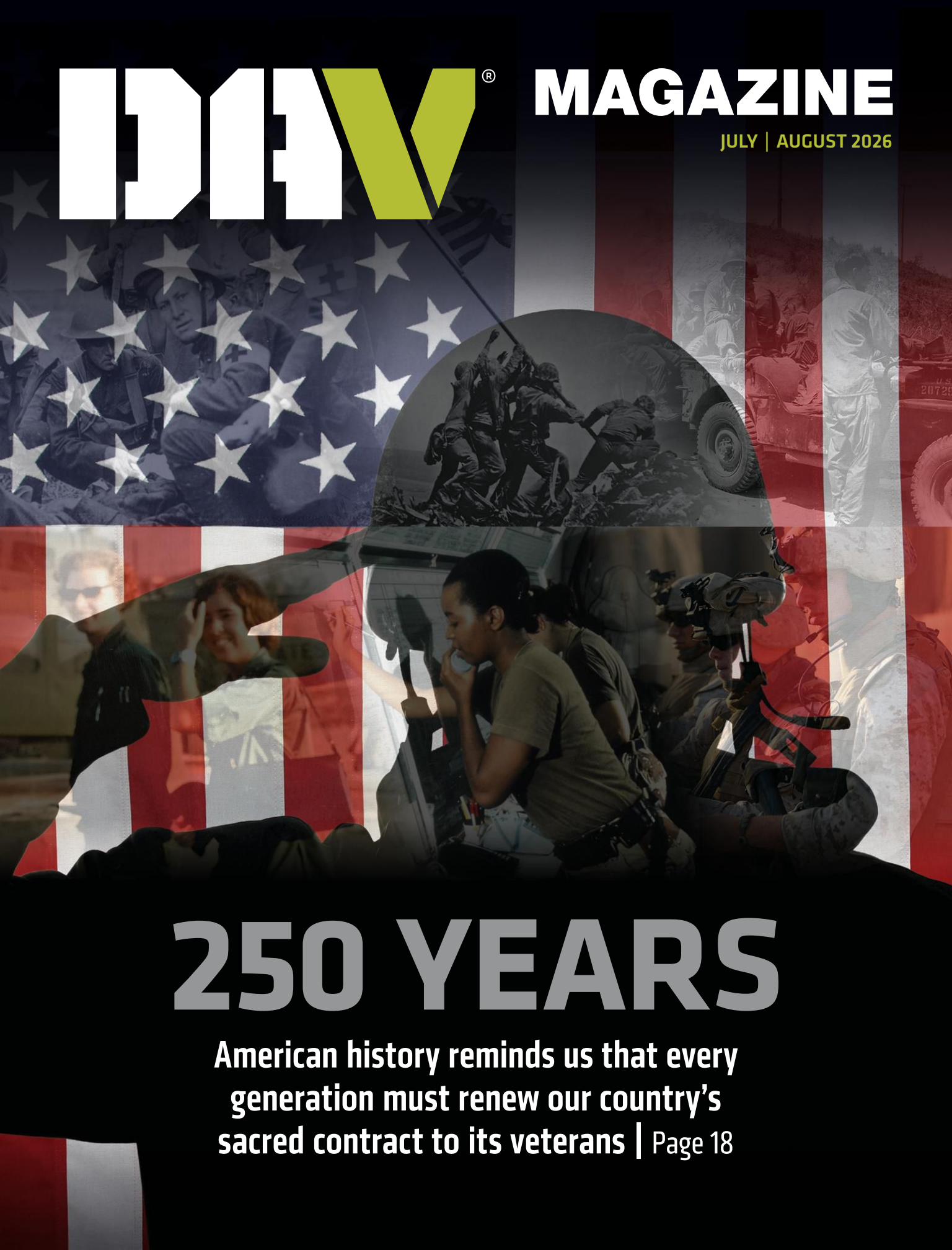


The background of the cover is a stylized American flag with stars and stripes. Overlaid on the flag are several semi-transparent images: a group of soldiers in the top left, a circular inset showing soldiers in a combat situation in the center, and a group of soldiers in the bottom right. The DAV logo is in the top left, and the magazine title is in the top right.

DAV[®]

MAGAZINE

JULY | AUGUST 2026

250 YEARS

American history reminds us that every
generation must renew our country's
sacred contract to its veterans | Page 18



Orlando to host 2026 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention

Aug. 1-4, 2026 | Rosen Shingle Creek

This year, DAV's annual national convention returns to sunny Orlando, Florida. Known for its attractions and entertainment, "The City Beautiful" ensures visitors of all ages have an experience they'll never forget.

The convention is an opportunity to advocate for ill and injured veterans, enjoy the camaraderie of fellow DAV members, and take ownership of the organization and its yearly agenda—while allowing for a hearty dose of fun in this premier vacation destination.

Orlando offers something for everyone: family-friendly attractions; world-class dining and entertainment; top-notch golf courses and other recreational activities; and, of course, beautiful weather.

After you spend time working alongside fellow veterans to help shape DAV's future, an array of one-of-a-kind experiences awaits you. Convention-goers

can experience the magic of Walt Disney World, the sights and sounds of Universal Orlando, the wonders of the marine life at SeaWorld, the world-class shopping at Pointe Orlando, or the breathtaking views atop the 400-foot Wheel at ICON Park, just to name a few. Florida's world-famous beaches and Kennedy Space Center are also only an hour away.

Attendees enjoy a special room rate of \$149 per single or double at Rosen Shingle Creek's overflow property, Rosen Centre Hotel. Transportation between Rosen Centre and Rosen Shingle Creek will be provided. ■



For more information regarding the national convention and to access the link to the DAV room block, scan the QR code or visit dav.la/orlando26.

FUN NIGHT FEATURING

THE
WAR
AND
TREATY



Founded in 2014 by the husband-and-wife duo Michael Trotter Jr. (an Army combat veteran) and Tanya Trotter, *The War And Treaty* has emerged as one of the most electrifying new acts in American music. They were nominated for Best New Artist and Best American Roots Song at the 2024 Grammy Awards, and have also been nominated for Duo of the Year at the CMA Awards two years in a row, and Vocal Duo of the Year at the ACM Awards. They won two Americana Music Awards (both for Duo/Group of the Year) and have received additional nominations and recognition from the CMT Music Awards, Folk Alliance International and People's Choice Country Awards, as well as from the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and the Grand Ole Opry.

MONDAY, AUG. 3 | 8-10 P.M.

TRAVEL ASSISTANCE The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) can facilitate the screening of injured or wounded veterans. After making flight reservations, veterans (or their care coordinators) should contact a TSA Cares representative by calling toll-free 855-787-2227 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. and weekends and holidays from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time. A representative will either provide screening information relevant to the veteran's disability or refer the veteran to experts at TSA for help through the screening process.

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER COLEMAN NEE



A year in service, together

As I reflect on this past year serving as your national commander, I'm filled with gratitude—for your dedication, your compassion and your unwavering commitment to our fellow veterans. It's been the honor of a lifetime to stand alongside you in service to those who have worn the uniform and to the families who stand behind them.

From the very beginning, I've spoken about the values that shaped me—community, camaraderie and a belief that we are strongest when we come together in service to something greater than ourselves. Over the course of this year, I've seen those values brought to life in every corner of this organization. Whether volunteering at food pantries during the holidays, advocating on Capitol Hill or showing up in your local communities to lend a hand to a veteran in need, you've demonstrated what it truly means to serve.

We've reinforced that DAV is more than a service organization. It's a movement powered by people willing to give their time, energy and hearts to ensure no veteran is left behind. During DAV Community Impact Day, you proved that even an hour of your time can change a life and that face-to-face connection remains one of the most powerful tools we have.

At the same time, we continued to press forward on the legislative front, fighting for the benefits and recognition our veterans and their families have earned, from strengthened mental health initiatives to critical legislation for survivors. Your voices helped ensure that lawmakers understand the real-world impact of their decisions.

As I mentioned in my first commentary, there's a passage from the Roman statesman Cicero that I first encountered as a young man that has remained my guiding principle: "Not for ourselves alone are we born." That idea has defined my life in service, and I see it reflected in each of you. It's the foundation of who we are as veterans and as DAV members.

As I step aside, I do so with complete confidence in the future of this organization. The strength of DAV has never been found in any one leader but in the collective commitment of its members. You're the reason we succeed. You're the reason veterans continue to find support, dignity and hope.

Thank you for allowing me to be part of this journey. It's been a privilege to serve you.

Now, as always, let's get back to work. Our mission continues, and our fellow veterans count on us. ■

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National Archives photo 542082

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Coleman Nee

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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT BARRY A. JESINOSKI



Our enduring sense of duty

Veterans carry a moral imperative long after they hang up their uniforms. The commitment to serve, to lead and to look out for one another doesn't fade with time—it evolves. DAV Community Impact Day is a powerful example of what that continued service looks like in communities across the country.

The grassroots effort on April 4 was more than a single day. It was an initiative that did exactly what our organization was built for: showing up for veterans in a tangible, local and highly visible way. It brought our mission out of meeting rooms and into neighborhoods, where the impact could be seen.

Nearly 2,000 volunteers showed how veterans continue to serve their communities through DAV Community Impact Day.

At its core, this annual event mobilizes DAV members, supporters and partners to serve their communities—all on the same day nationwide. This boots-on-the-ground service includes neighborhood cleanups, food bank support, home repairs for veterans and clothing drives. These are practical, immediate ways to make a difference—meeting needs, restoring spaces and strengthening communities.

Volunteering doesn't have to take a lot of time—just 60 minutes can make a meaningful difference in the lives of veterans.

The same values that guided us in uniform drive this coordinated movement of local volunteers. In cities and towns across America, DAV members stepped forward not because they were asked to but because service is who we are.

The day also helps reframe the narrative around veterans. Too often, the conversation focuses only on what veterans need. Community Impact Day reminds people of what veterans give. It highlights leadership, reliability and a continued willingness to serve something larger than ourselves. It shows our neighbors that veterans remain a vital and active force for good. It's not in a veteran's nature to see someone in need and walk away—we take responsibility, even if it's the first time we've met.

Just as important, it puts our chapters squarely in the public eye in an approachable, meaningful way. When communities see DAV members rolling up their sleeves and getting to work, it builds trust, strengthens relationships and deepens our connection at the local level.

Beyond the many community benefits, there's also a profound impact on those who participate. These moments reinforce camaraderie, restore a sense of purpose and remind us that we're still part of a team.

The growing number of registrations this year caught the attention of Sinclair Cares, the charitable arm of Sinclair Broadcast Group, which generously partnered with DAV to bring Community Impact Day to the homes and hearts of Americans nationwide.

This campaign is gaining momentum, and if you didn't have the opportunity to participate this year, we're just getting started. ■

Moral injury

The fact that DAV is acknowledging moral injury as a wound, directing members to research it, and noting the September 2025 American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders recognition matters. It signals that the conversation is shifting. And I want to gently add something to the conversation.

Here's the distinction we can't afford to miss: Moral injury isn't primarily a fear response. It's an ontological wound. The wound isn't in the nervous system alone. It impacts the moral architecture that once told them who they were, what mattered and why any of it was worth enduring. **Ryan Roberts, Houston, Texas**

Editor's Note: DAV partners with organizations like Save A Warrior and Boulder Crest Foundation to help address these issues for veterans facing moral injury. Learn more at saveawarrior.org and bouldercrest.org.

Psychedelic therapy

I want to sincerely thank DAV for doing such a wonderful job telling my story and for highlighting my journey with treatment-resistant PTSD, depression and anxiety.

As a woman veteran of color, it means so much to be seen, heard and represented. Sharing these stories matters. It helps break stigma, reminds others they are not alone and shines a light on the realities many veterans face long after service.

If my story helps even one person feel less alone or more willing to reach out

for support, then it was worth sharing. Thank you, DAV, for seeing me. **Gigi Theocharides, Las Vegas, Nevada**

Editor's note: Learn more and find Gigi's story at dav.org/mindsclapes.

VA bureaucracy

My problem with the VA is not the healthcare providers. They are fantastic people. It's the unbelievable bureaucracy, like computer systems that are 30 years behind civilian hospitals and filling out paper forms when everyone else has gone digital. I was sent to a site once and told to print out the form there, fill it out and then put it in the snail mail. Civilian hospitals all have websites, and you can fill out anything digitally. **Douglas Simmons, Honolulu, Hawaii**

Informed consent

Oh, how I wish I had the informed consent rule (H.R. 4837) years ago! My meds caused kidney damage, and it wasn't like I had any warning. It took me getting admitted to the hospital to find out it was Stage 3 kidney failure. (Stage 4 is dialysis and Stage 5 is death.) Where was my Stage 2 or 3 diagnosis? How could this happen? I'm learning from other veterans that it is common. That is unacceptable! I am proud to be a lifetime member of DAV. **Belinda Small, Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas**

Caregivers' reality

I am a caregiver to a high-risk combat veteran. The Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act (H.R. 2148/S. 879) is an important and necessary step in supporting caregivers during

post-caregiving transition. However, ongoing caregiver workforce participation remains structurally unresolved. Many caregivers cannot realistically reenter the workforce while still providing high-intensity care.

If we want to fully protect military and veteran families, future reform should also consider retirement credit accrual during active caregiving, expanded stipend eligibility, employer protection incentives, and pathways for flexible or remote federal work for active caregivers. In many cases, caregiving is not temporary. Policy should reflect that long-term reality. **Taylor McGowan, Glendale, Arizona**

DAV Patriot Boot Camp

I recently had the opportunity to attend DAV Patriot Boot Camp. One of the biggest takeaways for me was the strength and authenticity of the veteran entrepreneur community. The connections made with other business owners, along with the welcoming and highly supportive DAV staff, created an environment centered on real growth, honest conversations and forward momentum.

The one-on-one mentorship sessions were especially impactful. I had the privilege of sitting down with celebrity chef Robert Irvine, and what I appreciated most was his direct leadership style. He doesn't sugarcoat feedback. His bold, open opinions leave no guesswork and no fluff, which is exactly the type of constructive criticism I was hoping to gain. **Joshua Brack, Springfield, Missouri**

WRITE TO US Please send feedback to DAV Magazine, 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018, or via email to feedback@dav.org. We also welcome feedback on our social media pages. We regret we are unable to acknowledge every letter due to the volume received. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving claims are referred to DAV's Service Department.



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH FRASER/U.S. ARMY

Love lives on

Act would protect benefits for surviving spouses who choose to remarry

By M. Todd Hunter

For families of severely disabled veterans, service doesn't end when the uniform comes off. Spouses often spend years as caregivers, advocates and steady partners through the lasting effects of service-related injuries and illnesses. They're there for the hospital visits, the sleepless nights and everything between—sharing the burden and the sacrifice.

And when a veteran dies, their love and commitment don't disappear. The support those families earned shouldn't either.

Like anyone else, veterans want their spouses to keep living full, meaningful lives after they're gone. They want to know their family's sacrifices are recognized and that their loved ones can move forward without worrying about losing the benefits they depend on. That's where the Love Lives On Act (H.R. 1004/S. 410) comes in.

At the time of publication, the Senate version has already made it through committee, while the House version is still under review.

The current rules for surviving spouses are outdated and unfair. For example, if a surviving spouse remarries before age 55, they can lose the benefits they earned through years of supporting their veteran.

The Love Lives On Act would remove the penalty for remarrying and make sure surviving spouses can keep their benefits, giving them more stability and freedom to rebuild their lives. It recognizes something simple but powerful: Love doesn't end when a veteran dies, and support shouldn't either.

"DAV supports this legislation because it's about fairness," said DAV National Legislative Director Jon Retzer. "It's about keeping promises to veterans and their families and making sure surviving spouses aren't left facing unnecessary hardship after everything they've already given."

At the end of the day, passing the Love Lives On Act isn't just a policy decision—it's a way to honor the loyalty, sacrifice and enduring love of military families. It's about doing right by the people who stood by our veterans every step of the way. ■

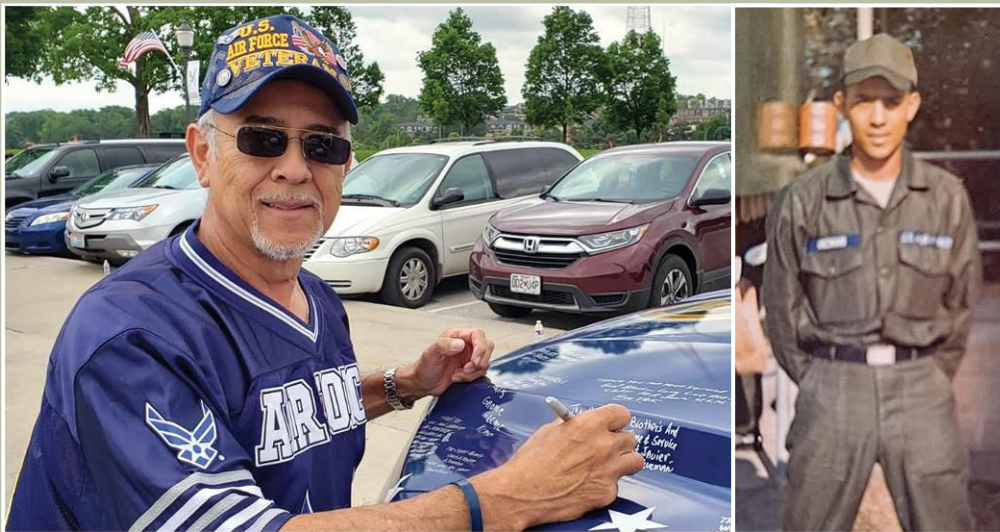


Stay informed. To take action on this important bill or other key veterans legislation, join DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) at daviccan.org.



'THE WEIGHT WAS LIFTED OFF'

A routine exam nearly cost a veteran everything—until a deeper look into toxic exposure revealed the full truth



Left: Now retired, Javier Guzman faced uncertainty when the VA reevaluated his condition and determined erroneously that his illness was not service-connected, putting his benefits at risk. **Right:** Guzman, during training at Lackland Air Force Base. He was later exposed to PFAS, which caused prostate cancer.

By Matt Saintsing

For years, Javier Guzman had no reason to question his health.

While stationed at Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base in Missouri, Guzman drove vehicles on the flight line, near aircraft and while transporting officers. Like other airmen, he ate the food, drank the water and did his job without hesitation.

He was also unknowingly being exposed to toxic chemicals.

"No one knew that anything was potentially contaminated," Guzman said.

He was surprised when, decades after service, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, a condition the Department of Veterans Affairs attributed to his time at Richards-Gebaur, which officially closed in 1994.

"I didn't have any symptoms," he said. "All of a sudden, it popped up."

His protein levels, used to screen for prostate cancer, were dangerously high. Doctors confirmed the diagnosis, and Guzman had surgery to remove part of his prostate, beginning a long, uncertain journey.

The VA initially recognized the connection between his service and illness. Guzman received a disability rating, which acknowledged that the cancer was tied to where he served.

However, that recognition wasn't permanent.

During a routine VA reevaluation—standard for cancer ratings—the department confirmed Guzman still had prostate cancer. Then, unexpectedly, the VA concluded his condition was not linked to his exposure at Richards-Gebaur.

That notification meant his benefits were at risk.

“At my age, 73, it would have changed everything,” Guzman said. “I would’ve had to cut down a lot of things.”

Guzman sought help from DAV, where he connected with Michael Franko, a senior national service officer in St. Louis.

Franko immediately saw problems.

“The blatant disregard for positive medical evidence—that was the first red flag,” he said.

Guzman was confused. The VA had approved his claim based on medical evidence linking his cancer to toxic exposure but now argued the opposite using the same record.

Franko began a deeper investigation, and what he found was even more concerning.

The VA examiner focused narrowly on particulate matter related to perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)—so-called “forever chemicals”—ignoring the broader environmental reality at the base.

“That’s when I really started getting into the weeds,” Franko said, dissecting the medical opinion.

Richard-Gabaur had long been identified as heavily contaminated. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports documented a wide range of toxic chemicals in the groundwater and soil, far beyond a single exposure source.

That understanding hadn’t yet influenced VA decision-making. Instead of arguing over one chemical or one exposure, Franko reframed the case around the “totality of exposure.”

“This isn’t a case where you can point to just one thing,” he said. “It’s everything combined.”

He combed through EPA reports, identifying contaminants such as vinyl chloride, trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchloroethylene (PCE)—chemicals known to persist on the base and impact human health.

Armed with new findings, he challenged the VA’s process directly.

Franko argued that the original medical opinion was inadequate because it failed to consider all exposures together, something required under VA guidelines for toxic-exposure risk activity cases.

After Franko detailed and presented the facts, his analysis succeeded. The VA agreed to obtain a new medical opinion rather than proceed with the reduction of benefits.

The conclusion this time was more favorable to Guzman. When viewed collectively, the chemical exposures Guzman experienced on base pointed to his cancer.



DAV benefits advocate Michael Franko

Not long after, Franko picked up the phone to break the good news. Guzman heard the words he’d been waiting for: His benefits would remain intact.

“I was really excited,” said Guzman. “It helped me tremendously.”

After months of uncertainty, the outcome brought financial, emotional and medical stability and restored a needed sense of balance.

“It was like the weight was lifted off,” he said.

DAV’s report *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans* notes that inconsistent processes and a weak legal framework continue to impact veterans. Franko’s experience highlights that when a veteran’s exposure or medical history isn’t fully and properly evaluated, the consequences can be life-altering.

Cases like Guzman’s are more common than many veterans realize, Franko said. Routine future exams can trigger reevaluations, and without updated medical evidence or strong advocacy, veterans can lose benefits they have rightfully earned.

“Veterans have to stay on top of their medical evidence,” he said.

Equally important is having knowledgeable advocacy to challenge the system when it errs. For Guzman, that advocacy was pivotal.

What once felt like it could unravel his life instead became a moment of relief—and a testament to the transformative power of effective advocacy when facing the VA system. ■



THE MOUNTAIN AS MEDICINE



Forty years in, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic still does what it set out to do: change lives

By Brian Buckwalter

At this year's National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass, Colorado, it was hard to miss Carlos Lopes.

Wherever veterans gathered—on the slopes, on the ice and on the pavement—there he was pushing himself and encouraging fellow veterans with his energetic personality, New England accent and scally cap.

“The number one thing I keep coming back for, it’s not just the sports,” Lopes said, “it’s them—the men and women we see rolling around, trucking along—they bring me back.”

Lopes was introduced to adaptive sports like skiing four years ago by his occupational therapist at the Brockton VA Medical Center in Massachusetts. He went all in.

“Turns out, I’m still an athlete,” Lopes, a Marine veteran, said. “It was just locked away.”

Lopes was injured while on deployment in Iraq in November 2005 when a fellow Marine fell 30 feet from a ladder onto him. Lopes became paralyzed and sustained a traumatic brain injury and a broken jaw from the incident. After two years at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, he was medically retired in 2007.

Attending the winter sports clinic for the second time, Lopes said he tries not to let the injury define him or his limitations.

“You can let it take over your life, or you can say, ‘No, that’s just part of my history; it’s not who I am,’” he said.

At this year’s clinic, when the Freetown, Massachusetts, native wasn’t skiing, he was playing sled hockey at the Aspen Recreation Center or riding a handcycle on paved trails in Basalt.

On the bike trail, he led the group and didn’t leave anyone behind, drawing from the lessons he learned in the Marines.

“It meant that much to me that we crossed the finish line together,” Lopes said.

Because of his positive attitude and encouraging spirit, Lopes was named the clinic’s DAV Freedom Award

recipient—the participant who best embodies the courage, perseverance and determination the event represents.

“It embodies the spirit of who he is and his character,” said DAV National Commander Coleman Nee.

For Lopes and nearly 350 other participants, the week was about rediscovery—of movement, competition and purpose—through adaptive sports. This has been happening since the clinic started in 1987 at Powderhorn Mountain Resort near Grand Junction, Colorado.

Kim Canova-Romans, a certified therapeutic recreation specialist with the VA North Texas Health Care System in Dallas, was at that first clinic and has volunteered at nearly every clinic since.

She remembers the physical demands of those early clinics. She’d tether herself to the sledlike sit-skis of that era, riding behind snowcats on the way up then guiding participants on the way down.

“So as a ski buddy and ski instructor, your legs were like noodles at the end of the day,” she said. These days, she’s a team lead, responsible for the logistics of moving large groups of veterans from event to event. It’s less physical than being a ski buddy but still hard work.

But Canova-Romans said being involved in any capacity is a privilege for her, especially because she gets to see veterans find freedom through adaptive sports.

“It’s medicine on the mountainside,” she said. “When you come to an opportunity like this and you experience the love, the compassion, the selflessness and the

★ 2026 DAV FREEDOM AWARD RECIPIENT: CARLOS LOPES ★



You can watch more about Carlos' story at wintersportsclinic.org/freedom-award-recipient.



Right: Team leads Kim Canova-Romans (left) and Randi Woodrow are both longtime clinic volunteers and close friends. Canova-Romans was at the first clinic in Grand Junction, Colorado, and has been at nearly every event since. **Far Right:** DAV Past National Commander Gene Murphy participated in the first winter sports clinic in 1987. "In athletics, [DAV] is providing an outlet," he said.



camaraderie that you feel from each other—all together—it makes a potion that's just healing. It heals people's mind, body and spirit."

Vietnam veteran and DAV Past National Commander Gene Murphy was at the first clinic, too. A sports enthusiast before he joined the Army, Murphy was paralyzed by enemy gunfire during a patrol. He said that first clinic experience reignited a spark.

"To me, it's life-changing," he said. "You're in a chair and then, all of a sudden, you're skiing down a mountain."

After, Murphy got involved in wheelchair basketball and softball. At almost 78 years old, he's still active and enjoys pheasant hunting, fishing, and "wheeling around" outdoors and on a treadmill equipped to handle his wheelchair. He said other veterans have similarly rediscovered their passion for sports after illness or injury through adaptive programs like this clinic.

"In athletics, [DAV] is providing an outlet. And for 40 years, we've done it," he said. "We've helped thousands of veterans change their lives."

Local DAV chapters were instrumental in helping the Department of Veterans Affairs host those early clinics, both financially and practically, helping bring in participants like Murphy. DAV became an official co-presenter in 1991.

"The physical and mental benefits of adaptive sports are undeniable," DAV National Voluntary Service Director John Kleindienst said. "I hear it all the time from veterans, that this clinic has saved their lives. Those stories never get old. In fact, they drive us to do anything and everything we can to keep it going."

This year, the event was tested by unusual conditions.

The early April weather for Snowmass felt more appropriate for viewing cherry blossoms in Washington, D.C., than for bombing down aspen-lined ski runs high in the Rocky Mountains.

Mud season—that unofficial fifth season in the mountains as snow melts and the ground thaws—arrived early, closing down the region's ski resorts. Vacationers went home, and most of the seasonal workers fled to Moab, Utah, to camp. Staff, volunteers and participants of the winter sports clinic had the mountain and the few remaining patches of snow to themselves.

The problem was getting veterans—and hundreds of pieces of adaptive ski equipment—to where the snow remained. But for an event that's been running for 40 years, adapting is the name of the game.

"Thankfully, we have a solid team—a great team," said Alex Maitre, the clinic's deputy director. "And we all came together, worked through the problem and made it happen."

Before participants arrived, and while the mountain was still open for business, volunteers loaded empty gondolas full of sit-skis, outrigger poles and other supplies, sending them up to higher elevations where some snow remained. They put in long hours, working around patrons who were getting in their last runs of the season.

"My goal was to make sure the veterans didn't feel any different throughout the week," Maitre said. "They deserve this event. This is for them. It took a village this year—between DAV, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Aspen Skiing Co., the clinic's staff and our volunteers—and we pulled it off."

By the time participants arrived, it was mostly business as usual—but the impact remained anything but ordinary.

For veterans like Lopes, the clinic wasn't about weather or logistics—it was about proving something to themselves and to each other.

"They pushed forward. They adapted—like us—and overcame the obstacle," he said. ■

From the NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTOR

JEREMY YOST



Removing employment barriers for veterans and military spouses

While navigating the claims and benefits process is critical, it's only part of a successful transition out of the military. DAV knows that long-term wellness can hinge on the ability to support your family, build a meaningful career and stay connected to your community. Even for veterans who are already employed, growth doesn't stop. Advancing your career and finding purpose in your work are just as important as landing that first job.

For too many veterans, entering the civilian workforce presents unexpected challenges. A résumé might not capture the full scope of your true abilities, and skills that are second nature in uniform don't always align neatly with civilian job descriptions.

Military spouses face similar challenges. Frequent relocations, career interruptions and the demands of managing the home through constant transition can make it difficult to build and maintain a steady career path.

Veterans and military spouses are part of a powerful and often underrecognized talent pool. Our adaptability, resilience and strong sense of purpose are valuable traits in the workplace, even when those aren't the requirements explicitly listed on job postings. We've heard from employers that they want to hire veterans but struggle to interpret military experience on a résumé or create pathways to connect with our community.

To help bridge that gap, we created *The Veteran Advantage: DAV's Hiring Guide for Employers of the Military Community*. While the guide is written for employers, it centers on veterans and spouses.

Rooted in research and real-world experiences, this guide takes the conversation beyond good intentions to practical strategies for companies. We provide tools to determine the alignment between military and civilian roles, conduct effective onboarding, and build programs like mentorship or employee resource groups, which improve long-term engagement and job satisfaction.

The Veteran Advantage complements the other services offered through DAV's employment program. Beyond the guide, DAV hosts nationwide job fairs and virtual hiring events. Every week, these events provide direct access to companies that are seeking to hire veterans and military spouses.

Additionally, DAV's Patriot Employer program recognizes companies that have demonstrated a true commitment to hiring and supporting the military community. It helps employers showcase their support in ways that attract those who've served. Winning organizations tend to already practice many of the recommendations discussed in *The Veteran Advantage*.

As veterans navigate their career after the military, *The Veteran Advantage* offers a critical step—removing barriers to meaningful opportunities. When your skills are recognized and your potential is realized, you have a clear path to lasting success. ■

To download *The Veteran Advantage*, scan the code or visit dav.org/hiring-guide.



To learn more about DAV's Patriot Employer Program, scan the code or visit patriotemployers.org.





Jacob Weber, who received a \$30,000 scholarship from DAV in 2023, recently graduated from Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in supply chain management.



Weber was made an honorary member of his grandfather Don Schoenemann's Army air cavalry regiment in 2025.

SHINING HIS LIGHT

Past DAV Scholarship winner Jacob Weber is creating a legacy of volunteering

By Brian Buckwalter

The room went dark when Jacob Weber got up to speak. Army air cavalry veterans and their loved ones snapped glow sticks to life, casting an orange light across the crowd's silhouettes and the iconic Stetson each veteran wore, as he began to talk.

Holding a glow stick over his head, Jacob asked the audience to join him in saying the name of someone they knew who died because of Agent Orange exposure.

"I just had goosebumps because you heard everyone say a name," his mother, Lori Weber, said. "Then it went quiet."

Jacob broke the silence by asking everyone to say, even louder, the name of someone they know currently fighting the effects of Agent Orange, "because they need your help right now and all of our prayers," he said.

"I'm just crying at that point," Lori recalled. "To see a dark room just light up orange and hear the names ... it was very powerful to see."

Jacob shared how Agent Orange had affected his grandfather, Don Schoenemann, who was in the room. A veteran of 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry Regiment—the "Ruthless Riders"—Don had served in Vietnam in 1968. His Parkinson's disease diagnosis is linked to his exposure to the herbicide.

Jacob also talked about the medical complications his mother, Lori, experiences from spina bifida, a condition in some children of Vietnam veterans that the Department of Veterans Affairs presumes is caused by veterans' exposure to Agent Orange.

After Jacob's speech, Ruthless Rider veterans presented him with his own Stetson and made him an honorary member.

One veteran later commented on social media about the 2025 presentation: "His love and concern for us at the reunion banquet will be one [I] will always cherish."

A lifetime of service

For the last several years, Jacob has been doing outreach events like this to bring awareness to Agent Orange. It's his latest initiative in his broad portfolio of volunteering for veterans.

"I saw it early on that he was very caring, very kindhearted," Jacob's grandmother, Helen Schoenemann, said. "You could be in a store, and if he saw a veteran wearing his hat, he would stop and run up and tell them, 'Thank you for your service.' He was in elementary school, so this has been going on his whole life."

Jacob's passion for helping veterans started when he occasionally accompanied his grandfather to VA appointments. Jacob has always been close to him and would frequently ask about his service.

"It still amazes me how just something inside him wanted to know what things were about and hear firsthand," Don said.

Those conversations and visits to the VA piqued Jacob's curiosity to learn more and grew his appreciation for all veterans. He wanted to show his gratitude, so his grandfather suggested writing letters to veterans.

"And that's what he actually started," Don said. "He wrote letters to guys in the hospital."

When Jacob learned that a group of Vietnam veterans met at a coffee shop near his house every Friday, he got

permission from his middle school to skip homeroom and joined them for donuts each week.

"He is 100% remarkable to me," Don said.

Those early relationships Jacob formed were the catalyst for what followed. In eighth grade, he had to log volunteer hours for the Junior National Honors Society. Serving veterans was his instinct, so he decided to restart a candy collection drive—Treats for Troops—that his mom had started when she was a teacher at Winchester Elementary School in Northville, Michigan.

Lori's students had collected candy and created care packages for veterans at the VA hospital in nearby Ann Arbor. But when she had to retire from teaching because of her health, the program stopped.

Since 2018, Jacob has collected candy from students, sorting it and delivering it to the VA. He said candy is a touchpoint that opens the door to conversations and relationships.

In 2019, he started Stockings for Soldiers, bringing holiday stockings, each filled with treats, activities and care items, to veterans to help them during their hospital stays.

Cards That Care started the following year, getting more people involved in writing notes, full of thanks and encouragement, like when he was younger. T-Shirts for Troops came in 2022 when Jacob learned that shirts were one of the most-requested items by veterans staying at the hospital. He also regularly collected pantry items to restock the nearby Fisher House.

Each initiative compounded what he was doing, and he has often spent his own money to help fund any shortfalls.

In 2023, Jacob was named the top DAV Scholarship recipient for his volunteer work, earning \$30,000 for his education. During his acceptance speech at DAV's national convention, he promised he'd continue serving and was pursuing a career where his skills could help veterans.

He's kept his word.

Carrying the flame

Jacob graduated from Michigan State University in May and has accepted a position at Ford Motor Co., a corporate partner of DAV that helps supply vehicles for the DAV Transportation Network.

"Jacob is an extraordinary young man whose efforts to honor veterans



For years, Weber has collected stockings, candy and other items for veteran patients at the VA medical center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He continued the collections through college, enlisting the help of students at his former elementary and middle schools.



Left: Weber with his mom, Lori, at his college graduation in May. **Right:** Students from Winchester Elementary School in Northville, Michigan, have joined Weber in collecting candy for his Treats for Troops initiative.

shifting his efforts toward recruiting and encouraging new student volunteers at his elementary and middle schools.

“These students are reaching prime points when they can really carry on the flame,” Jacob said.

With his guidance and support from Noonan, Winchester Elementary’s student council now runs near-autonomous candy drives. The students organize the collection, track the progress, and count and sort the candy, just like Jacob used to do. He

and families ensures they know their service and sacrifices are not forgotten,” said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. “He’s a great example of the type of leaders who are inspired and supported by DAV Scholarships. The lives he’s touched and recognition he’s given our cause and heroes is immeasurable.”

Jacob continues to regularly volunteer any chance he gets.

“It really kind of proved that it wasn’t about Honor Society or getting hours,” his former elementary school teacher and family friend, Ashley Noonan, said. “It was more of a passion that drove him.”

He wants veterans to feel seen, but there’s also a sense of urgency in his actions as he advocates for and brings awareness to the sacrifices veterans make and how their service can affect generations of their family.

DAV supports the Molly R. Loomis Research for Descendants of Toxic Exposed Veterans Act, which calls for a monitoring program to track birth defects among descendants of toxic-exposed veterans of all eras and to expand research into the topic. The bill is named after the daughter of a Navy veteran exposed to Agent Orange. Like Lori, she was born with spina bifida.

“I could potentially have a birth defect that we don’t know of yet, because they didn’t really show in my mom until she was about 30 years of age,” Jacob said. “So I feel very connected to them, and I also feel like they were wronged at the same time.”

Jacob knew the transition from student to professional would be a challenge, so a few years ago he began

encourages them through video updates that play on their morning announcements. In 2025, they collected 130 pounds of candy for veterans for him to drop off at the Ann Arbor VA.

At Liberty Middle School, in Canton, Michigan, a former teacher of Jacob’s has helped continue his Cards That Care initiative. Last year, students wrote more than 200 cards for veterans.

His grandmother and friends in her sewing circle have helped expand his Stockings for Soldiers care packages. People continue to donate items to his T-Shirts for Troops annual campaign.

“It’s the best feeling I’ve ever had in my life. Seeing someone continue what you’re doing is the ultimate form of respect,” Jacob said.

With each initiative and each year, more people in the community are joining Jacob in his efforts—simple acts of service that have big impacts. Even as he enters a new season of life after college, he shows no signs of slowing down—his light, unlike the orange glow sticks that eventually fade, continues to shine brightly.

“I feel like I couldn’t stop if I wanted to,” Jacob said. “There’s just too many awesome people I’ve met along the way.” ■



Learn More Online

Know a deserving student who is interested in supporting veterans or may qualify for volunteer recognition? To learn more, visit davscholarships.org.

A woman with dark, curly hair and extensive tattoos on her arms is standing in an art studio. She is wearing a light-colored, ribbed, sleeveless top and a gold necklace. Her arms are crossed. In the background, there are various art supplies, including paint bottles, brushes, and a large abstract painting on the wall.

Honest, Vulnerable, Visible

After years of carrying trauma, addiction and silence, Army veteran Sam Juan found healing—and now helps others do the same

By Matt Saintsing

Standing at her canvas in her studio in Virginia, Sam Juan brushed the surface and felt her shoulders drop. The Army veteran, artist and advocate spent years seeking healing from wounds that lingered long after her service. Painting became her way to breathe again.

“When I get into that flow state, it’s a deep exhale,” she said. “I’m extremely grateful for the practice.”

Juan’s journey to this moment was anything but easy. As a former Army Cultural Support Team (CST) member serving with America’s most elite special operations forces, she carried the weight of childhood trauma, combat and a tough transition from soldier to veteran. Today, she helps fellow veterans confront their struggles, earning recognition as DAV’s 2026 Disabled American Veteran of the Year.

Like her service in Afghanistan, Juan’s path to the Army wasn’t conventional. An immigrant who grew up in Bahrain, she moved to California at 14 for high school. She enlisted in the Army in 2003 as a food service specialist. While stationed in Germany, she took the oath to become a United States citizen.

“It was a surreal experience,” she said. “I never thought I would do that on my own. I was one of the first in my immediate family to become a citizen. There’s a lot of pride there.”

After, Juan switched specialties and became a signals intelligence analyst. She was stationed at National Security Agency Hawai’i where, in 2011, she saw a poster in the women’s bathroom that read, “Become a part of history.”

“It was so elusive and vague, I didn’t know what I was signing up for,” she said. “But my leadership thought I’d be perfect.”

She applied and was accepted to the Cultural Support Team.

At a time when women were barred from combat roles, the Army created small groups of highly trained female soldiers. These women accompanied special operations teams in combat zones to interact with Afghan women and children.

“It was the highlight of my career,” she said. “Being able to operate with SEAL Team Six and exemplify that type of service member—I’m very proud of my experience.”

One motivation pulling her toward CSTs was the perception that women were less capable than male soldiers.



DAV’s 2026 Disabled American Veteran of the Year, Sam Juan, served alongside Tier 1 special operations units while deployed to Afghanistan as a member of Army Cultural Support Teams. She credits art and psychedelic therapies for turning her life around in the aftermath of war.

“She was someone I looked up to. I was an officer, but she was a badass.”

—Alex Robinson

“We were always ridiculed, even during selection,” she said. “That was more of a driver for me not to mess up, so that women behind or after us could continue.”

“She could shoot, move and communicate in a way that I hadn’t seen before,” said Alex Robinson, a former Army officer who served with her on a CST. “She was someone I looked up to. I was an officer, but she was a badass.”

Firefights and taking doors—the sorts of things most people associate with SEAL operations—are not what stands out in Juan’s memory from Afghanistan. For her, it’s conversations with families, mothers and their kids. She helped a new 15-year-old mother breastfeed for the first time. Another time, she sat with a woman who had just lost her family.

Hardly the elements of war novels and streaming series.

Even still, war had taken its toll, and six months after leaving Afghanistan, she felt lost without the Army.

“I’m newly married and immersing myself in schoolwork as I would in that unit,” she said of that time, during which she was in art school. “My nervous system couldn’t tell the difference; I kept pushing hard.”

She was not only pushing hard but also pushing away a lifetime of formative trauma compounded by her experiences in Afghanistan. The violence and chaos of battle, coupled with the intimate conversations and interactions with innocent women and children in villages where the teams operated, left Juan with memories that she wanted to escape.

“These memories don’t go away,” she said. “Some of the things we did out there ... I’m not proud of.”

Despite earning Pat Tillman and Navy SEAL Foundation scholarships, Juan relied on alcohol, Adderall, other pills and cocaine. She completed schoolwork but often went

days without sleep, or she would crash and sleep for 18 hours. Struggles grew as she began using opioids.

“To mitigate the pain, you do more,” Juan said. She began to slip. The drugs took hold. She missed work and stood people up.

“On the outside, it looked like I was winning,” she said. “Inside, I didn’t know who I was.”

In early 2020, she realized she needed help. She reached out on social media, becoming vulnerable in the process. Support and compassion poured in, including a recommendation of psychedelics.

“I was at such a low point,” she said. “I could tell the therapist what she wanted to hear, but I wasn’t feeling any healing.

“When I started doing psychedelic therapy, it was immediate.”

She attended a Native American church in California, where she learned how to use plant medicine respectfully and ceremonially.

“I fell away from the church a long time ago, but being in that environment was a way for me to connect with God,” she said.

The next year, at a retreat in Texas, she received psilocybin and 5-MeO-DMT. Surrounded by special operations veterans, she felt at home.

“What stood out to me was just how strong, but how guarded, she was,” said Dr. Martín Polanco, founder and medical director of the retreat’s organizer, The Mission Within, a clinical program specializing in psychedelic therapy.

Shame and guilt surrounded Juan, fueled by a history of sexual trauma. Again, she turned to Polanco for treatment in 2023—this time for ibogaine.

“When I finally did ibogaine and was able to pause from that lifestyle long enough for me to change my habits ... change my routine. That’s what really made the difference,” she said.

Juan has not used opioids since. Sober and focused, her life and her art have flourished.

Initially, Juan shared her story to heal herself, but she soon realized its power to help others.

“(Sharing) normalizes the suffering and the issues veterans are dealing with, and it allows people to seek help,” Polanco added.

DAV selected Juan not only for her distinguished and groundbreaking military service, which helped pave the way for women serving alongside special operations forces, but also for the example she continues to set for veterans nationwide.

She was the first veteran to speak with DAV on camera about her ibogaine journey. She also brought

the physicality that served her well in service to the flag football game, the DAV Bowl, in February.

Through her advocacy, artwork and willingness to speak openly about mental health, addiction and recovery, she has helped other veterans recognize that seeking help is a sign of strength.

“Sam has taken experiences many people would prefer to keep private and turned them into opportunities to help others,” said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. “Overcoming adversity is commendable, but Sam is far rarer—she has transformed her pain into action that has saved her own life and the lives of her fellow veterans.

“DAV is proud to have her in our ranks.”

Juan has also helped strangers and friends, including Robinson, the former Army officer who served with her and struggled after leaving the military. Close to suicide, Robinson received an unprompted call from Juan.

“She said she could get me to Mexico (for psychedelic therapy) within two months,” said Robinson, who now works for Heroic Hearts Project, a nonprofit that brings veterans abroad for psychedelic treatment.

Juan has spoken to members of Congress and other policymakers about her experiences. As a social media influencer, she regularly shares her trials and triumphs.

“If I can share my life’s story and be of service that way, it just feels like an authentic way for me to be,” she said.

“I spent decades not saying anything.

“Now, I finally have a voice.” ■



Army veteran Sam Juan paints at her resident studio in Virginia. She uses art to express herself while confronting the realities of her service and tumultuous transition to civilian life.

The hard-earned right: 250 YEARS of the American veteran

From the Pension Act of 1776 to the PACT Act of 2020, veteran care was forged through misfires and hard-won victories

By Jonathan Kaupanger

The 250th anniversary of the United States is often framed through the lens of grand ideals: liberty, representation and the pursuit of happiness. But for those who fought to secure those ideals, the reality was often precarious. As the nation prepares to celebrate, it has an obligation to renew the sacred contract between the country and its veterans—a contract that wasn't written into our founding documents but forged through a series of national shames and hard-won victories in the halls of Congress.

A Pension (With a Catch)

In 1776, the American veteran as a social category didn't exist. The people fighting the Revolution were farmers, blacksmiths and tradesmen who picked up muskets for seasonal campaigns. To the average colonist, the idea of a standing army was not a symbol of pride but an expensive

tool of tyranny similar to the one they were currently revolting against.

This deep-seated suspicion was written into the law of the land. Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution restricted funding for the army to two-year terms. This was intended as a kill switch; if the army became too powerful or too expensive, the people's representatives could simply starve it of resources.

A decade earlier, the first piece of legislation for veterans, the Pension Act of 1776, had been born of desperate practicality. As British forces arrived in New York, the Continental Congress needed a way to keep men in the field. They promised half-pay for life, but with a catch: It was reserved exclusively for those with a visible disability. Because the founders feared a permanent military class, veteran care was viewed as a form of charity, to be doled out to the destitute, rather than an obligation earned through service. If a soldier returned from the war with his limbs intact but his farm in ruins, the government felt it owed him nothing but a handshake.

Speculators and Prize Money

When the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783, the United States found itself in arrears to 300,000 to 350,000 veterans. At the same time, the nation was drowning in \$43 million of debt—roughly \$1.3 billion in today's



Deborah
Sampson

1775–1783
Revolutionary War

1776
Pension Act of 1776

1783
Treaty of Paris

1799
Navy Pension Fund

currency. The federal government's first solution was to pass the buck to the states. Some states were generous, but many were bankrupt, leaving thousands of veterans with nothing.

Congress attempted to bridge the gap with the Bounty Land Act, which promised acreage to soldiers who had served until the end of the conflict. It was a grand gesture that failed in practice. Much of the land was remote, undeveloped, and required capital that most veterans simply did not have. Most veterans, needing immediate cash to feed their families, sold their land rights to speculators for pennies on the dollar. The land that was supposed to be a veteran's reward instead became the foundation of real estate empires for men who may never have seen a day of combat.

By 1799, the government realized it needed a more sustainable model, particularly for the Navy. Unlike the Army's tax-funded model, the Navy Pension Fund was financed by prize money. When a U.S. vessel captured an enemy ship, the proceeds from the sale of that ship and its cargo were split: Half went to the crew, and the other half funded the pension. As naval historian Margherita Desy told DAV, this was a brilliant system during the back-to-back wars between 1789 and 1815. Afterward, the fund dried up because there were no prizes to capture.

The Veteran Advocate in the White House

By 1816, the heroes of the Revolution had become symbols of the nation's inadequacy to care for warfighters. At the time, the government operated on a strict patriotic duty model. Service was considered its own reward, and pensions were reserved exclusively for those visibly shattered in battle. Still, the sight of men who had fought at Yorktown begging for bread in tattered uniforms sparked a wave of national guilt.

James Monroe, elected president in 1816, embodied the role of a veterans advocate. Wounded at the Battle of Trenton, he carried a British musket ball in his shoulder for the rest

of his life. Monroe understood the opportunity cost of service: A man who enlisted at 18 and returned at 26 had missed the window to establish a trade or a farm and build wealth while his civilian peers moved ahead.

Monroe embarked on a public relations tour, traveling the country in a buff-colored Continental Army uniform. He was a superstar to a public that had previously viewed the president as a distant clerk. He used this goodwill to push through the Pension Act of 1818. For the first time, a veteran could receive a pension for nine months of service, regardless of disability. It was a revolutionary shift. The federal government was taking ownership of veterans' well-being.

However, the contract remained fragile. When over 20,000 veterans applied—far exceeding the government's estimate of 1,600—Congress panicked at the cost. It passed the 1820 Remedial Act, forcing veterans to prove extreme poverty to keep their checks. Men had to list every possession in open court; one veteran lost his benefits because he owned a wig and a broken mirror.

(Continued on Page 20)



"The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776," by John Trumbull. A severely wounded James Monroe (on the ground, left of center) is depicted as being held by Dr. John Riker.



1812–1815
War of 1812

1818
Pension Act of 1818
(Monroe)

1820
1820 Remedial Act

1832
Pension Act of 1832

The Art of Justice and the Widow's Pelt

If Monroe was the policy champion, artist John Neagle was its campaign manager. In 1829, Neagle found 73-year-old veteran Joseph Winter huddled in the snow in Philadelphia, dressed in rags. His portrait, “A Pensioner of the Revolution,” became a viral image of the 19th century. It forced Americans to contrast their 50th-anniversary celebrations of the nation with the reality of its defenders living as beggars.

This visual shame campaign fueled the Pension Act of 1832, which codified service as a debt owed. This act was so massive it forced the government to modernize, creating the Bureau of Pensions—the direct ancestor of today’s Department of Veterans Affairs.

As the system grew, so did the recognition of the veteran family. The 1836 Widow’s Bill acknowledged that a pension was an earned debt that belonged to a veteran’s estate. Yet even this was fraught with difficulty. In an era before digital records, 80-year-old survivors had to find living witnesses to weddings that occurred in the 1770s. One widow, Charity Snider, proved her marriage by presenting a preserved mole pelt her husband had sent her from the front lines as a love token.

The inclusion of women and underrepresented groups remained a slow, grinding process. Deborah Sampson, who disguised herself as a man to serve in the Continental Army, had to petition for years to receive the same pension as her male counterparts. Similarly, Native

American veterans—who often fought on lands they were simultaneously being displaced from—were frequently trapped in legal limbo as the federal government’s inconsistent treatment of tribal sovereignty left their eligibility for benefits unclear and unevenly applied.

The Industrialization of Care

The Civil War changed the scale of veteran care forever. In 1860, the Bureau of Pensions had 18 clerks; by 1865, it was processing 75,000 applications a year. To house the operation, the government built the massive Pension Building in Washington, D.C. The architect, U.S. Army Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, designed the building with the disabled veteran in mind. The stairs had shallow risers for those with prosthetic limbs, and a document track moved files for 1,500 clerks.

This era also saw the birth of the universal pension. The 1890 Dependent and Disability Pension Act allowed any veteran unable to perform manual labor to collect a check, and by 1907, age itself became a qualifier. At 62, an honorable discharge was all a veteran needed to prove they earned certain benefits.

At this point in time, the government’s approach was largely hands off. It prioritized minimal financial assistance over physical well-being. That changed with Delphine Baker.

Delphine Baker was a visionary who reshaped the landscape of American veteran care, moving it beyond simple financial stipends toward a model of comprehensive, institutional support. Born in 1828 and raised in an environment that championed intellectual independence, Baker became an unconventional leader and a sophisticated public communicator. After her own physical collapse while serving as an independent supply agent and nurse during the Civil War, she shifted her focus to intellectual advocacy, launching The National Banner to fund and promote the cause of long-term care for volunteer soldiers.

Baker’s primary contribution was the realization that a “check in the mail” was insufficient for veterans with life-altering injuries and no means of support. She



John Neagle painted “A Pensioner of the Revolution” in 1830, in the midst of the fight for federal pension benefits for the remaining Revolutionary War veterans. It’s the earliest-known portrait of an American veteran who was homeless.

1836

The 1836
Widow’s Bill



1846–1848
Mexican-American War

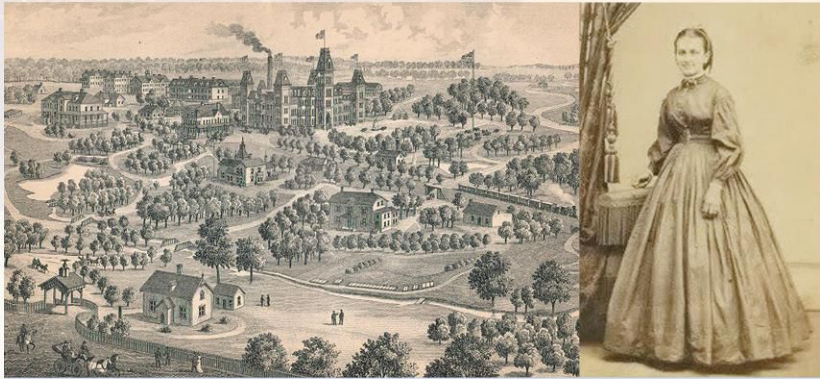


1861–1865
American Civil War

1865

National
Asylum Act
(Lincoln)





Left: An early view of the National Soldiers' Home, where Civil War veterans found sanctuary, medical care and a place to rebuild their lives. **Right:** Author and relief organizer Delphine Baker, who dedicated her life to ensuring Civil War veterans received the medical care and institutional support they earned.

forces, a group previously ineligible for such benefits. The resulting National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers were massive, self-sustaining campuses featuring libraries, theaters and even zoos, signaling to the public that veterans were honored guests rather than charity cases.

A Hard-Earned Right

The history of veterans benefits in America isn't a straight line of progress. It's a story of creative, often desperate measures—from prize money and mole pelts to the grotto gardens of the National Soldiers' Home where veterans worked the soil to heal their shattered nerves.

witnessed firsthand the “revolving door of misery” in wartime hospitals, where soldiers were discharged into homelessness because they were too disabled for manual labor but healthy enough to leave surgical wards.

“What I think is really neat about Delphine Baker’s vision is this kind of idea of whole care that was really new at the time,” said Melissa Winn, director of marketing and communications at the National Museum of Civil War Medicine. “It was not just treating wounds and bandages. It was looking at care in a recreational way. Considering their lives as whole lives, not just making sure that they could feed themselves or accommodate for some of these things that they weren’t able to do anymore.”

This prompted Baker to draft what history remembers as the “Power Petition,” a 30-page scroll of signatures she leveraged to corner Congress. By securing the endorsement of influential figures like Ulysses S. Grant and P.T. Barnum, she turned the cause into a moral and social mandate that even a reluctant government couldn’t ignore.

Her persistence culminated on March 3, 1865, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the National Asylum Act. This legislation established a federal obligation to provide whole care—including housing, medical treatment and vocational activity—for the volunteer

As we approach the 250th anniversary, we must remember that DAV’s mission is the continuation of this struggle. The sacred contract isn’t a gift or a charity. It’s a hard-earned debt. From the smoke of the Revolution to the modern PACT Act, the lesson of history remains the same: The nation’s debt to its defenders is a permanent social obligation that must be renewed by every generation. ■

UP NEXT

Think the fight for veterans benefits ended with the turn of the century? Think again. In Part 2, which will be published in the next issue of the magazine, we’ll dive into the 20th-century chaos where the heroes of World War II—MacArthur, Patton and Eisenhower—burned protesting veterans’ camps to the ground.

We’ll discover how a “Tombstone Bonus” and a massive nationwide telegram campaign forced Congress to defy a popular president and transform a bureaucratic nightmare into a sacred, legally protected right. Along the way, we’ll trace how these early battles for recognition and compensation set the stage for something even more enduring—the birth of a modern, member-driven force that would redefine veterans advocacy for generations to come: the founding of DAV.

1890

Dependent and Disability Pension Act

1907

Age 62 becomes a qualifier for veterans benefits

1898

Spanish-American War

Cathay Williams

EMPOWERING REMOTE NATIVE VETERANS

DAV Department of Arizona launches initiative to ensure Navajo Nation veterans can access earned benefits

By Jonathan Kaupanger

Native Americans have long been reported to serve in the U.S. armed forces at higher rates than most other racial and ethnic groups. Several sources, including the Military Times, report that since 9/11, nearly 19% of Native Americans have served in the military, compared with about 14% of people from all other ethnic groups combined. Yet, for many who return home to the Navajo Nation—a vast territory the size of West Virginia located in the southwestern United States—a secondary battle awaits: a grueling logistical labyrinth to access the federal benefits they rightfully earned.

Due to the Navajo Nation's rural landscape, critical veteran resources are often four to five hours away. For a veteran living in Arizona's Four Corners region—where the borders of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah meet—filing a standard Department of Veterans Affairs claim has historically required an expensive, exhausting overnight journey.

To help reduce these barriers, the DAV Department of Arizona formed a first-of-its-kind partnership that respects tribal sovereignty and empowers local advocates already leading the charge on the ground.

Standing on the front lines of advocacy

The heartbeat of this initiative belongs to the community itself. Seraphine Josley, president of the All-Navajo Veterans Auxiliary and Piñon site coordinator, has long been dedicated to bringing vital resources closer to home.

“On Navajo Nation, our veterans face many challenges of everyday life, including those of families affected by separation and the medical and emotional burdens of military service,” Josley said.

While the local desire to care for veterans has always been strong, funding constraints, limited staffing and a lack of basic amenities in remote homes heavily restricted the infrastructure, according to Josley. Recognizing that true tribal advocacy requires infrastructure, DAV Department of Arizona invested roughly \$50,000 to equip the Piñon Veterans Hogan with laptops, tablets and Starlink internet hotspots. (A hogan is a sacred dome-shaped or octagonal building.)

By integrating high-speed tech directly into the Piñon Veterans Wellness Center, DAV provided the tools necessary to turn an exhausting overnight trip into a seamless, local computer call.



“It’s all about getting out of the chapter house, going into the community where the veterans are that can’t come to you,” said DAV Department of Arizona Adjutant Carl Forkner. “If you’re in the Navajo Nation—Piñon or Chinle—you’re five hours away from the nearest service officer.”

Navigating the ‘VA language’

The federal claims process presents a digital and linguistic barrier that often feels like an adversarial trap, according to “The Language of Equity in Digital Health: Prioritizing the Needs of Limited English Proficient Communities in the Patient Portal 2.0,” an article published in the Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved. Traditional VA structures have heavily prioritized health over benefit claims, leaving a significant gap for remote communities where the poverty rate is three times the national average, according to the Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

“They don’t speak ‘VA,’” Forkner noted, emphasizing that bureaucratic technicalities routinely lead to unfair denials.

This is where local cultural expertise becomes the ultimate bridge. Many older community members—carrying the physical and emotional weight of aging, severe post-traumatic stress disorder and the effects of exposure to Agent Orange—feel most comfortable communicating in their traditional Navajo language.

Through this remote system, local Navajo volunteers act as vital translators and trusted guides. A veteran can walk into the wellness center, sit down in a familiar environment and connect via Zoom to a DAV service officer. With volunteers translating dense bureaucratic language into the veteran’s native tongue, paperwork is completed accurately and entirely on the veteran’s terms.

A model of sustained trust

A deep respect for the independent status of tribal communities makes this initiative a true partnership.

“What many people don’t realize is that tribes are all sovereign nations,” said DAV National Service Director Scott Hope. “The core of DAV’s effort is building trust to overcome cultural barriers, particularly among Native female veterans and noncombat male veterans who may not see themselves as veterans within their culture.”

Because trust must be earned over time, this isn’t a one-off tech drop. The Piñon site anchors long-term expansion. According to Forkner, future rollouts are planned for Arizona cities Kayenta and Ganado and for the Hopi Nation, with a strategy to scale the model to the Hualapai, Tohono O’odham and Apache reservations through 2029. Ultimately, the goal is to evolve these digital access points into holistic veterans centers featuring sweat lodges, specialized counseling and traditional healing practices.

Josley and the All-Navajo Veterans Auxiliary measure success in the restoration of a sacred promise.

“For many years, our veterans shared the same struggles—resources were too far, help was difficult to access—and many felt forgotten,” Josley said. “Today, we are witnessing a powerful change. Veterans who once felt discouraged are now coming forward again. Hearing a veteran say ‘I feel valued again. I am a veteran, and I fought for our country’ is one of the strongest measures of success we could ever ask for.” ■

Are you a Native American veteran who would like to share your story of service and sacrifice? Email feedback@dav.org with your basic information and someone will be in touch.



DOUBLED DOWN!

From fence-building to snack cake deliveries, 2,000 volunteers made a difference for veterans across the country on DAV Community Impact Day

By Brian Buckwalter

April 4 marked the third annual DAV Community Impact Day. Participation doubled from last year, with more than 2,000 people taking the pledge to commit at least an hour of their time volunteering for veterans.

Thank you to everyone who participated and made DAV Community Impact Day a success, and thank you to those who shared pictures and stories from your volunteer events. Here are some of our favorites:

★ Nebraska ★

Volunteers with DAV Chapter 7 and Auxiliary Unit 7 in Lincoln built a fence for fellow DAV member and former benefits advocate Mike Webb.

Webb retired from DAV after being diagnosed with ALS. A recent storm had destroyed the old fence, and with no wheelchair ramp to his backyard, Webb had a hard time letting his service dog outside.

"The rain held out, and we got it done," said DAV member Melissa Allen, who helped organize the volunteers. "We are so happy that we were able to come together and get this done for [Mike and his] service dog."

Webb and his wife, Monica, were thankful for the help.

"Mike can now let his dog out on his own, hanging on to that independence!" Monica wrote. "I'm so proud to be a fellow veteran with you all."



★ West Virginia ★

When Jacie Jarrells from Dunlow heard the call for volunteers on her local news station, the ninth grader immediately knew she needed to do something. So she pledged her time and contacted the Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center in Huntington to ask what she could do to help. She was told that the hospital needed snack cakes.

"Perfect," Jacie said. "One of my teachers at school calls me 'Little Debbie' because it's a running joke about how much I love them."

Jacie shared DAV's Community Impact Day posts and rallied her community to raise money for the snacks. She then purchased the treats and delivered them to the medical center, where they'll be given to patients to have with their morning coffee, as a snack between doctor visits and to help those with diabetes bring their blood sugar up.

"This experience for me was very rewarding because I know how just these little cakes make me feel, so sharing this joy with others makes me smile," Jacie said. "Veterans are the foundation of our country, and I believe that we forget too often just how much they have sacrificed in their lives for this country."





★ Texas ★

Volunteers with DAV Chapter 233 in Sugar Land partnered with other local veterans organizations for a day of service and outreach.

Volunteers provided food support, assisted with Department of Veterans Affairs claims, facilitated a blood drive, and created cards for deployed service members and veterans in hospitals and care facilities.

“This is what it looks like when veteran organizations unite with one mission—to uplift, support and make a real difference,” said Leena Dees, a Chapter 233 member. “Together, we are stronger and our impact goes further.”



★ Roundup ★

Top row: Members of DAV Chapter 4 in New Port Richey, Florida, painted a veteran's house. DAV Auxiliary Unit 204 members in Gilmer, Texas, served breakfast for local veterans. Nora Fisher, a member of DAV Chapter 9 in Johnson City, Tennessee, ran the “Joggin’ for the Noggin” 5K to raise funds for traumatic brain injury research. **Bottom row:** Bill Ferris of Chapter 8 in Martinsburg, West Virginia, organized about 25 volunteers to help with a garden cleanup at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. Members of DAV Chapter 12 and Auxiliary Unit 12 in Klamath Falls, Oregon, wrote and mailed letters to all their members as an outreach effort to check in on them. Sixteen volunteers with DAV Chapter 16 and Auxiliary Unit 16 in Orlando, Florida, hosted a lunch cookout for more than 50 veterans at the Cascade Heights senior living community in Longwood.

A special thank-you goes to Sinclair Media Group, who partnered with DAV through its Sinclair Cares initiative. Sinclair spread the word through its network of more than 160 television stations around the country to raise awareness about DAV Community Impact Day. Reporters from local news outlets shared many of your stories of service. Sinclair also donated \$25,000 to DAV and streamed a special DAV Community Impact Day broadcast highlighting volunteer events in Oklahoma, Montana, West Virginia and Ohio.

“The men and women who wear our nation’s uniform deserve our unwavering support,” said Rob Weisbord, Sinclair’s chief operating officer and president of local media. “DAV’s commitment to veterans and their families reflects the very best of community service. We are honored to stand alongside them.”

To view the Sinclair Cares video, scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/4tKZeYJ.



To stay connected with other service opportunities DAV offers, visit volunteerforveterans.org.





From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER MELISSA L. PIERCE

Keepers of the American spirit

As we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary, the occasion serves as a powerful reminder of why the DAV Auxiliary exists. This milestone isn't just about parades and fireworks; it's about the "Americana" spirit that defines our organization—a devotion to the ideals of freedom and the responsibility we share to care for those who defended them. We stand at a crossroads in history, looking back at 250 years of resilience while looking forward to the future of service we're building together.

To me, Americana isn't just a collection of nostalgic imagery. It's the living history of American veterans and their families. It's found in the grit of those who transitioned from the battlefield back to their communities and in the support we offer when our heroes return home. Americana is the community we build in our units, where shared experiences turn into a lifelong bond.

The history of veterans benefits in this country is a story of promises made and kept. It's a narrative stretching back to the founding of our republic, evolving as the needs of our veterans changed. The Auxiliary has been a cornerstone of that story for over a century, ensuring the human element of veteran care is never forgotten. As we celebrate our independence, we also celebrate the independence we help veterans achieve through advocacy. Together, we are:

- **Honoring the past:** We're the stewards of legacy, preserving the stories of those who served from the American Revolution to today, ensuring lessons of history reach every generation.
- **Serving the present:** We maintain a relentless commitment to caregivers and families—the backbone of the veteran community. We recognize that when a person serves, the whole family serves.
- **Protecting the future:** Our work today lays the foundation for those who will wear the uniform tomorrow, ensuring the next generation has the resources and respect they deserve.

Our mission is fueled by a patriotism that's both bold and humble. It's seen in the hours volunteers spend at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and in the advocacy we take to the halls of government. This year, I encourage every member to reflect on what Americana means to you. Is it the neighbor you helped? The veteran you honored at a local ceremony?

We're the keepers of the American spirit. Let's use this Independence Day to rededicate ourselves to our mission: making sure no veteran—and no family—ever walks their path alone. Happy Independence Day to you and your families. May we continue to serve with the courage and heart that founded this great nation. ■



Auxiliary

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National Fall Conference

Sept. 24-26, 2026



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51 Walnut St., Lawrenceburg, IN 47025

• Call 812-539-8888 and ask for the DAV Auxiliary group rate or visit bit.ly/48YvNe1.

Conference registration: \$65

• Includes Friday evening reception

Saturday evening dinner: \$65

• Dinner tickets must be purchased in advance and no later than Sept. 11.

Get more information:

auxiliary.dav.org/news-events/events

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Kobe, a service dog, rests while wearing his working vest.

Beyond the vest

How one veteran is fighting to protect service animal rights

By Jonathan Kaupanger

For many veterans, a service dog is more than a companion. It's a vital tool for navigating daily life with a disability. However, as Army veteran William McCasland recently discovered, public understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) still lags behind the law.

While traveling for a family reunion, McCasland, who is a member of DAV Chapter 11 in Waterbury, Connecticut, and his service dog, Kobe, were initially welcomed at several hotels and restaurants. That changed at a hotel in Mississippi when staff informed him that “pets” aren’t allowed in the dining area.

“I said, ‘Well, you have to understand this is not a pet. This is a service dog,’” McCasland said. Despite his explanations and Kobe’s well-trained behavior, McCasland was asked to leave the area, an experience he described as deeply embarrassing.

The confrontation highlights a common hurdle: Businesses often conflate highly trained service animals with emotional support animals or pets, despite clear legal distinctions.

The incident in Mississippi was particularly jarring for McCasland because it followed a week of seamless travel. The confusion began when a hotel staff member noticed McCasland practicing a controlled entrance—a training routine where Kobe sits and waits for a treat before entering a building. When asked if the dog was training, McCasland, a firm believer that a service animal’s proficiency requires constant reinforcement, replied that Kobe is “always training.” This simple statement was later used by the hotel to justify his ejection from the dining

room, with management claiming the dog was merely a service dog in training and therefore not protected by the ADA.

Angelica Williams, an Air Force veteran and community outreach coordinator for the Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division, emphasized that the ADA is designed to protect access for individuals with disabilities. According to Williams, there are four basic things you need to know:

-  **The definition of a service animal:** Under the ADA, a service animal is a dog individually trained to perform specific tasks that directly relate to a person’s disability.
-  **Tasks versus support:** Tasks can include alerting a person with post-traumatic stress disorder to an oncoming panic attack or providing deep pressure therapy. Critically, providing only comfort or emotional support doesn’t qualify a dog as a service animal under the law.
-  **The two-question rule:** When it isn’t obvious what service a dog provides, staff at a business may only ask two questions:
 1. Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
 2. What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?
-  **Prohibited inquiries:** Staff can’t ask about the nature of the disability, require a demonstration of the task, or demand documentation like certification or a doctor’s note.

Williams highlighted that the ADA’s protections are contingent on the handler maintaining effective control

of the animal. This goes beyond obedience and includes specific legal standards for how a service dog is handled in public.

Under DOJ regulations, a service animal must generally be harnessed, leashed or tethered. However, if a handler's disability prevents the use of a leash or if a tether interferes with the dog's safe and effective performance of its work, the handler isn't required to use one. In these cases, the handler must still maintain control through voice commands, hand signals or other effective means.

A handler can be legally asked to remove their service dog from the premises if it's out of control—behaviors like growling, biting or excessive barking—and if the handler doesn't take effective action to correct it.

Williams acknowledged that legitimate service dog teams often face unfair scrutiny due to the presence of poorly behaved pets or fake service animals in public spaces. To handle these high-tension moments, she suggests that veterans should calmly restate the two-question rule and explain the specific task the dog is trained to perform to distinguish them from a pet. If a business owner remains confused about the law, veterans can refer them to the DOJ's published fact sheet available at [servicemembers.gov](https://www.servicemembers.gov). If a veteran is still denied access despite the dog being under control and performing a task, they may file a formal ADA complaint through the portal at ada.gov.

A major point of confusion for both veterans and businesses is the rise of online registration services. Williams warns that these services are unnecessary and can be intentionally misleading, noting that veterans are often inundated with ads for licensing and registration. According to Williams, because of their military background, veterans may feel more pressure than civilians to have proper documentation.

This confusion is further fueled by recent changes in air travel. While the U.S. Department of Transportation updated its rules in 2021 to allow airlines to exclude emotional support animals and require specific forms, those rules don't apply to hotels, restaurants or shops. Business owners may learn about these airline requirements and mistakenly overcorrect, demanding the same documentation in spaces where the ADA guarantees access without it.

It's critical for veterans to understand that private companies offering these certifications often prey on their desire to follow the rules, according to Williams. These documents have no legal weight under the ADA.

"The ADA explicitly states that service animals are not required to be certified or go through a professional training program," Williams said. This means a dog that

a veteran personally trains, provided it's under control and trained for a specific task, meets the same service dog requirements as one trained by an accredited organization.

For McCasland, the goal of sharing his story is education. By pursuing a formal complaint and seeking compliance training for the hotel staff, he hopes to ensure the next veteran who walks through the hotel's doors is met with understanding rather than confrontation.

"I want to make it about all our veterans that have service dogs that are out there in the community," McCasland said.

While veterans like McCasland fight for their right to public access under the ADA, many others struggle just to obtain a service dog. To bridge this gap, DAV is advocating for the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act (H.R. 2605/S. 1441). This legislation would create a pilot program at the Department of Veterans Affairs to fund the training and placement of service dogs for veterans with conditions like traumatic brain injury and military sexual trauma. The veterans would pay nothing and would also receive veterinary insurance to ensure these lifesaving animals can get the care they need. ■



Learn More Online

For more information about the ADA, visit ada.gov.

For information on service members and veterans initiatives, visit servicemembers.gov.



After Kobe's handler, Army veteran William McCasland, was barred from a hotel dining area in Mississippi, the pair turned the embarrassing confrontation into a mission to educate others on the Americans with Disabilities Act.



Richard Boettger (left) celebrates with American author and long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad (right) on the 10-year anniversary of her iconic swim from Cuba to Key West, Florida.

Make a legacy gift to DAV through your will or estate plan

For more information about giving to DAV:

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- Return the attached postcard.
- Visit davplanmygift.org.

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- **Address:** 860 Dolwick Drive,
Erlanger, KY 41018
- **Federal tax ID number:**
31-0263158



Army veteran plans for future

Former soldier prepares estate through personal philanthropy

DAV member Richard Boettger, who served as a Russian language specialist in the Army, saw his planned military career come to an early end when he sustained a knee injury during basic training.

The career-ending injury is common among military members—10 times that of civilians, according to some studies. For the Michigan native, the loss was hard to take.

“I blew out my knee, which prevented me from going into any kind of special forces,” he said. “I got an early discharge, gave up my security clearance and went into other things. I eventually went to the VA hospital and got an operation, but it didn’t fully fix my knee.”

Reflecting on his journey, Boettger acknowledges the pivotal role the VA and DAV played in enhancing his quality of life through exceptional medical care and support services.

“I have had such extraordinarily good care from the VA with my medical care that it really enhanced the quality of my life,” said Boettger.

He also became a DAV member and learned about the FreeWill website.

“Using the FreeWill website was straightforward, and knowing the significant impact DAV has on veterans made it an easy decision for me,” he said, highlighting the importance of supporting organizations that provide critical programs and services to veterans at no cost.

Having such an accessible resource was a relief to Boettger. He used to pay thousands of dollars making updates to his will. FreeWill took that stress away and gave him the time to not only make sure his family is provided for but also support the causes he is passionate about.

“When I read the uplifting stories about what DAV does for disabled veterans who have suffered far worse injuries than I did, I’m reminded that giving to DAV is a good use of my legacy money.”

Join Boettger in his efforts by leaving your own lasting legacy for our nation’s heroes. Donate to DAV through your will, living trusts, beneficiary designations, memorials and endowed gifts. The complete list of gift planning resources is on DAV’s website at davplanmygift.org. You can also take advantage of DAV’s partnership with FreeWill and create a no-cost will, trust or legacy at freewill.com/dav.

Through his philanthropy and advocacy, Boettger aims to inspire others to follow suit and include DAV in their wills. By leaving a legacy that supports veterans, individuals can ensure the sacrifices made by those who served are recognized and honored for generations to come. ■

VA accelerates electronic health record rollout



■ After years of delays, the Department of Veterans Affairs says its federal electronic health record (EHR) program is now firmly back on track. VA Secretary Douglas Collins has accelerated the program with a renewed goal: full deployment across all VA medical centers by 2031.

A major governance overhaul, replacing multiple competing councils with a single decision-making body, has cut through bureaucratic delays and allowed the VA to move faster and more consistently. Deputy Secretary Paul Lawrence has taken a hands-on role, including visiting deployment sites and holding daily meetings

with Oracle Health to ensure front-line clinicians have what they need.

Here's how the rollout is going, according to the VA:

- The federal EHR has only experienced four outages since December 2025.
- The system has gone nearly two consecutive years without a major incident.
- It is currently live at six sites, supporting care for over 188,000 veterans.
- The system creates a lifelong medical record, integrating data across the VA, the Department of Defense and private community providers.

With the first new deployments underway and four Michigan medical centers already live in 2026, the VA is entering its first true expansion phase since the program's reset. Officials say the system's improved stability, streamlined governance and standardized national workflows have cleared the obstacles that once stalled progress. With 13 sites scheduled for deployment in 2026 and a market-based rollout strategy guiding future waves, the department believes it's finally positioned to move at scale toward a modern, fully interoperable EHR, advancing steadily toward its goal of reaching every VA medical center in five years.

VA research reveals findings on chronic pain, toxic exposure and opioid risks

■ The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Research and Development has released new findings in the areas of chronic pain, toxic exposure and long-term medication risks.

Here's the breakdown of the latest research:

- **A better way to manage pain:** A study of 800 veterans found that the Whole Health approach is more effective than standard care or traditional talk therapy in reducing how much chronic pain interferes with daily life. These results were equally effective when delivered through telehealth.
- **The impact of toxic exposure:** Looking at data from 250,000 veterans in the Million Veteran Program, researchers found that multiple toxic exposures are increasing the likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts or behaviors by 17%.
- **Dental health:** A review of data from 2 million veterans showed that long-term opioid therapy (more than 90 days) is linked to a 24% higher risk of tooth decay, infections or tooth loss. The medication suppresses the immune system and reduces saliva flow, both of which negatively affect oral health.





From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

DEBRA VARNER DANCER

Embracing the unchangeable



Some circumstances are unchangeable. Personal limitations, loss of loved ones, past experiences and other significant challenges can leave permanent marks on our lives, especially those who served.

Refusing to accept this truth can result in feelings of misery, frustration and dissatisfaction.

But the path to overcoming what may seem like insurmountable obstacles starts with acceptance. When we choose to surrender and let go of things beyond our control, we can experience peace instead of frustration.

Acceptance is the first step toward a posture of submission and surrender, allowing us to find peace among life's challenges and unchangeable circumstances. Faith—regardless of its form—means recognizing reality, honestly confronting challenges and holding onto hope even when things are tough.

Because our past is something we can't alter, it's important for us to focus on changing what's within our power—namely, ourselves. We can't change others. When we face loss or disappointment, our focus should shift to personal transformation, not external blame. This requires honest self-evaluation and a commitment to personal growth even if our tendency is to resist change.

Finding and maintaining peace requires conducting a relational inventory in which we assess our relationships with family, friends and colleagues. We should also take a moral inventory to help identify habits, hurts and hang-ups that hinder our progress.

While you may not be able to change things in your past, you can find a brighter future by leaning on hope. You can act on things within your control and seek out the joys in life.

Joy can be found in every stage of life. These seasons are ever-changing and may be different for each of us. However, they present distinctive opportunities and rewards if we seek to recognize them.

We all experience times filled with challenges and hardship, moments of hurt and pain, and periods when we wonder what the future holds. Those are guarantees. However, there is wisdom to be gained when we recognize those negative experiences don't need to define our outlook. Then we can better appreciate each phase of life and take full advantage of what it offers.

Yes, our past is unchangeable. So are some of our current situations. But if we approach the challenges we face with a perspective of hope, we will find that many difficult circumstances are fleeting.

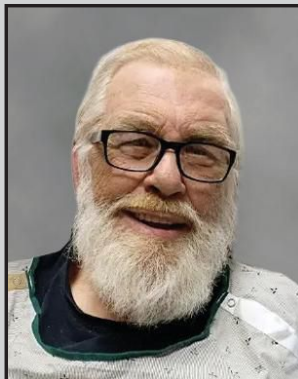
Let's embrace the inevitable career shifts, relationship changes, personal loss or other life challenges. Not only will we be happier and more joyful with the peace we'll discover, but we can also share that comfort, insight and renewed hope with others. ■

Death of DAV benefits advocate, director

Darrel Babcock, who had a 25-year career with DAV, died April 7, 2026. He was 81.

Born and raised in Naponee, Nebraska, Babcock served in the Army as a paratrooper with the 173rd Airborne Brigade during the Vietnam War. He was seriously wounded in combat and was medically retired in 1971.

Babcock began his career with DAV as a national service officer apprentice in 1972 in Lincoln, Nebraska. As an NSO, he also worked in San Antonio. In 1990, he became the personnel director at DAV



Babcock

National Headquarters in Cold Spring, Kentucky. In 1993, he became a field director at the National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and retired in 1996.

"We are immensely thankful for Darrel's contributions to DAV and for his service to his fellow veterans," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "DAV grieves along with his family and the many veterans and families he served through our sacred cause. May he rest in peace."

Babcock was preceded in death by his wife, Ginny. He is survived by his daughter, Faith Seeton; stepdaughter, Deloris Lundy; and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

DAV Honor Garden

A living monument to our nation's heroes

We invite you to honor a veteran and be part of the historic DAV Honor Garden monument with the purchase of a commemorative brick. **Order today.**

Scan or visit dav.org/bricks or call 877-647-VETS (8387).



Last-minute holiday cheer

Through a long-standing community partnership, Penny Collins, a chapter service officer with Chapter 7 in Bowie, Maryland, and Dr. James Dula, from the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training, successfully coordinated an emergency distribution point to ensure 24 veterans received holiday gift bags just in time for Christmas.



Volunteers continue mission of helping disabled veterans

Chapter 34 in Claysburg, Pennsylvania, receives a \$600 donation from the Blair County Antique Auto Club, demonstrating the club's commitment to supporting local veterans and DAV programs. Pictured from left: Dale Crum, Tom Pringle, DAV member Mike Babiak, Frankie Pringle, Chapter Adjutant Paul Monoskey, Chapter Service Officer Marc Garzarelli, DAV member Joe Cupples and Department of Pennsylvania Commander Lory Liebegott.



VA clinic food delivery

Members from Chapter 30 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, deliver snacks and food items to the Myrtle Beach VA Clinic. Pictured from left: Tom Huston, chapter commander; Candy Anderson, VA Volunteer Services; and James Turner, life member. Many members of the active chapter and Derwin Bradley, the recently elected commander of the Department of South Carolina, provided volunteer support for DAV Patriot Boot Camp for entrepreneurs earlier in the year.



Student honors grandfather's legacy

Nathan Karimjee, a student at Dr. Hector P. Garcia Middle School in Helotes, Texas, organized a donation drive benefiting Chapter 114 in Helotes, Texas. Inspired by his grandfather, Vietnam veteran Santiago "Jim" Muzquiz, Nathan collected snacks and monetary donations from community members during his spring break. The effort raised \$579 and a substantial collection of snacks for local veterans.



Community engagement

Members of Chapter 20 and Auxiliary Unit 20 in West Columbia, South Carolina, demonstrate their commitment to veterans through outreach and public events. The chapter participated in the Columbia Fireflies' Military Appreciation Night, where Commander Robert L. Clark threw the ceremonial first pitch.

REUNIONS

ARMY

14TH BATTALION, 9TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (MANCHUS) Sept. 21-26, Springfield, IL, Contact: Bob Lannon, Ph: 317-403-0033, Web: manchus.org

27TH FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT, ALL BATTALIONS AND AIR/GROUND SUPPORT GROUPS (VIETNAM/CAMBODIA) Sept. 22-25, Branson, MO, Contacts: Keith Porter or Bruce Dees, Ph: 318-393-9372 or 405-570-5374, Email: porterkeithalan@gmail.com or brucedees@reagan.com

27TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (WOLFHOUSES) Aug. 16-23, Covington, KY, Contacts: Dave and Wanda Shepherd, Ph: 859-445-2281, Email: shepd227@gmail.com, Web: wolffhoundpack.org

35TH/538TH LANDCLEARING COMPANY (VIETNAM) Sept. 10-12, Winthrop, MN, Contact: Ron Trebelhorn, Ph: 320-212-6546

44TH ENGINEER BATTALION Sept. 16-19, Branson, MO, Contact: David Szprejda, Ph: 715-548-1208, Email: r_and_d100@hotmail.com, Web: 44th-engineers.com

106TH INFANTRY DIVISION Sept. 16-20, Savannah, GA, Contact: Randall Wood, Ph: 912-450-9800, Web: 106thinfdivassn.org

205TH MILITARY POLICE COMPANY (MOS 95B; 1971-73) Sept. 13, Leavenworth, KS, Contact: Larry Grebe, Ph: 574-209-0273, Email: ldgrebe@gmail.com

249TH ENGINEER BATTALION Sept. 21-23, Dayton, OH, Contact: Robin Wandell, Ph: 660-815-1166, Email: firewoodfriends@hotmail.com

577TH ENGINEER BATTALION Sept. 9-13, Nashville, TN, Contact: Tammy Beene, Ph: 615-293-5422, Email: tammy@knowbettertravel.com

COMPANY A, 2ND BATTALION, 501ST INFANTRY REGIMENT, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (VIETNAM) Oct. 12-14, Fort Myers, FL, Contact: Don Wood, Ph: 713-503-6720 or 504-343-8393, Email: drwood45@gmail.com or kencounts@bellsouth.net, Web: alphaavengers.com

COMPANY D, 1ST BATTALION, 6TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 198TH LIGHT INFANTRY BRIGADE, AMERICAL DIVISION (VIETNAM, 1968-71) Sept. 14-18, Indianapolis, IN, Contact: Gary Salpini, Ph: 703-425-0522, Email: gs@d-company1-6.org, Web: d-company1-6.org

OV-1 MOHAWK ASSOCIATION Aug. 27-29, Washington, DC, Contact: Alan Summers, Email: gatorn10c@gmail.com, Web: ov1mohawkassociation.

NAVY

ASSOCIATION OF MINEMEN Sept. 1-3, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Don Moody, Ph: 626-824-0727, Email: assocminemen@yahoo.com, Web: minemen.org/wp

CONSTRUCTION BATTALION MAINTENANCE UNIT 302 (CBMU-302) Sept. 15-17, Bloomington, MN, Contact: Tom Vandenberg, Ph: 509-520-5396, Email: peggie.vandenberg@hotmail.com, Web: seabee.org

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF NAVAL PHOTOGRAPHY Oct. 14-17, Virginia Beach, VA, Contact: Greg McCreash, Ph: 757-284-8040, Web: navyphoto.net

NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALIONS (NMCB) 8 AND 11 Sept. 21-24, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Larry Hagler, Ph: 512-796-2834, Email: mcb11.2026@earthlink.net, Web: mcb11.com and nmcb8.com

USS ARCHERFISH (SSN-678) Sept. 24-26, Groton, CT, Contact: John Carcioppolo, Ph: 860-514-7064, Email: gumba700@comcast.net

USS FORRESTAL (CVA/CV/AVT-59) AND ALL AIR GROUPS Sept. 29-Oct. 3, Virginia Beach, VA, Contact: Bill Solt, Ph: 321-362-5806, Email: sisbill@aol.com, Web: ussforrestal.org

USS HECTOR (AR-7) Sept. 23-26, Fairborn, OH, Contact: Glenn Hahn, Ph: 610-597-8038, Email: gandk5124@verizon.net, Web: uss Hector.com

USS HOLLISTER (DD-788) Sept. 16-19, Metairie, LA, Contact: Casey Orr, Ph: 319-651-9426, Web: usshollister.org

USS KAWISHIWI (AO-146) Sept. 17-20, Cincinnati, OH, Contacts: Jim Ostrenga or Richard Perkins, Ph: 309-531-5093 or 513-888-1262, Email: lonesailor73@yahoo.com or grandpaperk@aol.com

USS MONTICELLO (LSD-35) Oct. 8-11, Branson, MO, Contact: Robert Behm, Ph: 573-207-4670, Email: beamer@ussmonticello.com, Web: ussmonticello.com

USS POINT DEFIANCE (LSD-31) Sept. 23-26, Providence, RI, Contact: Mike Doto, Ph: 406-491-9308, Email: mdoto1947@gmail.com, Web: usspassociation.com

USS RAINIER (AE-5) Sept. 14-18, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Don Benson, Ph: 251-391-4084, Email: drbenson88@aol.com

USS RASHER (SS/SSR/AGSS-269) Sept. 9-13, Manitowoc, WI, Contact: Richard Moore, Ph: 804-815-0730

USS SOUTH DAKOTA (BB-57, SSN-790) DAY OF HONOR Aug. 8, Sioux Falls, SD, Contact: Diane Diekman, Ph: 605-271-0815, Email: info@battleshipsouthdakota.org, Web: southdakotabattleship.org

MARINES

7051 CRASH CREW Sept. 24-27, San Angelo, TX, Contact: Isaac Diehl, Email: usmcafrapresident@gmail.com

COMBINED ACTION PROGRAM (CAC/CAP, VIETNAM, 1965-1971) Nov. 6-10, San Diego, CA, Contact: Mark Morales, Ph: 601-918-5008, Email: mrmom@bellsouth.net, Web: cap.vet

COMPANY L, 3RD BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT, 1ST MARINE DIVISION VIETNAM Sept. 14-18, Branson, MO, Contact: Allen Glick, Ph: 573-295-4532, Email: drglick78@gmail.com

FORCE LOGISTICS COMMAND/FORCE LOGISTICS SUPPORT GROUP A AND B (VIETNAM) Sept. 21-25, Biloxi, MS, Contact: Edward Farrell, Ph: 936-650-2254, Email: lzybones85@gmail.com

MARINE ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION (ALL ERAS) Sept. 22-27, Seattle, WA, Contact: Ed Peterson, Ph: 732-754-8755, Email: ed66451@aol.com

USMC VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION Sept. 10-13, Kansas City, MO, Contact: John Wear, Ph: 719-495-5998, Email: johnwear2@verizon.net, Web: usmcvtva.org

AIR FORCE

57TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY (GLADIATORS-COUGARS, VIETNAM) Sept. 30-Oct. 4, Mount Pleasant, SC, Contact: Libby Morris, Ph: 877-424-2449, Email: vidawalls@hotmail.com or libbymorris001@gmail.com, Web: 57thahc.com

INQUIRIES

- Searching for James Dickey, who was an EA-2 with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 62 in Đông Hà, Vietnam, 1969. Contact: Don Grubb, Ph: 570-672-3070
- Searching for machinist mates in the No. 4 engine room on the USS Kitty Hawk (CVA-63), 1963-67. Contact: Rick Marquis, Email: rmarquis041@gmail.com
- Searching for my teammates who served in Vietnam with Company C, 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, March 1968-69. Contact: Sgt. Paul A. Campione Jr., Email: paul@pac-plumbing.com
- Searching for anyone who served with my cousin-in-law Chet Kurczewski on his river patrol boat in Vietnam around 1967-68. I have the boat's flag that he retrieved when it was sunk and would like its number to put on a plaque to attach to its flag box. Contact: Ed Marco, Email: edward07@comcast.net
- Searching for anyone who was stationed on Treasure Island, San Francisco, CA, September 1989-November 1989. Contact: Michael Fore, Ph: 361-318-3566, Email: mfore1966@yahoo.com
- Searching for men and families of the 1392nd Engineer Forestry Company and 1321st Engineer General Service Regiment in World War II To award the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal and Army of Occupation Medal. After a lot of research, I was able to prove that my dad, Harry Newton, who was with the 1392nd Forestry Engineers, was entitled to these medals. I have them in my possession now. But a lot of other men also earned those medals, and I need help to locate them. Contact: Jackie Erickson, jbnwton@jamadots.com

REUNION STORIES

DAV is interested in stories about veterans who connected via the Reunions section of *DAV Magazine*. If you have a story you would like to share, please email feedback@dav.org.

PLANNING A REUNION? We welcome submissions from our readers for reunions and inquiries. Please email the details to feedback@dav.org. Submissions must be received at least six months before the event and are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety.



Spread the news! Send photos of your DAV or Auxiliary news to production@dav.org. To be considered for publication, photographs should be at least 3 x 5 inches at a resolution of 300 dpi. Submissions should also include a description of the event, along with the names of those pictured, when applicable. In most cases, submissions are published in the order in which they are received but are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety.



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Patriots Pitch contest at the 2026 national convention

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Rosen Shingle Creek | Orlando, Florida
Main Ballroom | Friday, July 31 | 5 p.m.

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