10th Mountain Division
3rd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
DIVARTY, 82nd Abn. Div.

82nd Sustainment Bde.
16th MP Bde.
82nd Combat Aviation Bde.
50th Expeditionary Signal Bn., 35th Signal Bde.
1st Bn., 101st Field Artillery, Massachusetts National Guard
319th Ordnance Co., Washington Army National Guard
1st Bn., 194th Armor, Minnesota National Guard
249th Engineer Bn., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USA Network Enterprise Center, Qatar
160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment
8th Psychological Operation Group
95th Civil Affairs Brigade
U.S. Army Special Operations Command



Army Presidential Unit Citation ribbon

Navy and Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation ribbon

Marine units

24th Marine Expeditionary Unit
Command Element
Battalion Landing Team, 1st Bn., 8th Marines
Combat Logistics Battalion 24
Marine Tiltrotor Squadron 162 Reinforced

Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force Crisis Response-Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC)

Command element, SPMAGTF-CR-CC 21,1
2nd Bn., 1st Marines
Combat Logistics Battalion 21
Marine Wing Support Squadron 373
Marine Aerial Refueler Squadron 352
Marine Aerial Refueler Squadron 234
Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 364

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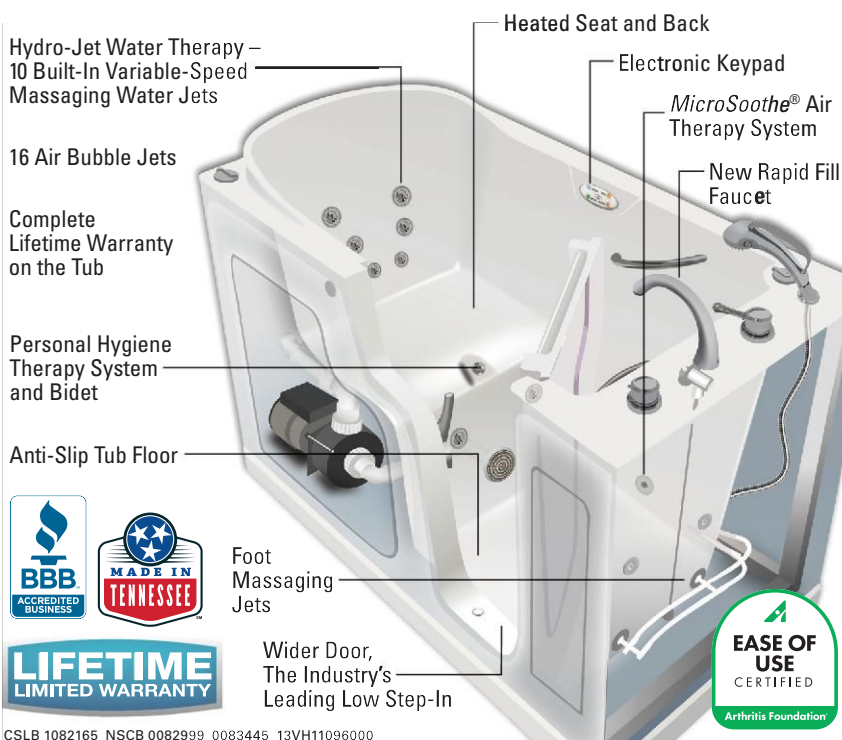
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Study Finds Firefighting Foam Linked to Testicular Cancer

A report published in a medical journal found an association between testicular cancer and exposure to firefighting foam. U.S. airmen studied were involved with firefighting and aircraft maintenance.

BY DAVE SPIVA

A study published in July claims a type of polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) used in the military is linked to testicular cancer in airmen. The toxin is a component in firefighting foam, such as aqueous film forming foam (AFFF), which is used to extinguish liquid-based fires.

A medical journal, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, published an article titled “A Nested Case–Control Study of Serum Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances and Testicular Germ Cell Tumors Among U.S. Air Force Servicemen.” In the study, researchers stated that there is a significant connection between perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), which is a PFAS, and testicular cancer.

Researchers claimed that the study was the “first to investigate” PFAS concentrations among Air Force service members and testicular cancer. Of U.S. men who have testicular cancer, more than 98 percent have testicular germ cell tumors.

“Testicular cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among U.S. active-duty servicemen and among young adult men in general,” according to an August report from the National Cancer Institute.

Military firefighters who were observed for the study were found to have “elevated concentrations” of PFAS. Blood samples of 530 airmen with testicular cancer were tested, and they were found to have elevated levels of PFOS compared to 530 cancer-free service members. Research also found that while higher levels of PFOS were associated with an increased risk of tes-



AIR NATIONAL GUARD PHOTO

Air Force fire protection specialists of the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing douse a training fire with a suppressant foam on Dec. 5, 2013, during an exercise at the Military Sealift Command Training Center East in Freehold, N.J. Findings of a study published in July 2023 suggested that there is a correlation between Air Force personnel who developed testicular cancer and firefighting foam used on military aircraft.

ticular cancer, other PFAS substances showed no signs of causing testicular cancer specifically.

The study also found that levels of PFAS in the blood were linked with being a firefighter or a service member stationed at a base with a high level of PFAS in the water supply. Researchers suggested that more tests be done to learn more about cancer related to PFAS.

In the September 2023 issue of *VFW* magazine, it was reported that military aviation ground and air crews have higher rates of cancer than the general U.S. population.

VFW continues to push for expanded presumptive conditionals related to PFAS exposure. To this end, VFW delegates passed VFW *Res. No. 615* at the 124th VFW National Convention last year. According to the resolution, VFW will continue to “urge Congress to invest adequate resources to study, diagnose and treat conditions and illnesses associated with toxic exposure.”

The resolution also states that Congress should ensure that the Department of Defense discloses “known and potential toxic exposures during all military operations.” ★

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

RECRUITING MADE EASY



You have likely noticed QR codes on VFW brochures, advertisements and other materials. QR codes are all about convenience and up-to-date information with a quick scan of the code from a smartphone.

How is it convenient? It is simple: Instead of having stacks of brochures and flyers at membership recruiting booths and service officer locations, a single poster or placard with the code provides the most current information available.

This ensures we won't be delivering outdated printed materials.

The QR code shown here is linked to a VFW membership application.

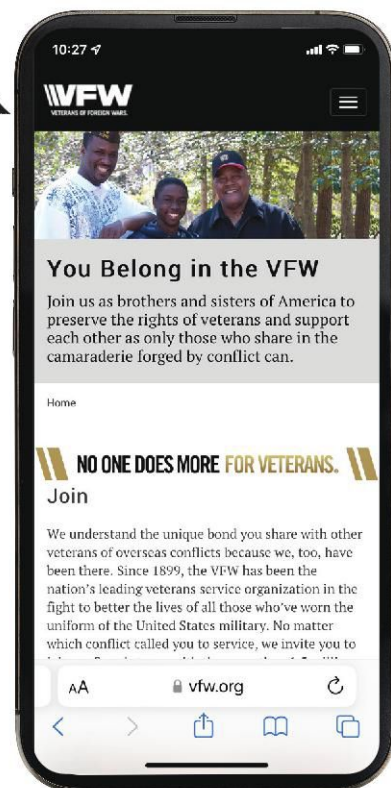
VFW also has a QR code for its array of Member Benefits. Why? VFW's affiliate partners modify their programs frequently, which quickly nullifies printed material. The Member Benefits QR code drives users to a webpage where the information is constantly updated.

With the use of QR codes, recruiting has never been easier.

ASK ME WHY I'M A VFW MEMBER



The flyer above is featured at VFW service officer locations. A quick scan of the QR code on the flyer will take users to the VFW website where they can read all about becoming a VFW member. This is just one of a few QR codes implemented by VFW for more efficient recruiting.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Senate Supports Veterans 2nd Amendment Rights Legislation

The Senate in October passed a VFW-supported amendment that could keep VA from reporting some veterans to a background check used in purchasing a firearm.

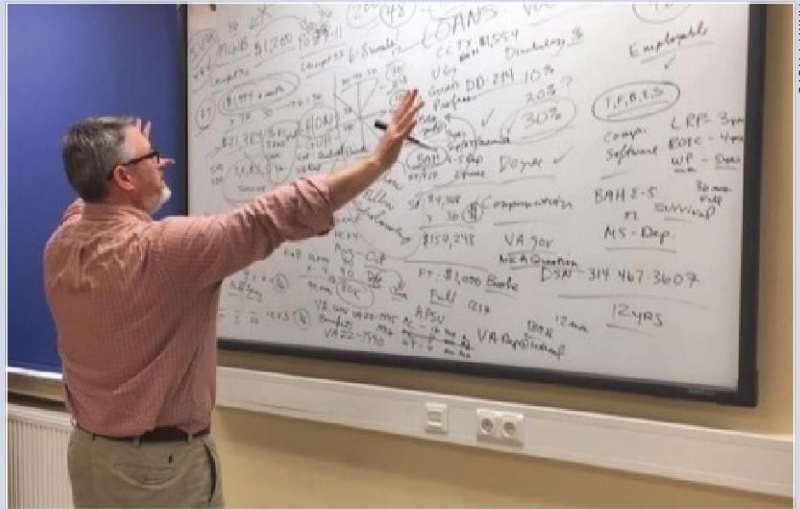
Originally known as *H.R. 705*, or the *Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act*, the legislation is now an amendment of the *Military Construction, Veteran Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2024* (*H.R. 4366*). The 2nd Amendment rights legislation was approved by the Senate to be a part of the omnibus bill.

If passed by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden, the legislation formerly known as the *Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act* would stop VA from reporting some veterans to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System. VA's current policy, as of Nov. 7, 2023, is to report a veteran if it is determined that he or she is incompetent and requires a fiduciary to manage his or her benefits.

In July, VFW testified in support of the legislation. VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Kristina Keenan said veterans with fiduciaries are reported to the FBI's background check database without additional screening.

Keenan told members of Congress that VA's current practice may cause veterans to not seek VA care due to a "fear" their firearms might be taken away.

"This has created a significant stigma surrounding mental health and has created a barrier to care for many," Keenan said before Congress. "This perception is difficult to change. The VFW continues to encourage veterans to use their earned VA health care, including the world-class, veteran-specific mental health services that VA provides."



ARMY PHOTO

Marc Maxwell, an education services specialist at the U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach Education Center, explains the differences in education benefits that are available to veterans, service members and their dependents during a *GI Bill* community session.

VFW Supports the Expansion of *GI Bill* Housing Benefits

A VFW-supported bill could help student veterans taking online college courses earn a higher housing allowance.

During testimony to the House VA Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Kristina Keenan said VFW supports the *Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act* (*H.R. 5702*), which she said was a "step in the right direction."

If approved by Congress and President Joe Biden, *H.R. 5702* would have *GI Bill* students receive the national average monthly. The housing allowance for full-time students appearing for classes in person is determined by the location of the institution.

As of Nov. 7, 2023, the current monthly housing allowance for students using the *GI Bill* for online courses is half of the national average allotted to *GI Bill* recipients. Keenan said the stipend is "simply not enough" for students.

"If they take courses during the summer, even online, they should not experience a decrease in their housing benefit that could cause them financial hardship before they have completed a degree program," Keenan said. "The VFW would like for student veterans to receive at least the full national average rate for housing allowance, even if they are enrolled in a degree program that is conducted online for some or all semesters."

Keenan added that online education has adapted since the COVID-19 pandemic and that the education and work model has changed around the country.

"Student veterans continue to require housing assistance in order to successfully pursue higher education, even when enrolled in online programs," Keenan said.



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 VIDEO SCREENSHOT

VFW National Veterans Legislative Deputy Director Kristina Keenan speaks at a VFW press conference in front of the VFW Washington Office on Nov. 14 on Capitol Hill. She on behalf of VFW called on the Department of Justice to investigate unaccredited agencies, which VFW has dubbed “claim sharks,” that require veterans to pay fees for their disability claims services.

VFW Says Don’t Pay for Your Benefits

VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento issued a powerful statement to veterans in November: Don’t Feed the Sharks.

Sarmiento’s message refers specifically to what VFW has dubbed “claim sharks,” which are unscrupulous individuals or companies charging hefty fees to supposedly assist veterans with their VA claims. This is illegal and needs to be stopped, Sarmiento said.

“The bottom line is this: predatory claim shark companies are engaging in illegal activities,” the Chief said. “There is no gray area here, no matter how much money they want to throw at it. Their

“The VFW is determined to stop predatory claim sharks and we are eager to serve alongside you in this fight.”

VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento

latest collusion is a desperate attempt to avoid accountability.”

During a VFW press conference on Nov. 14 on Capitol Hill, VFW National Veterans Legislative Deputy Director Kristina Keenan called on the Department of Justice to investigate unaccredited agencies that require veterans to pay fees for their disability claims services.

“The harm that unaccredited claims agents have caused veterans and survivors has been significant,” Keenan said. “Several

[unaccredited claims agents] are even sponsoring veteran events and sporting events. They are doing everything they can to appear legitimate, while scamming people out of their benefits.”

Since the claim sharks first emerged, the VFW has increased the pressure on these companies by passing legislation to crack down on their practices at the state level and is working to help veterans bring litigation against them. At the press conference, VFW expressed its support for the *GUARD VA Benefits Act of 2023* (S. 740), which would protect veterans from entities seeking to take their hard-earned benefits. If approved, the *GUARD VA Benefits Act* would reinstate criminal penalties for unaccredited claims representatives who charge fees to veterans for filing a disability claim.

“This fight may get a little messy in the coming weeks,” Sarmiento warned, “But the VFW is determined to stop predatory claim sharks and we are eager to serve alongside you in this fight.”

Furthermore, VFW has trained its more than 2,300 VFW-accredited service officers on how to handle claim sharks. VFW will continue to seek out veterans who need help getting out of these predatory contracts.

For more than 100 years, VFW has worked tirelessly to advocate for veterans and their earned benefits. In the last year alone, more than 550,000 veterans received more than \$13 billion in benefits from VA through VFW’s global network of VA-accredited service officers. Not a penny of this \$13 billion went to VFW. It all went to the veterans, as the law requires.

A flyer with information about claims sharks can be found on www.vfw.org. The direct URL for the flyer is: <https://vfworg-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/PACT-Act/Dont-Feed-the-Sharks-One-Pager--Print-Friendly.pdf>.

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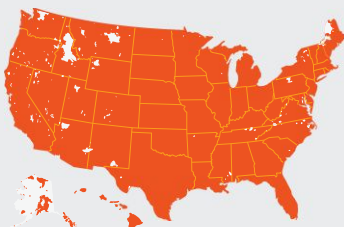
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JUST ONE PHONE CALL 'TO SAVE SOMEONE'S LIFE'

A VFW member speaks about working with a VFW-certified veterans service officer. The Iraq War veteran said he is thankful for the help he received.

BY DAVE SPIVA

From left, Director of the Waupaca County (Wis.) Veterans Service Office Jesse Cuff, a member of the VFW Department of Wisconsin, and Joshua Kampert, life member of VFW Post 11346 in Waupaca, Wis., pose last October at the Iola (Wis.) Veterans Memorial. Cuff has helped Kampert with filing disability claims and said his main job as a service officer is connecting veterans with their earned benefits.

One phone call to Joshua Kampert in 2019 may have saved his life.

Kampert received the call from Iraq War veteran Justin Johnson. Johnson said that he and Kampert talked about their struggles after leaving the Marine Corps. The pair were deployed to Iraq from February to September 2005 with Charlie Co., Combat Logistics Bn. 8.

“After connecting, we promised each other that we would meet up by the end of the year,” said Johnson, a Gold Legacy life member of VFW Post 5066 in Collierville, Tenn. “We then met in December 2019 for the silkies hike in Key West, Fla.” (See below.)

While spending time together and with other friends from their time in the service, Johnson told Kampert about his experience with filing a VA disability claim. Johnson said he worked with a VA-accredited service officer.

“[Kampert] had plenty of questions about filing a claim and how it would benefit him,” said Johnson, a past All-American Post commander (2021-22). “I did my best to answer his questions. I assured him that VA benefits are earned and that he would not be taking benefits from others. At the time, we did not know of the side effects from burn pits from our service in Iraq.”

Johnson said he shared stories about the struggles Vietnam War veterans had related to Agent Orange. He told Kampert that they might be in the “same scenario” with toxic exposure and burn pits from their deployment to Iraq.

Before leaving Key West, Kampert and Johnson vowed to return to the same event in 2020.

FINDING KAMPERT HELP

A year later, Johnson updated Kampert on his VA disability claim and encouraged Kampert to contact a service officer for his own service-connected disabilities. Johnson searched the internet and found a service officer near Kampert’s home. Kampert said that he promised Johnson he would talk to the service officer.

“I found the contact information for veteran service officer Jesse Cuff, and I was also able to find out that Jesse was also a combat veteran and around the same age as us,” Johnson said. “I later found out [Cuff] was an accredited VFW service officer.”

Cuff, a member of the VFW Department of Wisconsin, met with Kampert and helped him file a disability claim, which Kampert said gave him VA disability compensation and, more importantly, VA health care benefits. Cuff is the director of the Waupaca County Veterans Service Office in Wisconsin.

Kampert, a life member of VFW Post 11346 in Waupaca, Wis., said that he believed Cuff truly cared about him and did everything he could to help.

“He was professional and helped me through the entire process,” Kampert said. “Him being a combat veteran around my age made me feel comfortable to work with him.”

From left, Russell Everroad, Justin Johnson and Joshua Kampert participate in a silkies hike in December 2020 in Key West, Fla. Johnson and Kampert served together in the Marine Corps in Iraq from February to September 2005 with Charlie Co., Combat Logistics Bn. 8.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN JOHNSON



Justin Johnson, a Marine Corps veteran and Gold Legacy life member of VFW Post 5066 in Collierville, Tenn., poses for a picture in 2005 in Fallujah, Iraq.

‘CONNECTING VETERANS WITH THEIR EARNED BENEFITS’

Cuff is an Army Reserve veteran who served from 2002 to 2012 as a combat engineer. He served in Afghanistan in 2010 with the 428th Engineer Company.

“Our primary focus obviously is

the resources available to him and other veterans. Cuff added that he worked with Kampert on a personal level with his health and well-being rather than focusing on paperwork during the initial contact.

“In my opinion, veteran service offi-

“Our primary focus obviously is connecting veterans with their earned benefits. But we also focus on improving the quality of life for veterans that work with us.”

— Jesse Cuff, Veteran Service Officer,
VFW Department of Wisconsin

connecting veterans with their earned benefits,” Cuff said. “But we also focus on improving the quality of life for veterans who work with us. That is what drives me and my team to keep focusing on our veterans.”

Cuff said that with just one phone call, he was able to help Kampert with

cers like Jesse Cuff make some of the biggest and impressionable impacts for our veterans on their decision to receive care and help,” Johnson said. “Knowing that my comrade was able to receive the care and help he had earned from his service made me so proud and thankful.”

A CLAIM FOR A BRAIN TUMOR

On Dec. 9, 2022, Johnson said he received a phone call from Kampert’s wife. It was not good news.

“[Kampert] was in the emergency room for seizures, and the doctors found a tumor in his brain,” Johnson said. “I talked to him in great length about how the tumor was more than likely service connected from toxic exposure to burn pits in Fallujah.”

Johnson said that at the time he was keeping up with VFW’s advocacy for the *Honoring Our PACT Act*, which was made into law in August 2022.

“During this time, I remember contacting [Cuff], who started helping me file a claim for my brain tumor,” Kampert said. “I’ve seen a lot of cases of brain tumors from people who were exposed to burn pits overseas, and I know that was the reason for mine.”

‘I THANK GOD I HAVE VA BENEFITS’

Kampert said he went in for brain surgery with Dr. Mustafa Baskaya, a neurological surgeon at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wis. Kampert said the doctor was able to remove the cancerous tumor.

“My family and I are extremely thankful for the great service I was able to receive from [Cuff], which helped me receive the care and benefits I needed,” Kampert said. “It just takes one phone call to save someone’s life. I know it saved mine. I thank God I have the VA benefits I have, or I would be bankrupt or possibly not be able to get the treatment I need.”

As of November 2023, Kampert was receiving chemotherapy treatment, which he planned to continue through April.



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In 2024, VFW will print and mail six issues of VFW magazine to all VFW members and subscribers (see schedule below). The other four issues of the magazine will be digital and available on VFW's website.



Here are the issues designated for digital and print over the next two years (2024 and 2025):

Digital issues

January
April
August
October

Printed issues

February
March
May
June/July
September
November/December



We want to make sure that VFW members do not miss out on any digital content, so we need verified addresses.

To make this easy, we have created a QR code (at left) that, when scanned, will direct the person to VFW's OMS so that an email address can be added or updated as needed.



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VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Kristina Keenan, left, and past VFW Department of Wisconsin Commander Jason Johns, right, meet with Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-Wis.) last September on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. A Gold Legacy life member of VFW Post 328, Wisconsin's Mother Post, Johns is an attorney with Johns Law Office and has joined forces with BMBF Law, a firm working Camp Lejeune contaminated water cases.



'TAKING CARE OF VETERANS FIRST'

VFW has entrusted two law firms to work with veterans and families who were exposed to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. Both firms offer reduced rates for veterans and families looking for a “fair price.”

BY DAVE SPIVA

The passage of the *Honoring Our Pact Act* in 2022 included a provision known as the Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA). The CLJA allows veterans, family members and contractors suffering from the effects of toxic exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, N.C., to file lawsuits for compensation.

The CLJA applies to people who worked for a period of at least 30 days between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, at Camp Lejeune. It allows them to file lawsuits to obtain “relief for harm” caused by the Marine Corps base’s contaminated water.

To better serve veterans, two law firms dealing with Camp Lejeune cases have agreed to work with VFW and provide its services to veterans and families.

VFW General Counsel John Muckelbauer said that these law firms will provide their services at a reduced rate.

“These firms have agreed to work on these cases at a minimal cost to veterans and their families,” Muckelbauer said. “Many firms, particularly those spending significantly on advertising, are charging 40 percent plus all costs for each case.”

The VFW recommends that veterans harmed by the toxic water should contact a VFW accredited service officer to file a claim for VA disability benefits and compensation. These veterans should also pursue a federal lawsuit under the CLJA.

VFW’s entrusted law firms are:

- Bergmann & Moore (Provides services for 33 percent of the award, including costs for the case.)
- Baird, Mandalas, Brockstedt and Federico (Provides services for 25 percent of the award, plus costs for the case.)

Muckelbauer encourages veterans interested in filing a tort claim under the CLJA to contact each firm and discuss what options may be available to them. He added that picking between the two firms depends on a veteran’s individual situation and preference of which team they feel more comfortable working with. Muckelbauer added that pick-

ing between the two firms depends on a veteran’s individual situation.

‘WE SUPPORT VFW AND ITS MEMBERS’

Glenn Bergmann, an attorney with Bergmann & Moore, said he has recently seen a significant increase of “over-exaggerated” and “abusive” advertisements related to Camp Lejeune contaminated water cases. This, he said, is the reason he wanted to step in and help.

“We saw so many firms that previously had no interest in veterans suddenly become very interested because they saw an opportunity to make money,” Bergmann said. “That is why we approached VFW to see what we can do to help veterans and their families.”

Bergmann added that after screening many different law firms, Bergmann & Moore decided to work alongside Beasley Allen, a law firm known to represent plaintiffs and claimants in tort cases, much like ones related to the CLJA. Bergmann said his firm negotiated a “fair price” that will help veterans and others who are a part of the lawsuit.

“First and foremost, we support VFW and its members,” Bergmann said. “I don’t think it’s right for lawyers to take away most of an award a veteran receives in a case. Many of these law firms historically charge a lot more money than we do. We just want to protect veterans.”

Bergmann & Moore has a long-standing relationship with the VFW to assist VFW appellants with cases before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

HELP THROUGH THE PROCESS

Baird, Mandalas, Brockstedt and Federico (BMBF Law) has extensive experience in litigating groundwater contamination mass tort cases. Attorney Jason Johns, a gold legacy life member of VFW Post 328, Wisconsin’s Mother Post, said he works on behalf of the firm to give as much information as possible to clients. Johns, an attorney with Johns Law Office, also is a past commander for the VFW Department of Wisconsin. He says veterans can expect attentive service.

“When you work with us, you are get-

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<https://www.vfw.org/service-officers>

ting our direct office lines and cell numbers so that we can help you through the process,” said Johns, an Army Iraq War veteran and Purple Heart recipient. “When you call, you are not getting a call center. You are getting me or someone else at BMBF Law who is directly involved in your case, and you know our first names.”

Johns said that while speaking with veterans, families and former Camp Lejeune contractors that they have the VFW to thank for passage of the *PACT Act*.

“The VFW is the only national veteran service organization proactively out at events educating veterans and the public about the Camp Lejeune Justice Act,” Johns said. “This alone says a lot about VFW leadership and its members.”

Johns also said he always recommends veterans pursue VA claims from VFW’s service officers.

ANOTHER OPTION FOR VETS AND FAMILIES

In September, the Departments of Navy and Justice announced a plan that would give those who have already filed a claim a voluntary “Elective Option.” This would allow claimants to “quickly resolve” their federal lawsuits related to the contaminated water at Camp Lejeune.

Attorney Glenn Bergmann of the law firm Bergmann & Moore speaks to service officers in September 2022 in Annapolis, Md., during the VFW NVS Accredited Service Officer Skill Level Training Conference. Bergmann & Moore is one of two VFW-entrusted law firms working with veterans and their families on the *Camp Lejeune Justic Act*. Bergmann & Moore has a longstanding relationship with VFW in assisting VFW appellants with cases before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Claimants, however, only qualify for the Elective Option if they had been diagnosed with one of nine stated conditions less than 35 years after their last exposure at Camp Lejeune. If they meet the requirement of condition diagnosis during the latency period, a claimant could receive a \$100,000 to \$450,000 settlement from the government (based on the amount of time they were at Camp Lejeune). An additional \$100,000 could be given for cases involving death. (Learn more at <https://www.navy.mil/clja>.)

Johns recommends that if an eligible claimant is contacted by the Department of the Navy or Justice about the Elective Option, they should speak with their attorney before agreeing to accept any settlement offer. Johns added that while the elective option may be the best



PHOTO BY CHRIS MACINOWICZ

option for some, it is a “slap in the face” to most. The VFW has also expressed concerns with the elective option.

“To say that years of pain and suffering for those affected by this is only worth up to \$450,000 and that they will only give family members an additional \$100,000 for a case involving death is just wrong,” VFW National Veterans Service Director Mike Figlioli said. “The government needs to do better than that.”

TAKING CARE OF VETERANS

VFW member and Vietnam War veteran Lenny Lazzara said he has been working with BMBF Law for his case. He was stationed at Camp Lejeune from 1968 to 1969. He served in the Vietnam War with the Marine Corps’ 1st Division near Da Nang. Lazzara, who also worked at Camp Lejeune as a civilian electrician through the 2000s, said that the whole process of working with BMBF Law has been an “easy” one.

“They make me feel like they really care about veterans they help,” Lazzara said. “Working with Jason Johns has been an easy process.”

Johns said that he is prouder of his work related to Camp Lejeune water contamination than any other case in his career. He added that hearing life stories from those affected by toxic exposure at Camp Lejeune “angers and motivates” him to do everything he can to help.

“These stories are going to stick with me for the rest of my life,” Johns said. “At the end of the day, we are in the business of taking care of veterans first. I am damn proud of doing it.” ★

EMAIL dspiva@vfw.org

“First and foremost, we support VFW and its members. I don’t think it’s right for lawyers to take away most of an award a veteran receives in a case ... We just want to protect veterans.”

Glenn Bergmann with Bergmann & Moore,
one of two VFW-entrusted law firms



Keeping Clean in the Field

U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. Collin George, of the 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion, shaves in a field environment during training mission Saber Junction 23 on Sept. 12, 2023, at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center near Hohenfels, Germany. Troops need to maintain good hygiene while in the field to ensure they stay healthy and capable of completing their mission.

Saber Junction 23 is an annual Army exercise with NATO allies and other partners. In 2023, it included 4,000 participants from 16 different countries. The forces trained together from Aug. 28 to Sept. 23, 2023. The primary U.S. force for the exercise is the Germany-based Army 2nd Cavalry Regiment. The exercise aimed to develop and enhance the readiness of NATO allies and partners.

Last September, VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt and VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci visited NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Belgium. VFW's leaders learned about NATO's mission, as well as the readiness and quality of life for troops in Europe. (See article on page 36 for more on the VFW's mission in Europe.)



Retired Army Capt. LeRoy Torres, center, shakes hands with President Joe Biden as then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Timothy Borland, far left, watches after the signing of the *Honoring Our PACT Act* into law on Aug. 8, 2023, at the White House in Washington, D.C. On Sept. 29, Torres was awarded \$2.49 million by a Texas jury after losing his job as a state trooper.

ARMY RESERVIST AWARDED \$2.49M

A Texas jury ruled in favor of an Iraq War veteran in a claim that the state failed to comply with the *Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act*.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Six years after his original lawsuit against the state of Texas for not following the *Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA)*, retired Army Capt. LeRoy Torres was awarded \$2.49 million by a Texas jury on Sept. 29.

An Army Reservist who lost his job as a Texas state trooper when he suffered a service-connected disability in the Iraq War, Torres won the lawsuit a year after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in his favor to sue the state of Texas for alleged discrimination.

"A \$2.5 million award is great," VFW General Counsel

John Muckelbauer said. "But it would have been better if Texas had simply followed the law. That way, Torres and his family would not have had to go through all of this."

In *LeRoy Torres v. Texas Department of Public Safety*, the plaintiff said the state had denied his request to remain on the force in an administrative role that would accommodate his service-related disability. Instead, according to Torres, he was forced to retire and then denied a disability retirement pension from the state.

Initially, the state of Texas claimed "sovereign immunity" to get the case dismissed by the court. The majority opinion

of the Supreme Court was that Texas cannot claim such protection from *USERRA*. It was a 5-4 decision that favored the plaintiff.

Then-Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer stated Texas agreed that its “domain power” would yield to federal policy to “build and keep a national military.”

Under *USERRA*, veterans have the right to continue working for their former employer if they leave their job to perform military service. If a veteran is eligible, his or her employer must restore his or her job and benefits after a military service-related absence.

TROOPS HAVE ‘THE RIGHT TO REINTEGRATE’

VFW, as well as other veterans’ organizations, submitted an *amicus curiae* brief to the Supreme Court that stated Torres was “discriminated against” for having a service-connected disability. An *amicus curiae* — or “friend of the court” — brief is a statement submitted by a third-party entity interested in a case.

The *amicus curiae* brief stated that Torres’ case is “not unique” and that about 25 percent of all veterans, including about 40 percent of post-9/11 veterans, have a service-connected disability.

“Veterans with service-related disabilities are more likely to suffer from unemployment and employment discrimination,” the brief stated. “Veterans who develop disabling conditions because of their military service have earned the right to reintegrate into the workforce with the dignity and respect they deserve.”

‘IT WOULD PUT VETERANS AT A DISADVANTAGE’

Muckelbauer said that VFW was interested in the case because it challenged a federal law that was “designed to protect” military service members.

“There are hundreds of thousands of state-employed veterans, Reservists and National Guard troops who are affected by the outcome of this case,” Muckelbauer said. “If a state were to not follow *USERRA*, not only would it put veterans at a disadvantage, but it also would be a threat to national security. It would deter those who are serving from continuing their career in the military.”

VFW’s National Legislative Service Deputy Director Kristina Keenan said she hopes cases such as Torres’ will continue to discourage *USERRA* discrimination across the workforce.

“Thankfully, over the years employers have become more aware of *USERRA* and the re-employment rights of veterans,” Keenan said. “*USERRA* complaints handled by Department of Labor usually only range in the hundreds each year, and of those that have merit, most are resolved favorably for the veteran without requiring legal action.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEROY TORRES

Then-Army Capt. LeRoy Torres, serving in Iraq in 2007, was frequently exposed to burn pits, something he said was considered “the norm.” Years later, doctors determined Torres had a toxic brain injury, which was likely due to burn pit exposure.

Tragically, instances like LeRoy’s continue to be some of the most prevalent in *USERRA* cases, where public servants like police officers are among the most common occupations reporting *USERRA* problems.”

TORRES ‘JUST WANTED TO WORK’

In 1989, Torres enlisted in the Army Reserve, and in 1998, the state of Texas hired him to be a state trooper. He served in that position until 2007, when the Army called him to serve in the Iraq War. Torres said exposure to burn pits was the norm during his time overseas.

In June 2018 testimony to the House VA Health Subcommittee, Torres said that he had been to more than 200 medical appointments since returning from Iraq.

Torres said that in 2012, doctors diagnosed him with a debilitating lung condition. Torres added that in May 2018, doctors determined he had a toxic brain injury, which he claimed was “likely” due to burn pit exposure.

“What is striking about this case is that rather than looking into accommodating Torres’ request following his military service, the state of Texas expressed it didn’t need to follow *USERRA*,” Muckelbauer said. “All Torres did was ask for accommodation in a different position because of his disabilities related to toxic exposure. He was not asking for anything unreasonable — he just wanted to work.”

Torres’ victory is another toward decades of advocacy work for burn pits as a health risk that in August 2022, spearheaded by VFW and with help from many other veterans’ organizations, was signed into legislation.

Known as the *Sgt. 1st Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act)*, more than 1 million disability claims have been filed under the *PACT Act* since it was passed.



EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org



‘It’s the beating heart of modern marketing strategies’

The VFW encourages members to make use of videos in telling their stories and send them to VFW National Headquarters.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

In wanting to humanize its brand, VFW’s Department of Communications and Public Affairs has embraced diverse ways to incorporate videos and reels that showcase the faces and actions of veterans behind the VFW sphere.

Since the days of Fred R. Barnard, who famously promoted his advertising agency in 1921 by stating the Confucian adage that a picture is worth a thousand words, the advent of videos has stretched the barriers of such a notion.

‘THE WAY OF THE DIGITAL AGE’

“In the dynamic realm of marketing, where attention spans are fleeting and first impressions are everything, the importance of video cannot be overstated,” said Randi Law, VFW’s Director

of Communications and Public Affairs. “It’s the beating heart of modern marketing strategies.”

The propeller behind the digital age, videos have supplanted all other forms of media as the quickest and most effective way to catch the attention of audiences. According to Forrester Research Vice President James McQuivey, a one-minute video is worth more than 1.8 million words.

McQuivey’s findings are in line with statistics that show that in the U.S., 75 million people watch videos online each month and 40 billion videos are streamed monthly.

Continuously growing its digital footprint at a global level, VFW, the nation’s oldest combat veterans’ organization, has sought to adapt videos in everything from

its advertising campaigns to telling the stories of its veterans in *VFW* magazine.

Beginning this month and in all the online issues to come, *VFW* magazine will incorporate videos within select articles to further enhance stories. For those members wanting to share their stories at a national level, the VFW encourages sending photos and videos of the work conducted in communities across the world.

“Video is not a trend, it is the way of the digital age,” Law said. “Capture those videos and post them to social media tagging the VFW’s national handles. We love seeing the great work of our members in motion and welcome the opportunity to amplify those efforts via national channels.” ★

EMAIL irodriguez@vfw.org



Karen James is a noted journalist and expert in relationships.

ADVERTISEMENT

Ask The Expert

Health, Marriage, and Love After 50!

The Amazing Bedroom Secret Of Older Italian Men!

A Secret Any Man Can Use...

This month I got a letter from a reader in Texas about a "little secret" that's made her love life with her husband absolutely explosive!

Tina writes: Dear Karen,

For years my husband and I had a great love life, but when he reached his 50s, he just lost his spark in the bedroom. He tried every product available, but nothing worked.

Well, last month he returned from a business trip in Europe and shocked me with more energy and passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like newlyweds and we had a night I'll never forget! It was incredible, and has been ever since. So here we are, closer and more intimate than ever... in our 50s!

On his trip, my husband stayed next to an Italian couple and heard them passionately making love every night. He figured they must be in their twenties, but when he saw them in the hallway, he realized they were in their 70s!

My husband couldn't help himself, so later he asked the man his secret. A nutritionist by trade, the older man told him after 38 years of marriage, their love life was better than ever! Then he took a small pack of tablets from his satchel, gave it to my husband and said "These come from a small village north of my town and are made from naturally pure extracts, packed with rich sexual nutrients. They will give you powerful erections and you'll perform in the bedroom even better than you did as a young man. Then he laughed and said, "You'll become an Italian Stallion - like me!"



"My husband shocked me with more energy and passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like newlyweds and we had a night I'll never forget!"

Karen, that Italian nutritionist was right! But now the pack is almost empty and we desperately want more. Do you know about these European tablets and how to get them in the States?

Sincerely,

Tina D., Fort Worth, TX

Tina, you're in luck! Ever wonder why older men from Italy are famous for staying passionate and sexually active well into their 80s? For years they've relied on a unique blossom extract to enhance their libido and performance in the bedroom

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reputation throughout Europe. As Rocco from Milan put it, "It's like bedroom rocket fuel, especially for us older guys!"

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Provarin is surprisingly inexpensive, but I only know of one importer here in the States. A spokesman told me they were proud to produce the highest quality brand for men and offered any of my readers a one-time double-discount, plus free shipping and 2 free bonus packs!

Wow, so there you go, Tina - and the rest of you readers! Just give them a call today before they sell out. The number is **1-800-262-3621**.

Aren't you glad you asked?

Karen

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‘The Real Closure Was That It Answered Questions’

A VFW member from Michigan helps honor his wife’s late uncle, whose ‘killed at sea’ citation during World War II left many questions unanswered for decades.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

ABOVE: VFW Post 8852 Commander Roger Bobby, second from right, of Port Sanilac, Mich., observes two members of the North Dakota National Guard’s honor guard conduct the folding of the flag in honor of Bobby’s wife’s uncle, World War II veteran Ralph Sitter, who was killed at sea aboard the *HMT Rohna* on Nov. 26, 1943, during a funeral ceremony at Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery in Strasburg, N.D. Looking on from Bobby’s right, is VFW Post 6264 Commander Ed Nieuwsma. Sitter had never received a proper military burial or VA-issued marked grave, and more than 80 years after his death, Bobby and his wife, Tillie, arranged the ceremony in honor of her uncle’s memory.

Family members of World War II veteran Ralph Sitter pose following a VFW-style funeral service orchestrated by Roger and Tillie Bobby that included the North Dakota National Guard's honor guard on July 1, 2023, at Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery in Strasburg, N.D.



Tillie Bobby and her family spent 80 years piecing together the vague details around her uncle's death during World War II, clinging to a citation that simply stated he was killed at sea. But in 2022, while browsing the Find a Grave database online, Bobby and her husband, Roger, of Port Sanilac, Mich., discovered a link between Tillie's uncle's death and the British troopship *HMT Rohna*.

"We got married 53 years ago, and I had just thought her uncle, Ralph, died at sea by having his plane shot down or something," said Roger, a VFW Post 8872 commander in their hometown of Port Sanilac. "Finding out that he was on the *HMT Rohna* led us to finding The Rohna Survivors Memorial Association and learning about the cause of his death."

Pvt. Ralph Sitter was born on July 7, 1909, in Strasburg, N.D., and later

moved to Washington state for work before joining the Army Air Force. He was among the 793 Air Corps 853rd Engineer Aviation Battalion servicemen aboard the *Rohna* on Nov. 26, 1943, when a German aircraft sank the vessel off the coast of Algeria in the Mediterranean Sea.

At the time, the U.S. War Department had withheld details from the public due to the then-new radio-guided bombs used in the attack, according to details the Bobbys found on the Rohna Survivors Memorial Association website. Believed to be the largest loss of Army servicemen at sea in a single attack, it killed 1,015 of the 2,000 Army Air Corps servicemen aboard that day.

When Congress publicly recognized the sinking of the *Rohna* in October 2000, the families of the deceased had been kept in the dark for decades and even the survivors, who had been held



AN INSIDE LOOK

Check out these two videos from the VFW-style funeral ceremony held in honor of World War II veteran Ralph Sitter on July 1, 2023, at the Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery in Strasburg, N.D.

<https://youtu.be/7oL7dXTrG3U>

<https://youtu.be/-GJjYzjpkM>

Videos by Amy Anderson



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“The real closure was that it answered a lot of questions about Uncle Ralph for my wife and her siblings. They got to uncover what the citation really meant when it said, ‘killed at sea.’”

Roger Bobby,
VFW Post 8852 Commander

to secrecy, struggled to prove the event had taken place.

“Little is known about the *Rohna* in the public consciousness as a result, and it is something that does not get talked about or taught in schools,” Roger said. “It was such a huge loss of American lives, and the fact is that the families did not know what happened for more than 50 years. Some family members went to the grave not knowing what happened to their loved ones.”

To do right by her uncle after discovering the details of his death, the Bobbys requested an official VA-issued marker in June 2022. But since Sitter had had a stone on a family plot in a Strasburg cemetery, the VA denied the request that August.

“The regulations are that if the deceased died before 1990 and there is a marker of some sort, the VA would deny it,” Roger said. “So we just went ahead and had our own marker made to look like the VA-issued marker, with the same dimensions, and added ‘HMT Rohna casualty.’”

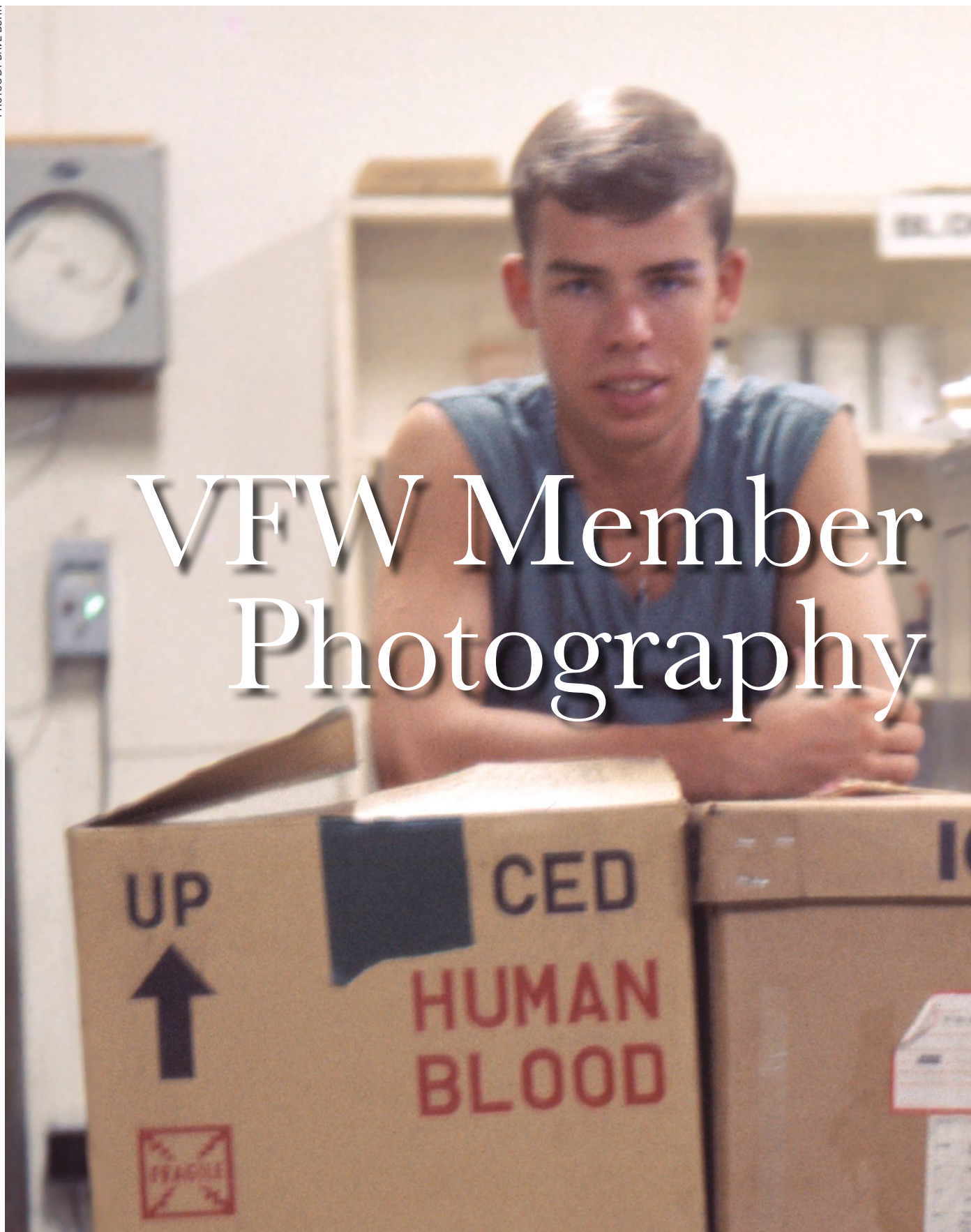
The Bobbys then orchestrated a VFW-style funeral ceremony to honor Sitter and others who perished aboard the *Rohna* on Nov. 26, 1943. They traveled from Port Sanilac to Strasburg and held the ceremony on July 1 at the Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery in Strasburg, where Tillie’s parents and grandparents also are buried.


The ceremony was conducted by an honor guard from the North Dakota National Guard, and more than 70 guests attended the event, which included VFW Posts in North Dakota whose members sat among Tillie’s family to honor Sitter and others who lost their lives on the *Rohna*.

“My wife is the youngest of 16 children, and her mother was Ralph’s sister,” Roger said. “Aside from the nice ceremony we were able to give him, the real closure was that it answered a lot of questions about Uncle Ralph for my wife and her siblings. They got to uncover what the citation really meant when it said, ‘killed at sea.’” ★

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VFW Member Photography





19-year-old Dave Buhr stands behind boxes of human blood at the blood bank at the 36th Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tau in Vietnam in 1967. Buhr enlisted in the Army in 1966 after two of his close friends received orders to go to Vietnam. He received his medic training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. While in Vietnam, Buhr discovered a passion for photography and chronicled his time in-country.

Donates Collection

An Army museum in San Antonio now displays a photo exhibit that details a Vietnam War veteran's tour in 1967. He says it shows "we did make a difference."

BY MADELINE MAPES

When Dave Buhr was serving in Vietnam in 1967 with the 36th Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tau, he found a new hobby in photography.

One of Buhr's battle buddies brought his 35-millimeter camera with him to Vietnam. Buhr played around with the camera and soon purchased his own Yashica 35-millimeter twin lens reflex camera. He used it to capture his perceptions of Vietnam while serving as a medic.

The images Buhr captured were eventually used to show people all over the Midwest what the Vietnam War really meant to Buhr and others who sacrificed their time, strength and lives in support of the Vietnam War.

"Once I started learning how to use the camera and experiment with things, I started capturing a lot of unique photos," said Buhr, a member of VFW Post 3404 in Springfield, Mo.

During his time in Vietnam, Buhr took several photos of everything from wounded soldiers to Buddhists to families affected by the war. He enlarged and framed a number of his photos to create an exhibit that has been showcased at a variety of museums. Buhr said he also made a book to go along with the exhibit to explain each photo and different things about Vietnam.

Buhr said his photos have been showcased at the Churchill Memorial Museum in Fulton, Mo., a veteran celebration and parade in Branson, Mo., and the Blanden Art Museum in Fort Dodge Iowa, along with several other locations across the Midwest.

"I had two or three themes I really wanted to portray to the people that came to the museum shows," Buhr said.

He said he expected some veterans to attend, but a lot of people who came were often families of veterans. Knowing who much of his audience would be, Buhr

Buddhist monks walk the beach on the South China Sea in 1967. The image is one of a 20-photo collection taken by Vietnam War veteran Dave Buhr during his time serving as a medic. The collection is now housed at the U.S. Army Medical Department Museum at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.





made sure his exhibit presented what he considered to be the most important things to know about the Vietnam War and Vietnam as a country.

In May 2022, Buhr donated his 20-photo exhibit to the U.S. Army Medical Department Museum at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, as part of its permanent collection.

The museum has items from all wars that the U.S. has participated in, including a transport medical train car from WWII, a medevac helicopter from Vietnam, as well as numerous vehicles, clothing, medical instruments and more items on display.

Buhr received his medic training at Fort Sam Houston before deploying to Vietnam. After graduating from high school in 1965, Buhr attended a 15-month program in Minneapolis, where he learned lab work and how to conduct EKGs and X-rays. When two of his close friends received their notices that they were going to Vietnam, Buhr enlisted with them under the buddy program.

One of Buhr's favorite photos from his time in Vietnam is of a Vietnamese prisoner with a foot injury in the radiology lab in the hospital. Buhr described the photo as the prisoner and the medic working the X-ray machine look at Buhr while he took the picture. Buhr posed the question of putting U.S. soldiers in the prisoner's shoes in that moment.

"What do you suppose we would look like if we were the enemy, and we were in their medical facility, which would not have this kind of technology," Buhr



asked. "What would we look like?"

Buhr said he believes his photos categorize the people of Vietnam, the physical effects of war on troops as well as the beauty of the country.

"I hope more and more veterans realize that we did make a difference," Buhr said. "There also was a lot of good that occurred over there." ★

EMAIL magazine@vfw.org

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

A Vietnamese grandmother holds her grandchild in Vietnam in 1967. The photo is just one of the photos taken by Dave Buhr during his time as a medic during the Vietnam War. Buhr said he believes the photos he took in Vietnam categorize the people of Vietnam, the physical effects of war on troops as well as the beauty of the country.

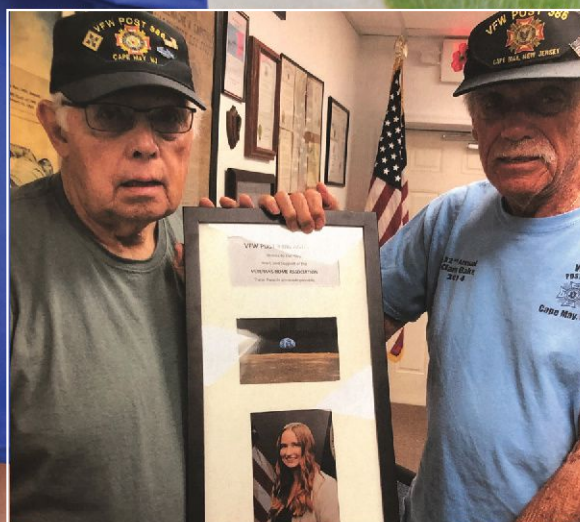
Gabrielle Masterson celebrates her graduation from the University of Kentucky in 2022. Masterson received a degree in computer engineering with a double minor in physics and computer science.

RIGHT: Gabrielle Masterson's official NASA photo. Masterson is a CRONUS flight controller at Johnson Space Center in Houston. In 2018, Masterson received a \$500 Citizenship Award from VFW Post 386 in Cape May, N.J.

'I Have My Dream Job'

The generosity of one New Jersey Post aided a woman on her journey to a NASA career. She says she will always be grateful.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE



Howard Holland and Jim Hill of VFW Post 386 in Cape May, N.J., display a postcard and photo last summer from Gabrielle Masterson, who received the Post's Citizenship Award in 2018. Masterson went on to earn a degree in computer engineering and landed her dream job at NASA in Houston. After getting hired at NASA, Masterson sent the Post a note thanking them for the \$500 award she earned four years earlier.



NASA PHOTO

Growing up in the small community of Cape May, N.J., Gabrielle Masterson had a fascination with outer space. More focused on the arts and less on math and science, Masterson would paint pictures of space and the planets.

"I found space amazing and terrifying at the same time," Masterson said.

During her junior and senior years of high school, Masterson began taking advanced placement math and science classes.

She had a goal of going to college to study physics after she graduated high school in 2018. Getting there, she knew, was not going to be easy with the cost of college tuition.

Masterson said her guidance counselor spoke to her about multiple awards and scholarships for which she could apply. One of those was the Citizenship Award sponsored by Cape May's VFW Post 386.

She wrote an essay describing how one day she hoped to work for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Masterson's essay was selected, and she earned a \$500 award to help her get started at the University of Kentucky.

After a year of studying physics, Masterson changed her major to computer engineering with a double minor in physics and computer science. She had graduate school on her radar after graduation in the spring of 2022.

"Just for fun, I decided to apply to NASA," Masterson said. "I was hired and started in June."

Masterson is a CRONUS flight controller at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. There, she coordinates communication between the space station and mission control. One of her areas of focus is monitoring video and audio messages.

"Getting out of my comfort zone communication-wise has been the most challenging aspect, but also the most rewarding," Masterson said. "Growing up, I was a very shy person. Public speaking was the most difficult part of high school for me."

Masterson said she loves the diversity and hustle and bustle of life in Houston, which is worlds away from her hometown seaside community of less than 3,000 people.

She said she has not and will not forget the kindness of those who helped her fulfill her lifelong goals. To that end, Masterson sent a postcard to the Cape May VFW to thank the members for the award they gave her.

"I knew that college was going to be hard on my own, even with my family helping me as much as they could," Masterson said. "I worked so hard applying for different scholarships. I was so grateful for each scholarship no matter the amount."

According to VFW Post 386 life member Andy Barber, the members were excited to see the postcard from Masterson arrive. Along with a photo provided by her parents, the postcard is framed and hangs inside the Post.

"You would have thought we gave her \$1 million," Barber said. "This postcard is so touching. It is great she reached out after the fact for such a small amount. This girl is such a special person."

Barber said that the Post has given out up to \$12,000 in scholarships to the three schools in the Cape May area. The Veterans Home Association runs the Post canteen, which, Barber added, assists in providing the funds for scholarships.

The Post, which counts 215 members, relies on the schools' guidance counselors when it comes to naming recipients.

"We have faith in the guidance counselors," Barber said. "They are familiar with the students' volunteer and community service work in addition to their grades."

Barber added that the Post has sent VFW items to Masterson and let her know she is welcome to come to the Post any time she is back home in New Jersey.

"They had a piece in my journey of me getting to where I am," Masterson said. "I have my dream job, and I will always be grateful to them."



EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, left, and VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt, center, visit Flanders Field American Cemetery on the southeast edge of Waregem, Belgium, on Sept. 29, 2023.

'The VFW Means What It Says'

VFW leadership embarked on a tour of Europe to engage with U.S. commands, service members and military families.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt led a European tour in late September to visit with U.S. commands, deployed service members and military families, spreading the gospel of the VFW and its unwavering support for them.

Sarmiento and Lipphardt arrived in Belgium on Sept. 26, along with VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci, for the first leg of a two-country tour that included Germany.

The VFW delegates began at NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and Chièvres Air Base in Brussels, where they spoke with and listened to service members to learn about their mission, readiness and quality of life.

"These trips are vitally important to us because supporting our service members, veterans and their families is why the VFW was created to begin with," said Sarmiento, a Gold Legacy life member of VFW Post 5579 in Gibbstown, N.J. "I wanted to send a

message loud and clear to all who serve overseas — the VFW has not forgotten about you, and we have your backs. No better way to do that than in person."

Sarmiento and the VFW delegation then traveled east, where they arrived in Wiesbaden, Germany, 233 miles from Brussels, on Sept. 30. In Germany, they visited numerous military installations and major commands, which included the U.S. Air Force Europe (USAFE), Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and the U.S. European Command Headquarters (EUCOM).



VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, left, VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt, second from right, and VFW Executive Director Ryan Gallucci, right, visit the headquarters of U.S. Army Garrison Benelux near Brussels in Belgium on Sept. 28, 2023.



A VFW delegation (in VFW caps, from left) of VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci, VFW Europe National Council member and National Inspector General Pete Mascetti, VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, VFW Department of Europe Junior Vice Commander John Casey and VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt are joined by U.S. soldiers in October during a visit to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. Sarmiento said he wanted to send a message to all U.S. troops serving overseas that the VFW has their full support and assistance.

During their trip, the VFW delegates learned much about the service members and the veterans who support the military as government civilians and contractors. For Gallucci, whose expertise includes VA benefits assistance, the trip spotlighted one specific opportunity.

“The thing that stood out the most is that the Department of Defense’s total U.S. workforce in Europe needs VA benefits assistance,” Gallucci said. “The VFW can absolutely provide that support, and we are going to look for ways to make it a reality.”

Joining a longstanding tradition of past VFW leaders to tour Europe in search of perspective, Sarmiento and Lipphardt lent an empathetic ear to service members, veterans and their families to better understand how to advocate on their behalf. In doing so, according to Lipphardt, the VFW can strengthen the tenor of its voice when addressing representatives of the Department of Defense, Department

of Veterans Affairs, Congress and the Biden Administration.

“While they may be a whole ocean away in a different country, those in uniform and their families are close to our hearts and in our thoughts always,” Lipphardt said. “When they see us making the effort to visit them where they are, they know the VFW means what it says, and that makes all the difference.” ★

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‘We Just Wanted to Give Back’

A VFW member in Washington State opens a mobile pet pantry for those with furry companions needing a boost.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

PHOTO COURTESY OF POST 11326



Chandra Mattausch and Vietnam War vet Tony Blount work at the mobile pet pantry last spring in Cheney, Wash. Blount founded the pantry after seeing patrons at area food banks with pets. VFW Post 11326, of which Blount is a member, supports the pantry with volunteer hours.



BLOUNT'S VIETNAM WAR EXPERIENCE GOES VIRAL

During an interview with The Vietnam Experience on YouTube, Blount was asked to share his story about his service as a Marine in Vietnam in 1968. It has been viewed almost 2 million times in less than a year. To watch Blount's interview, scan the QR code above.



Vietnam veteran Tony Blount remembers when he and his late wife, Amy, went through hard times when they were younger. The couple — both of whom were 100 percent disabled veterans — had to utilize food banks to make ends meet.

When the duo had the opportunity to give back, they formed West Plains Angels out of Cheney, Wash., to help other veterans, schools, food banks and other groups.

“We just wanted to give back,” said Blount, junior vice commander of VFW Post 11326 in Cheney. “We were finally in a position to give back, so we did.”

Earlier this year, Blount started a mobile pet pantry. He travels to the various food banks in surrounding communities on food distribution days to give out pet supplies to those with furry companions at home.

With the help of his fellow VFW members donating their time to distribute pet food among other items, Blount has donated 2,500 pounds of pet food and nearly \$2,000 in leashes and harnesses. He gives pets toys, too.

“This pet pantry has been deeply well-received,” Blount said. “So many of the people going out to these pantries cannot afford to buy pet food. But oftentimes, their pets are their only source of companionship. I find it curious that the more we gift and give, the more we receive.”

Blount said he is not much into computers or tweeting or texting. Instead, his focus is to “compound the good,” which just happens to be the motto of West Plains Angels.

“My wife of 50 years died two years ago,” Blount said. “I do this in memory of my most beloved wife, Amy. The day I met her at Travis Air Force Base, she wrote in her diary, ‘Today I met the boy I am going to marry.’”

VFW Post 11326 Commander Rick Mattausch describes Blount as “dynamic.” Mattausch and his wife have both volunteered their time at the mobile pet pantry.

“Tony is kind of a saint, really,” Mattausch said. “He’s always working to help the people of the community.”

The Post gives Blount Buddy Poppies, which he distributes when giving away pet supplies. Mattausch said he’s pretty sure Blount has distributed more Poppies than anyone else in their VFW District. He also accepts donations on behalf of the VFW.

“The work he is doing is important,” Mattausch said. “He is helping people who are having a hard time making ends meet and preventing them from having to give away their pets. It is not often you meet someone like Tony.”



EMAIL jdyhouse@vfw.org

REUNIONS AND CLAIMS



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

ARMY

54th Chemical Trp., 11th Armd. Cav Regt.: Tony Banachs (423) 262-9191; ncbanachs@aol.com

NAVY

NCPQA: Lowell Heath (601) 463-0073; senorchief43@yahoo.com

Swift Boat Sailors Assn.: Bob Barnett (505) 340-8715; swift.boat.reunion.2024@gmail.com or www.swiftboats.org

Task Force 116, Gamewardens, Vietnam-present: Stephen Watson (928) 273-2475; swatson9@outlook.com

USS Donner LSD-20: Dennis Heimbach (610) 775-7539; dennisheimb@gmail.com

USS Mullinnix DD-944: Bob Houghton (302) 650-3042; muxassn@hotmail.com or bohn-mjhoughton@gmail.com

USS Savage DE/DER-386: Tom Hendricks (406) 788-1399; tjhendricks33@gmail.com or www.usssavage.org

PROPOSED

USS Paulaski County LST-1088: Robert G. Branyan II; robertbranyan1943@gmail.com

CLAIMS

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

Army

D Co., 1/52nd, 198th Inf., Chu Lai, Vietnam, July 1971 — Seeking anyone who served with me to substantiate a claim for an injury during a firefight from shrapnel to my neck. Medic was able to remove the shrapnel. William T. Shepard (631) 235-6919; shepatlaw@aol.com

HQ, Anti-Tank Plt., B Co., 1st Bn., 75th Abn. Rangers., Weapons Plt., 3rd Plt., Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia, Mar. 1979-Mar. 1981 — Seeking SSgt. D. Caddy, Cpl. Stowers, Spec. 4 Gerold Smith, Lt. Cole, Medic Doc. Johnson, Sgt. Horsely, or anyone who served with me to substantiate an injury from a gunshot wound to the neck and throat area. The incident occurred during close quarter battle training in the Sheepley Hollow area. Joseph E. Hafer Jr. (813) 695-4710; g.i.joehafer@gmail.com



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VFW MAGAZINE REUNION FORM

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

Reunion Listing in Magazine

☐ Planned reunion

(Reunion arrangements have already been made)

☐ Proposed reunion

(Determining interest in organizing a reunion)

Military service (check one):

☐ Air Force

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☐ Marine Corps

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

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

Contact name, phone & e-mail: _____

Date of reunion: _____

City/state reunion will be held: _____

VFW Post no.: _____ Coordinator name & phone: _____

Check the box that best describes the category of feature stories you find of greatest interest in VFW magazine. (Choose only one.)

☐ Military history of wars and battles.

☐ Current events on defense and foreign policy.

☐ VA benefits and services.

☐ VFW internal matters and activities.

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

FEEDING COMMUNITY DURING TOUGH TIMES

A VFW Post in Georgia used VFW's national Day of Service to help feed more than 200 families suffering from food insecurity.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

After a strong showing during VFW's Day of Service debut in 2022, VFW Post 5408 members in Acworth, Ga., raised their bar to include a drive-thru food pantry last May.

On Saturday, May 6, Post 5408 opened its drive-thru to more than 200 families between mid-morning and late afternoon, distributing more than 20,000 pounds of food to help community members suffering from food insecurity.

"Our first year, we cleaned up a memorial in town, but it was more like an introduction," VFW Post 5408 Commander Dwayne Kilbourne said. "Last May, we wanted to take it up another notch and make more of an impact during what has been an economic downturn in the area."

In Acworth, 33 miles northwest of Atlanta, the slight decline in economic activity has brought on a possible recession, according to Kilbourne, who added that Post 5408 sought the best possible way to toss a "lifeline" into the community.

This arrived in the form of a partnership with Sweetwater Mission, a Georgia-based social services organization. The two groups joined to help the estimated 10.7 percent of Acworth residents who suffer from food insecurity, a figure that is slightly above the national average, according to the Atlanta Community Food Bank.

"We found that a lot of the community members, while very supportive of our veterans, also struggled with food insecurity," Kilbourne said. "For us, we were fortunate enough to be able to partner with Sweetwater Mission to



PHOTO COURTESY OF DWAYNE KILBOURNE

Members of VFW Post 5408 unload food provided by Sweetwater Mission, a Georgia-based social services organization, for distribution out of the Post's drive-thru food pantry in Acworth, Ga., during VFW's Day of Service on May 6, 2023. Post 5408 members distributed more than 20,000 pounds of food throughout the day.

help us feed the community."

Sweetwater Mission provided more than 20,000 pounds of food to Post 5408, whose members planned and executed the distribution out of the Post throughout VFW's national Day of Service.

For Kilbourne, who spoke on behalf of his Post members to several news outlets in the area about their Day of Service efforts, the true reward of the day came in the form of smiles from the families whose bellies would be filled.

"A lot of times, you don't know where people are walking or where they are in life," Kilbourne said. "In that moment, a lot of times, especially with food, a necessity, going without it is unaccept-

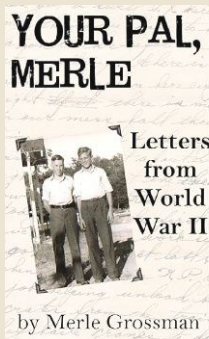
able. So we're fortunate to be able to provide that if only for a moment, a day or a week."

Kilbourne added that despite several other community projects already at hand throughout the year, Post 5408 is looking to extend its partnership with Sweetwater Mission to provide its community with a regular drive-thru food pantry again this year.

"Our VFW Post strongly believes that going beyond the walls of the Post is critical," Kilbourne said. "For us, we're already excited to build upon this drive-thru pantry and get to do many more outside of just the month of May." ★

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STAFF PICK



**Your Pal,
Merle:
Letters
from World
War II**

**By Merle
Grossman,
life member,
VFW Post
5252, Pelican
Rapids, Minn.**

This compilation of letters between World War II veteran Merle Grossman and his lifelong friend, Junior Albright, detail the written communication of one man deployed overseas to a friend stateside. Through these letters written by Grossman, readers get a consistent dose of Midwestern humor, friendship and unique descriptions of places and events experienced by a Minnesotan deployed to the Pacific in selfless duty to his country.

In a minimalist, sparse and candid prose, the author paints an honest and often lighthearted depiction of military service for his best friend. The book also includes photocopies of each letter, as well as sketches drawn by the author during his service. *Rivershore Books*

BOOK CORNER SUBMISSIONS

VFW magazine's "Book Corner" features select books written by VFW members. If you have written a book or an e-book bearing an ISBN or ASIN, contact the magazine for guidelines at magazine@vfw.org or by mail at: VFW magazine, Book Corner, 406 W. 34th Street, Suite 523, Kansas City, MO, 64111. The subject of the book must relate to the military or veterans. VFW does not sell books featured in "Book Corner." Contact the book's publisher for more information.

Face of the Troll

By J. Thom Love, life member, VFW Post 8235, Fort Worth, Texas

This novel encompasses the life of three boys who grew up in rural North Carolina during the World War II era. Although from very diverse social backgrounds, they formed lasting bonds that amused and amazed all but their families. As with most, they drifted apart during college and postgraduate education, having developed different goals and values. The Vietnam War further separated them as one became a Marine Corps combat pilot, a Naval flight surgeon and a protesting, anti-military internist. The death of one reunited the surviving two, revealing how horrid experiences led to greater understanding of themselves and others. *Fulton Books*

From Inez to Andrew: Poems from a Grandmother and Grandson during War and Peace

By Andrew Whipple, VFW Post 7110, St. Maries, Idaho

From Inez to Andrew is a collection of poems shared between Inez Needham Spiller in the 1940s, and poems by her grandson, Andrew Whipple, written in 2021. Many of Inez's poems deal with World War II, as well as with her impending death at the young age of 42 from a heart condition. Andrew's poems, on the other hand, reflect his time as an Army officer and his appreciation for others who have served the U.S. Other poems evolved from his background in sports and as a small-town country boy. The book is the story of the coming together of a grandson and grandmother who never met in real life. *Palmetto Publishing*

Shepherds of God in Wolves' Clothing

By Rev. Dr. Murray Joseph Thompson, VFW Department of New Mexico

Having served in the Army as a military chaplain for nearly a decade, the author offers a unique perspective from both an historical point of view, as well as from personal experience on the extraordinary service of those men and women who have been called to minister what he deems America's finest. In this memoir, he shares his reflections, spotlighting everything from the biblical roots for spiritual leadership among God's people in ancient Israel through the evolving history of the military chaplaincy in the last century. *Christian Faith Publishing*

Perish without Spiritual Warfare

By David F. Winecoff, life member, VFW Post 683, Kittitas, Wash.

In *Perish without Spiritual Warfare*, David Winecoff sets out to provide readers with tools to arm themselves and their families against the spiritual challenges of today's world. He teaches each reader how to use these tools to become the "overcomer that God intends each Christian to be." In his book, the author states that relatively few study the word of God or study the Bible and the promises of God on their own. He believes many religious Christians are feeling more and more that we are all living in a spiritual war zone, and his book is a manual on how to navigate such challenges today. *Reecer Creek Publishing*

The Abalone Ukulele: A Tale of Far Eastern Intrigue

By Roger Lee Crossland, life member, VFW Post 9460, Stratford, Conn.

The Abalone Ukulele: A Tale of Far Eastern Intrigue is an historical novel set in 1913 Shanghai, where four cultures are about to collide: China, Korea, Japan, and the U.S. The point of collision is three tons of Japanese gold ingots meant to undermine an already collapsing China. Three ordinary men, a disgraced Korean tribute courier, a bookish naval officer and a polyglot third-class quartermaster realize they must foil Japanese subversion and — with sub rosa assistance from Asiatic Station — high-jack that gold to finance a Korean insurrection. *New Academia Publishing*

‘Our Goal Is to Continue to Positively Show Up’

A VFW Post in Illinois annually awards scholarships to descendants of veterans. The Post commander said she hopes recipients will be inspired to join the military or support veterans.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

For the past nine years, VFW Post 311’s emphasis on higher education has led to more than \$30,000 in scholarships awarded to high school seniors with family ties to veterans in Richton Park, Ill.

What began in August 2014 with three \$1,000 scholarships, the *Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 Commander’s Scholarship* program has since awarded up to six \$1,000 scholarships a year to more than 30 recipients.

“It’s our way of giving back to the descendants of veterans and helping our future leaders,” VFW Post 311 Commander Aretha Spurlock said. “We want to show the community and our young adults that we are still here serving in a positive way. Maybe this inspires them to go on and join the military, or maybe it leads them to support veterans in some capacity.”

The applicants each year are screened by the Post’s scholarship committee, which includes past and current educators and professionals, to ensure they meet the primary requirements to compete. They are then judged on academic transcripts, community involvement and letters of recommendation from high school and community leaders.

Akin to VFW’s national *Voice of Democracy* contest, Post 311’s scholarship committee also assigns an annual essay theme for participants.

“The students are graduating seniors, and they are asked as a part of their applications to write an essay with the theme being a topic of Americanism or democracy,” VFW Post 311 Quartermaster Arnold Taylor said. “We then review and score their essays and evaluate their personal interviews with the committee.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARNOLD TAYLOR

From left, VFW Post 311 scholarship committee members Tamara LeMay, Dr. Rupert Evans, Sharee Pearce and VFW Post 311 Commander Aretha Spurlock present students Myia Williams, third from left, and Arthur Levi McFadden III, second from right, with the *Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 Commander’s Scholarship* on July 10, 2023, at VFW Post 311 in Richton Park, Ill.

As is customary, the 2023 recipients were announced on July 10 during Post 311’s “Commander’s Ball,” where the winners read their respective essays to a crowd of VFW members and guests.

The 2023 winners included local seniors Arthur Levi McFadden III and Myia Williams. McFadden, a graduate of Crete-Monee High School in Crete, Ill., started this fall at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, while Williams, a Thornwood High School graduate in South Holland, Ill., is attending Xavier University of Louisiana in

New Orleans.

Post 311 members have already begun fundraising for the 2024 *Benjamin O. Davis Post 311 Commander’s Scholarship* contest, which opens in April to participants.

“The VFW states that the true character of America is measured by her communities and the people who work to improve them,” Spurlock said. “We are a VSO that not only supports veterans, but we support the entire veteran family and dependents. Our goal is to continue to positively show up.” ★

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Pet Owners Take Note: Pet Insurance Is a Sure Bet

It seems that just about everything is more expensive lately. Though inflation has slowed, prices have yet to do the same. Used cars, rent, groceries and gas prices all remain well above pre-pandemic expenses.

According to *The Washington Post*, baked goods and cereal prices remain 23 percent above 2020 levels. Eggs are 52 percent more expensive than in 2020.

Raising a pet seems to be getting more expensive, too. The dog-sitting app, Rover, has estimated yearly dog expenses range from \$600 to \$3,500, depending on your location. For example:

- Flea and tick prevention can cost up to \$215.
- Annual checkups are typically over \$100.
- Dental cleanings can cost upwards of \$600.

WAYS TO SAVE MONEY AS A PET OWNER

Give your wallet a break and save on pet ownership with these tips:

- **Don't try new food before the weekend.** If the new food does not agree with your pet's tummy, emergency vets are usually the only option open on the weekends and can be pricey.
- **Stay up-to-date on prevention and vaccines.** Maintaining your pet's preventative health care such as vaccines and flea and tick medicine may seem expensive, but it is often more affordable than dealing with an infestation or illness.
- **Shop around for groomers.** Ask friends and family for their groomers' prices or learn to groom your pets at home.



- **Buy food in bulk or rely on automatic shipping.** Buying pet food and treats in bulk will help you save over time, and many online retailers offer discounts for auto-ship orders.
- **Purchase pet insurance.** Depending on the type of policy level you purchase, a variety of common procedures and treatments for both cats and dogs are covered, saving you money on vet bills.

A LOOK AT WHAT PET INSURANCE COVERS

When pets are young, pet insurance can cover routine vaccinations and spaying or neutering. Coverage can include unforeseen accidents and illnesses that will happen throughout their lives, from allergies to sprains. As your pets age, they will have different needs — perhaps arthritis medication or cancer treatment — and pet insurance can cover that, too.

Pet insurance makes it easier to be prepared and care for your pets. It often covers these conditions and more:

- Accidents and injuries, such as poisons and sprains.
- Common illnesses, such as vomiting and diarrhea.
- Serious illnesses, such as cancer and diabetes.
- Chronic illnesses, such as allergies and arthritis.
- Hereditary conditions, like hip dysplasia and blood disorders.
- Testing and diagnostics, such as ultrasounds and blood tests.
- Procedures, such as surgeries and chemotherapy.
- Holistic and alternative methods, like acupuncture.
- Wellness procedures, such as vaccinations and spay/neuter.

For more information about pet insurance, call the VFW Member Benefits Department at 1-800-821-2606.

Depending on your location, dog expenses can range from \$600 to \$3,500.



During the week-long 83rd Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, veterans got a chance to see VFW in action.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

Motorcycle enthusiasts line the streets of Sturgis, S.D., last August for the VFW-sponsored Sturgis Military Appreciation Day, which featured remarks from VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore, who took this photo from a platform above the crowd. Sturgis organizers said 617,000 attended this year's Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, an increase of 6,000 from last year. Nearly 45 percent of all attendees were veterans.

As hundreds of thousands of motorcycle enthusiasts converged in Sturgis, S.D., last August, VFW representatives were there to greet them. During the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, which ran from Aug. 4-12, VFW members were present to talk about veterans' earned benefits, tout the great work of the VFW and sign up new members.

According to interim VFW Membership Director Corey Hunt, 140 new members were recruited from 29 different states, representing multiple war periods during the rally.

"We do really well there with recruiting," Hunt said. "We referred about 30 participants to the on-site service officer, who was Will Hoffman from South Dakota."

Rally organizers reported 617,000 visitors to Sturgis for the event. They estimated that 42-45 percent of registered rally-goers were veterans.

VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore rallied the crowd on Aug. 8 for the Sturgis Military Appreciation Day, presented, in part, by the VFW. From a platform above the masses of bikers below,

Whitmore explained what it means to be a veteran.

"The best part of being in Sturgis is meeting fellow veterans and listening to their stories," Whitmore said. "We all have that common bond, and it is strengthened by sharing those experiences that no civilian can understand. We need to stay at Sturgis for this very same reason. It is where we can explain the advocacy, benefits and the camaraderie of the VFW."

Hunt said VFW's Membership Department is looking at ways to expand its presence next year in Sturgis. ★

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROL WHITMORE



ABOVE: From left, Jackyl frontman Jesse James Dupree, interim VFW Membership Director Corey Hunt and VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore discuss plans at the Full Throttle Saloon outside Sturgis, S.D., last August during the annual motorcycle rally. Dupree has long been an avid supporter of the VFW, particularly supporting its *Unmet Needs* program.

TOP RIGHT: From left, VFW member Judy King, South Dakota Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore and interim VFW Membership Director Corey Hunt enjoy the sights during the 83rd Sturgis Motorcycle Rally last August in South Dakota. King traveled from Indiana to help recruit new members into the VFW. Some 140 veterans from 29 different states were signed up.

BOTTOM RIGHT: VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore speaks on a platform before thousands of rally-goers on Aug. 8 in Sturgis, S.D. Whitmore was one of the VFW representatives on hand during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. In addition to member recruiting, VFW offered veterans' benefits claims assistance. Whitmore said it was an honor to attend and represent VFW. VFW members from Sturgis and nearby Deadwood, S.D., also helped with the VFW efforts during the rally.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROL WHITMORE



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROL WHITMORE



Members of the Guantanamo Bay VFW Post 12225 take the oath of installation last October during the new Post's institution ceremony. This is the first time in 30 years a VFW Post has been located at Gitmo. After a VFW delegation visited Naval Station Guantanamo Bay last August, it was clear that a VFW presence there was necessary. At publication time, the Post had 136 members on its roster.

VFW Goes 'Where the Troops Need Us'

After a 30-year absence at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, VFW now has a thriving Post where VFW's founders fought during the Spanish-American War.

BY JANIE DYHOUSE

On Sept. 29, 1899, 13 veterans of the 17th Infantry Regiment gathered in Columbus, Ohio, to remember their fellow soldiers who were killed while serving on Cuba during the Spanish-American War. They also were there to form an order that would last beyond their lifetimes to enfold veterans of foreign service in the coming decades.

It is fitting that last October, VFW Post 12225 was instituted on the very ground upon which VFW's founders fought during the Spanish-American War 125 years ago.

After a 30-year VFW absence on Cuba, the Post has a permanent and physical location on Naval Station Guantanamo Bay.

"Having a Post on the same ground that the founders of the VFW fought on over 125 years ago is truly special," said

VFW Post 12225 Commander Matt Mayer. "There is a large population of veterans living and working on the base and a large amount of deployed service members serving here currently. To have a veterans service organization here is very important so we can better assist our veteran community."

Last August, VFW Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento led a delegation on a fact-finding mission to the naval station. That delegation, which included past VFW Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch II, met with various decision-makers to determine the need for and feasibility in establishing a VFW Post at the naval station.

Some of the key leaders the delegation met with were Capt. Samuel "Smokey" White, commanding officer Naval Station Guantanamo Bay; Senior Chief Mark House, command master

chief Naval Station Guantanamo Bay and the commander and operations sergeant major of Joint Task Force Guantanamo; the principal of WT Sampson Elementary/High School; the commander and first sergeant of Marine Corps Security Force Company Guantanamo Bay; and leaders of Naval Hospital Guantanamo Bay.

The move offers ease of access to VFW's many programs and services directly to some 6,000 service members, veterans and other members of the military community.

"The need and desire for convenient access to the support and resources, most notably the VA claims assistance we provide, was made explicitly clear," Sarmiento said. "We're excited about this opportunity and look forward to becoming a pillar of support in this close-knit community."

Roesch said he was honored to be a part of getting the new Post stood up in less than two months.

"I have become good friends with Post Commander Mayer, officers, and members of the post," Roesch said. "Watching them taking the reins with excitement and enthusiasm is something I will never forget. Now we can execute all our programs with boots on the ground for a very special military community that needed us as much as we needed them."

Post 12225 was established with 136 members of the new Post, which include the naval station's commanding officer and other leaders among its ranks. According to the Post commander, the new presence will be beneficial to the community.

"First and foremost, we are going to assist veterans in any way that we are needed, that goes without saying," said Mayer, a chief warrant officer 3 with the Michigan National Guard. "Secondly, we have plans to get involved in almost every aspect of the community here. From scholarships for the students, to recognizing our teachers and first responders, we will be on the forefront of community involvement and telling the story of the VFW."

The "Gitmo Post" is the latest to join a small handful of currently active Posts located directly on military installations. It is now the 36th Post operating overseas.

"It is always great when we can re-establish a VFW presence in an area where it is needed," interim VFW Membership Director Corey Hunt said. "The VFW can now directly help support the service men and women who find themselves stationed there at Gitmo. What other VSO goes to where the troops need us?"

For a look at the photos from the installation ceremony of the Gitmo VFW Post 12225, visit the *VFW Magazine* Facebook page. 📷

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Post Commander is #StillServing

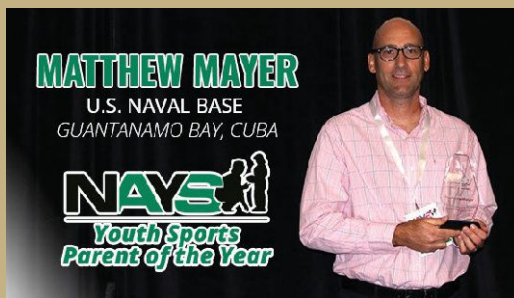
In November, VFW Post 12225 Commander Matt Mayer was named the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) 2023 Volunteer Parent of the Year.

Each year, NAYS picks one volunteer parent out of its 1,400 partnering municipal and military installation youth sports programs.

Mayer, who is serving with the Michigan National Guard at Naval

Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was nominated by the youth sports and fitness director at Guantanamo Bay.

"It was truly an honor to be selected for such an amazing



Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, VFW Post 12225 Commander Matt Mayer receives the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) 2023 Volunteer Parent of the Year award in November in Baltimore, Md. Mayer received the award for his work as a youth sports coach at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, where he has been stationed for two years.

award," said Mayer, who has been stationed at Gitmo for two years and lives there with his family. "I was selected for the help I provide coaching and officiating various youth sports to include basketball, baseball, football and soccer."

NAYS is an organization that provides coach and official training to some 1,400 municipal and military installation youth sports programs.

Mayer traveled to Baltimore, Md., for the NAYS annual convention and was presented his award.

In his 23rd year of military service with the Michigan National Guard, Mayer is a perfect example of one who is #StillServing.

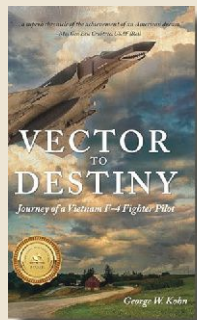
17th Infantry Regiment's Claim to Fame in Spanish-American War

Of all the Medals of Honor awarded during the Spanish-American War, one-third were awarded to members of the 17th Infantry Regiment, a regular unit stationed at Columbus Barracks in Ohio before the war.

At El Caney, Cuba, on July 1, 1898, the unit's members earned nine Medals of Honor. Among them was VFW co-founder Oscar Brookins. He was awarded the MOH for dragging a wounded comrade to safety during the heat of battle.

In 1899, the 17th went on to the Philippines, where it served in seven of that war's campaigns.

STAFF PICK



**Vector to
Destiny:
Journey of a
Vietnam F-4
Fighter Pilot**

**By George Kohn,
life member,
VFW Post 7591,
Madison, Wis.**

Vector to Destiny: Journey of a Vietnam F-4 Fighter Pilot goes beyond the classic Vietnam War story to give the reader some insight into what it was like to grow up on a farm with a big dream. The author's journey takes the reader from farm fields in Wisconsin to the skies over Vietnam in F-4 fighter jets. Share Kohn's struggles, failures and exhilarations as he moves along his path toward destiny. His story is filled with riveting accounts of missions flown into intense enemy resistance. Along the way, there were indications of divine intervention. The reception upon returning home from the war was less than desirable. According to Kohn, understanding the plight of Vietnam veterans is a prelude to respecting the contributions of 2.4 million Americans who have fought to preserve the freedoms we cherish. *Koehler Books*

BOOK CORNER SUBMISSIONS

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Awaiting the Sun: WWII Veterans Remember the Aleutians

By Bil Paul, VFW Post 5181, Dixon, Calif.

In *Awaiting the Sun*, author Bil Paul tells the captivating story of the Aleutians, which was the only North American territory to be invaded and occupied during World War II. The fighting for these remote islands off the Alaskan mainland lasted for more than a year and claimed more than 3,800 Japanese and American lives. Soldiers on both sides experienced spells of intense combat, but also extended periods of extreme isolation and boredom. Paul has constructed a narrative history of the conflict by weaving together the accounts of more than 200 officers and enlisted men. The in-theater experiences of noted writer Dashiell Hammett, as well as musicians Yehudi Menuhin and Bud Freeman, appear in the narrative. Chapters detail men's reactions to dismal weather, often poor food and housing, and the lack of women. More than 50 official and personal photographs complement the narrative. *Schiffer Publishing*

Flying Low

By Steven Blanton, VFW Post 2872, Athens, Ga.

This memoir by Steven Blanton tells the story of a boy growing up in a household whose patriarch was a World War II Navy veteran of the Pacific Theater and part of the "Greatest Generation." Though Blanton seldom heard his father talk about what he did during the war, this book captures his own experiences during the Vietnam War, serving as a tell-all for his children and grandchildren. During his time in Vietnam, the author kept a calendar that became the basis for the stories in his memoir. Readers can navigate the author's life, as he writes about his recollections from growing up in Atlanta to his college years and his time in Vietnam. *Deeds Publishing*

Good Order and Discipline

By Gregory Huckabee, life member, VFW Post 3061, Vermillion, S.D., and Dale Keiser

This nonfiction account by Gregory Huckabee and Dale Keiser tells the untold story of the aftermath of World War II. While the world reels back from the abyss of the war, the whispers get louder: rumors of American soldiers brutalized by a U.S. military stockade staff gone renegade. Beatings, torture, shootings, soldiers disappearing in the middle of the night and sadistic officers and guards doing whatever they desired to stay in control. As international trials in Nuremberg begin to prosecute Nazis accused of war crimes, a hotshot Army lawyer is brought in by the Supreme Headquarters of the Army in Europe to prosecute a vicious sergeant practicing unimaginable cruelty. The trial unearths shocking events at the Lichfield Replacement Depot stockade that will change the course of military justice forever. *GRAT Dog Press*

Memoirs of 1st Wolfhounds Bravo's Third Platoon 66-67 (The Search for America's Lost Nuclear Weapons)

By Frederick Roark, VFW Post 445, Charleston, S.C.

This memoir is about the exploits of the author as a member of his platoon during the Vietnam War between 1966-1967. There is combat, humor, romance and heroism. It begins in the teenage years of the platoon leader's life and proceeds to his military service. *Book Baby*



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