

DAV[®]

MAGAZINE

MARCH | APRIL 2025



A LEGACY FORGED IN VALOR

DAV leader awarded Medal of Honor
for heroism in Vietnam | [Page 16](#)

2025 Department Conventions					
Department	City	Convention Headquarters	Dates	Banquet	
Alabama	Mobile	Mobile Marriott	June 6–7	June 7	
Arizona	Mesa	Sheraton Mesa Hotel at Wrigleyville West	June 26–29	June 28	
Arkansas	North Little Rock	Wyndham Riverfront Little Rock	June 6–7	June 7	
California	Sparks	Nugget Casino Resort (Nevada)	May 14–17	May 17	
Colorado	Colorado Springs	Embassy Suites by Hilton	May 21–22	May 22	
Connecticut	Meriden	Comfort Inn & Suites	May 17	May 17	
Delaware	Camden	Department of Delaware Headquarters	June 7	June 7	
District of Columbia	Washington	Denvel D. Adams Legislative Building	May 16–17	May 17	
Florida	Lake Mary	Orlando Marriott Lake Mary	June 12–14	June 14	
Georgia	Macon	Macon Marriott City Center	June 4–8	June 7	
Hawaii	Honolulu	Ala Moana Hotel by Mantra	June 6–7	June 7	
Idaho	Coeur d’Alene	Best Western Plus Coeur d’Alene Inn	May 6–9	May 9	
Illinois	Springfield	Northfield Inn, Suites & Conference Center	June 5–8	June 7	
Indiana	Indianapolis	Indianapolis Marriott East	June 4–8	June 7	
Iowa	Ames	Gateway Hotel & Conference Center	June 13–15	June 14	
Kansas	Salina	Baymont by Wyndham	May 23–25	May 24	
Kentucky	Lexington	Embassy Suites by Hilton Lexington/UK Coldstream	June 19–21	June 21	
Louisiana	Kenner	DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel New Orleans Airport	May 15–18	May 17	
Maine	Newry	Grand Summit Hotel	April 24–26	April 26	
Maryland	Ocean City	Grand Hotel	May 18–23	May 22	
Massachusetts	Leominster	DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Leominster	June 5–7	June 6	
Michigan	Mount Pleasant	Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort	June 8–13	June 11	
Minnesota	Welch	Treasure Island Resort & Casino	April 24–26	April 25	
Mississippi	Choctaw	Golden Moon Hotel & Casino	April 24–27	April 26	
Missouri	Columbia	Stoney Creek Hotel	May 30–June 1	May 31	
Montana	Great Falls	Elk’s Lodge No. 214	May 30–31	May 31	
Nebraska	North Platte	Ramada by Wyndham North Platte & Sandhills Convention Center	May 30–June 1	May 31	
Nevada	Reno	Silver Legacy Resort Casino	May 2–5	May 4	
New Hampshire	Nashua	DoubleTree by Hilton Nashua	May 3	May 3	
New Jersey	Wildwood	Bolero Resort & Conference Center	June 15–18	June 17	
New Mexico	Albuquerque	Sheraton Albuquerque Uptown	June 20–21	June 21	
New York	Callicoon	Villa Roma Resort	June 22–25	June 24	
North Carolina	Raleigh	Hilton Raleigh North Hills	June 12–15	June 14	
North Dakota	Jamestown	Gladstone Inn & Suites	May 2–4	May 3	
Ohio	Dublin	Embassy Suites by Hilton Columbus Dublin	June 12–15	June 14	
Oklahoma	Catoosa	Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tulsa	June 2–4	June 3	
Oregon	Medford	Hilton Garden Inn Medford	May 17–18	May 17	
Pennsylvania	Harrisburg	Best Western Premier The Central Hotel	June 16–20	June 19	
Puerto Rico	Aguadilla	Courtyard Aguadilla	April 25–26	April 26	
Rhode Island	Warwick	Crowne Plaza Providence-Warwick	April 10–12	April 11	
South Carolina	Columbia	Doubletree by Hilton	May 8–11	May 10	
South Dakota	Aberdeen	AmericInn by Wyndham Aberdeen	April 25–26	April 26	
Tennessee	Franklin	Drury Plaza Hotel Nashville Franklin	June 8–13	June 12	
Texas	Kerrville	Inn of the Hills	June 6–8	June 7	
Utah	Salt Lake City	Hilton Garden Inn Salt Lake City Airport	May 30–31	May 30	
Vermont	White River Junction	Hotel Coolidge	May 16–17	May 17	
Virginia	Roanoke	Holiday Inn Roanoke-Tanglewood-Rt 419&l581	June 5–8	June 7	
Washington	Oak Harbor	Navy Gateway Inns and Suites	June 25–27	June 26	
West Virginia	Mineral Wells	Comfort Suites Parkersburg South	June 20–21	June 21	
Wisconsin	Green Bay	Oneida Casino Hotel	June 12–14	June 14	
Wyoming	Casper	Holiday Inn Casper East	May 2–3	May 3	

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER DANIEL CONTRERAS



Answer the call

Over the last several months, I have had the privilege of meeting members and volunteers across the country as your national commander. In every interaction, hearing your stories, challenges and successes has been a source of inspiration.

The core themes of community and service continue to come up in each of those conversations, highlighting the importance of our volunteer work. Whether by helping connect veterans to their benefits, working to tackle food insecurity through food banks or distribution events, volunteering at VA hospitals, or driving a veteran to their VA medical appointments, volunteers are shining examples of the positive impact we can have on the lives of veterans daily.

Volunteers remain at the heart of the work we do, seizing opportunities to fill the gaps in the lives of veterans and their families. Wherever there is a need, there is a chance to volunteer.

To shine a much-deserved spotlight on those who donate their time, DAV's second annual Community Impact Day will be April 5. I am hoping you can take the pledge with me and find an opportunity to volunteer to support veterans and their families on that day.

Check out Page 27 in this magazine, scan the QR code, and pledge an hour of your time. An hour may not seem like much, but together it adds up and creates a collective impact.

Last year, we had over 650 DAV volunteers across the country take the pledge and give back to veterans in their communities. This year, with your help, we're hoping we can double the number of volunteers.

If you need some ideas for volunteering, please read the commentary on Page 26 from DAV National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst, or visit communityimpactday.org to learn what other departments, chapters and volunteers have planned.

This event is a great way to increase the visibility of DAV and introduce veterans, their families and others to our organization in your community. It shows that we go beyond saying "thank you for your service" and take action to empower veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.

Please help us get the word out. We look forward to hearing about and seeing all the wonderful work you do to support veterans and their families with your volunteer efforts. ■

To shine a much-deserved spotlight on those who donate their time, **DAV's second annual Community Impact Day will be April 5.**

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Cover photo by Staff Sgt. Derek Hamilton/U.S. Army



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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT BARRY A. JESINOSKI



Veterans benefits are earned, not ‘generous’

You’ve likely heard dangerous sentiments regarding veterans benefits, including last year’s viral Economist article declaring them “absurdly generous.” Arguments such as these aren’t new, but as Congress and the administration get underway doing the vital work our nation requires, their reemergence caused understandable worry among veterans that their hard-fought benefits could be on the chopping block.

The nebulous and anonymous piece, published on Thanksgiving, no less, paints a picture of a nation carelessly spending American taxpayer dollars. The reality could be anything but. These benefits, health care and disability compensation have already been earned—through bloodshed in many cases. These are benefits earned by veterans through their sacrifices.

The danger lies not only with this article writer’s specific argument but also with others who might share this myopic perception. These sorts of unsigned articles are often trial balloons sent up by people with their hands on the levers.

The Department of Veterans Affairs’ budget growth over the past two decades makes for a tempting target. But these funds are not charity—they represent our nation keeping our promise to America’s veterans after more than 20 years of war. Nowhere in this anonymously penned article will you find any mention of the selfless service and sacrifice our nation’s veterans have endured, both before and since 9/11. Instead, it offensively casts aspersions on veterans’ motivations to apply for disability benefits. After three decades of serving and working alongside veterans from World War I through the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I have yet to meet a single veteran who wouldn’t gladly trade their VA compensation for a healthy body, mind and spirit.

What’s apparent in the article is the grotesque idea that veterans are merely leeches sucking up scarce portions of the federal budget. However, as far as DAV is concerned, those funds have already been spent, and organizations such as ours help veterans realize and receive their earned benefits and fight to keep them.

Veterans cannot be reduced to a number on a balance sheet. They are more than a monetary benefit—they are patriotic individuals who answered our nation’s call to defend America against all enemies, foreign and domestic. In doing so, many returned from military service forever changed. And it’s incumbent on us as a nation to care for them and their families, caregivers and survivors—regardless of the price tag. The costs of a well-defended nation are paid by individuals.

DAV will continue to vigorously advocate against these dangerous ideas through our advocacy in Washington, D.C., and beyond. This includes calling out those who would undermine generosity with poison pens. They need to be made aware that true generosity is the selfless service our veterans perform while wearing our nation’s uniform. ■

Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act

Thanks for supporting H.R. 8371. I am not sure if addressing problems with the claims process is anywhere in this legislation, but—take it from someone who is stuck in supplemental claim limbo as a result of the VA adjudicators not understanding their own diagnostic codes—that system needs to be addressed. It is obvious the VA was not ready for the influx of claims post-PACT Act, and they are extremely bogged down. Compensation and Pension exams being canceled by the third-party contractors is not helping the situation either. I applaud expanded services for veterans, but the VA has to be able to handle the current level of service first. **John Girard, Johnstown, Pennsylvania**

Recognizing Native Americans

Despite military service dating back to the Revolution, the Indigenous population of this nation was not recognized as citizens or allowed to vote until 1924. Even with the troubled history between the tribal nations and the government, Native Americans have continued to serve in greater numbers per capita than any other group. The unique use of the “Code Talkers” from the Navajo, Comanche, Cherokee and Choctaw tribes in World War I and World War II remains one of the great stories in military history. Yet still today, Native veterans face challenges, including access to health care, mental health support and housing. As a veteran and tribal member myself, I have seen the gaps in these services for tribal member veterans. While we must continue to advocate for the resources for all of our veterans, we must honor our nation’s proud

Native legacy of military service by ensuring they are not forgotten about in the often-remote tribal lands within the United States. **Robert Don Gifford II, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

Lethal-means safety

Lethal-means legislation is not going to do anything but make it look like you’re trying. Veterans need tangible resources and better outcomes. That’s way easier to do than to convince people that your intentions align with their Second Amendment rights. I’d love to discuss at length my personal experience as well as the solutions we can all implement to have a better understanding and better outcomes. **@DevilDocTalk via Twitter**

Editor’s note: *Just 15 years ago, efforts to mitigate firearm suicide were virtually nonexistent. Today, members of the firearms community now actively collaborate with health care providers, researchers, suicide prevention officials and government agencies to work on public education campaigns that help save veterans’ lives. You can read the American Psychological Association’s latest research at dav.la/42gh5.*

Ending the Wait

Your article on the *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans* report (November/December 2024) is great, but it does not mention the other people affected by PFAS exposure. Both my daughter and wife had exposure and long-term

effects—including surgeries and lifelong medical needs—from living on base housing at Fort Eisenhower, Georgia, where PFAS contamination has been identified. I have no known effects yet. Unfortunately, there is no way to get help for my family. I have contacted the VA and my congressional representatives to no avail. **Emil Velez, Suwanee, Georgia**

I just want to add my voice to the group of toxic-exposed veterans. I was stationed at Fort McClellan for basic and permanent party from 1973 to 1976. About 25 years ago, I was diagnosed with Graves’ disease. My doctor told me that it is inherited, but no one in my huge family has ever been diagnosed with it. The VA is taking excellent care of me, and I am very thankful. Best of luck to you all. **Karen Punturo, Palmer, Alaska**

Healing through DAV project

Bravo Zulu to DAV for the outstanding work on the Fallujah 20th anniversary campaign. The production value is top notch, and the stories are raw, poignant and inspiring. I am so thankful they invited me to be a small part in this project. This opportunity truly helped me deal with some of my inner demons and continue on the pathway to healing—forever grateful. As we recognize the 20-year anniversary of Fallujah, let us not forget the sacrifices made by so many of our brothers- and sisters-in-arms. Semper Fidelis! **Jonathan Knauth, Stafford, Virginia**

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.

The Dole Act

Transformative legislation to improve the lives of veterans and caregivers signed into law

By Kevin C. Miller

The 118th Congress enacted the fewest laws by far since 1980. But just before the holidays and the adjournment before the new Congress was seated, lawmakers rallied to pass the most significant veterans bill of the session—one that, for nearly two years, DAV and our grassroots supporters fought hard for. This is a law that will benefit caregivers and all veterans.

Signed by then-President Joe Biden in January, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (Public Law 118–210) is comprehensive and transformative legislation that will improve the lives of veterans and their caregivers on several fronts.

Among its many impactful provisions, the Dole Act aims to streamline the disability claims process, expand access to job training and employment opportunities, address veteran homelessness, strengthen mental health services, and ease burdens for aging and disabled veterans to receive at-home care and much more.

The Dole Act will make significant improvements to current caregiver support programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs and expand access to home- and community-based services at every VA medical center. This will give tens of thousands more veterans the option to receive medical care at home rather than in a facility.

The legislation will also create a mental health care grant program to support family caregivers and increase the cap from 65% to 100% of the cost of nursing home care for veterans seeking noninstitutional care alternatives, potentially providing thousands of dollars more a month in support to eligible veterans and their families.

“This legislation includes support from several DAV resolutions and will have a profound impact on the health and economic well-being of veterans, their families and caregivers,” said DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “It will expand and improve programs and services vital to veterans and helps us deliver on the promises made to those who served.”

The new law also includes several provisions related to improving access to and quality of community care, including one that requires the VA to reach out to veterans about their community care options.

The measure allows surviving spouses to maintain eligibility to use certain education benefits upon remarriage, includes provisions to boost supportive housing grants and mandates that the VA take a closer look at dental care options for veterans. Additionally, the bill requires the VA to establish a two-year dental care pilot program for enrolled veterans with ischemic heart disease.

“This is another tremendous victory for veterans, and DAV is proud to have a leading role in advocating for legislation that will be life-changing for so many veterans and their families,” said DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras. “This expansive package is an excellent example of how elected leaders can collaborate to transform lives for the better.” ■



Stay Informed

For more updates on other major veterans legislation, join DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) at daviccan.org.

PHOTO BY E.J. HERSH/DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE NEWS

Eyeing benefits decades after disaster

Vietnam veteran injured with training explosives and friendly fire proves it's never too late to seek help

By Matt Saintsing

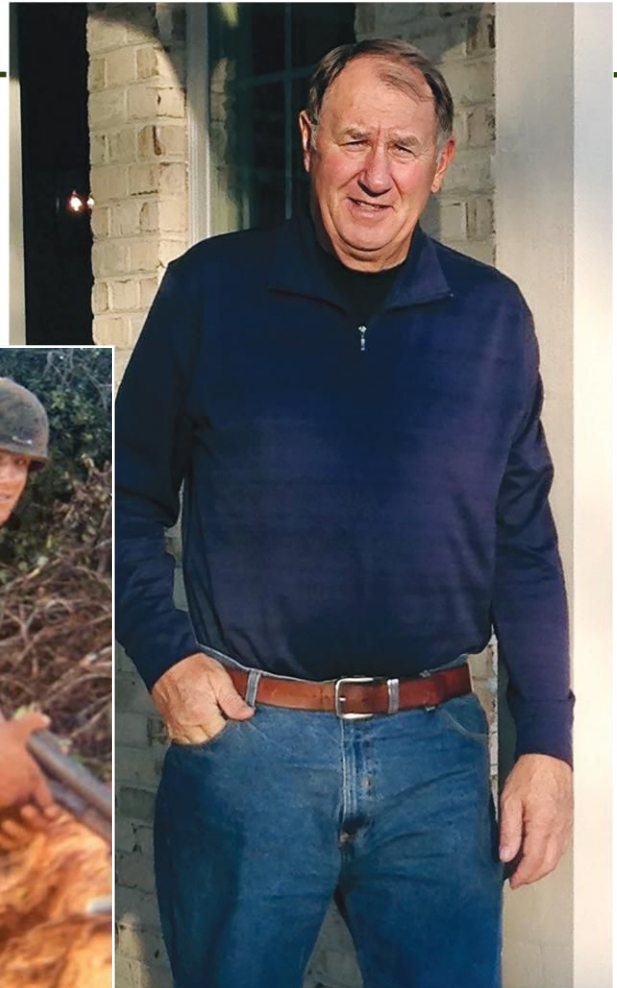
Carefully prodding the sand with a bayonet, Army infantryman Dennis Burckhard found a fake mine to disarm. He was training at Fort Lewis, Washington, preparing for scenarios he might encounter in Vietnam. After carefully lifting the explosive device under darkness, he placed a pin, as instructed, and carried the mine to a sergeant for inspection.

"He looked down at me and said, 'You sure you put this pin in?'" Burckhard recalled.

The noncommissioned officer then carelessly withdrew the pin, which had kept the training charge from exploding. In a flash, wood and metal debris flew into Burckhard's right eye.

Doctors removed debris from his cornea and treated his eye. After just a few short days, Burckhard returned to training.

Decades after being injured and forever changed by service, he finally received the necessary support and benefits he earned, thanks to DAV.



Dennis Burckhard on patrol in Vietnam (left). The injuries he endured in service have had far-reaching negative impacts. Today, with DAV's assistance, he receives the veterans benefits he earned decades before.

It wasn't the last time metal pieces struck his head, however.

Burckhard deployed to Vietnam and served with the 101st Airborne Division. His second injury came as his platoon was heading to the bottom of a valley

When he received the news that his claims had been approved, Burckhard was stunned. “This is your lucky day,” his wife told him after checking their bank account.

on a seek-and-destroy mission. Soldiers hacked away at the thick jungle vegetation with machetes when they crossed paths with another platoon in the company.

Confused, the soldier walking ahead of the formation saw movement and opened fire. Chaos ensued.

“Me and my squad leader were sharing a can of peaches when he was killed,” Burckhard said. “He got hit five times through the chest with a full burst of M-16.”

Through the screams and friendly fire, pieces of broken bullet and gear fragments peppered Burckhard’s head and neck. The shrapnel ultimately settled behind his carotid artery, and Burckhard carries it with him to this day.

The injury also blew out his ear and rocked his physical stability.

“I couldn’t stand up. I couldn’t balance,” he said.

Following the incident, he was airlifted from the jungle.

Burckhard was in Vietnam just 60 days when the Army swapped his grenade launcher for a typewriter. He finished his time in uniform as a company clerk at Fort Hood, Texas.

After that, Burckhard’s conditions were left unattended and worsened. The wounds on his face left a painful scar and numbness in his right cheek. The dizziness he encountered on the battlefield developed into vertigo. However, his recurring post-traumatic stress disorder is what remains particularly pernicious.

“I wake up in the middle of the night and can still hear my buddy screaming,” Burckhard said. “It was just absolutely miserable.”

So when he saw a newspaper ad for a DAV information seminar, he thought, “What the heck,” and attended. There, he met Rafael Sierra, a DAV benefits advocate from the national service office in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

“At information seminars, we conduct a morning session where we provide information on VA benefits,” Sierra said. “Then, we provide one-on-one assistance and conduct interviews with veterans.”



Sierra



Nunez

Assisted by fellow National Service Officer Felix Nunez, Sierra confidently submitted new claims to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Burckhard was proactive in the process, gathering evidence, including an old dental X-ray that shows the metal in his neck. When he received the news that his claims had been approved, Burckhard was stunned. “This is your lucky day,” his wife told him after checking their bank account.

His claims had all been approved, and VA backpay was sitting in his account. Overall, DAV assistance helped Burckhard receive a VA rating, which unlocked health care and other veterans benefits. Today, he remains a vocal advocate of DAV and is touched by the level of care he received.

“It just gives you a good feeling, somebody that really cared,” Burckhard said. “I could tell Rafael really likes his job.”

Sierra said it was an honor to give back to a fellow soldier who endured so much.

“Everyone in our office was involved in either calling the veteran back, answering a question or responding to an inquiry,” Sierra said. “We here at the Winston-Salem regional office came together to assist the veteran, and we were successful.” ■



Las Vegas to host 2025 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention

Aug. 9–12, 2025 | Paris Las Vegas

This year, DAV's national convention heads to the largest city in Nevada and one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, Las Vegas. With over 40.8 million visitors in 2023, Las Vegas is one of the nation's most popular vacation destinations.

The convention is an opportunity to advocate for ill and injured veterans, enjoy the camaraderie of fellow DAV members, and help shape the organization's yearly agenda—while still managing to have a fun time.

Located in the Las Vegas Valley within the greater Mojave Desert, Las Vegas is an internationally renowned

resort city, featuring gambling, shopping, fine dining and big-name entertainment. The city is known for its luxurious casino resorts and has more than 56 golf courses within 20 miles of the city limits.

Las Vegas is home to the largest glass pyramid; the largest hotel, with over 5,000 rooms; and one of the world's tallest observation wheels, the 550-foot-tall High Roller.

Convention attendees will enjoy a special room rate at the Paris Las Vegas of \$159 per single or double. Please note that upon booking your reservation, your credit card will be charged a deposit equal to the first night's room and tax. This one-night deposit is nonrefundable.

The Paris Las Vegas is known for its half-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower at 541 feet tall, which is the tallest reproduction of the original. ■



For more information and to make your hotel reservation in the DAV room block, scan the QR code or visit dav.org/events/2025-national-convention.

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 SERVICE DIRECTOR

JIM MARSZALEK



The dizzying world of VA ratings math

Every day, veterans across this country receive the life-changing news that a Department of Veterans Affairs disability rating has been granted. These benefits aren't just disability payments that veterans use to survive; they are recognition of the wounds, injuries or illnesses incurred during their military service and a signal of our sacred obligation to care for those who return forever changed.

Essential as these benefits may be, the perplexing VA ratings math can be challenging to decipher. VA math causes much confusion for veterans, so you are not alone if you need help understanding it. DAV is here to help.

Disability ratings are assigned percentages that represent the level of impairment resulting from service-connected conditions and injuries. Generally speaking, the higher the percentage, the more disability compensation a veteran receives. They exist to offset loss of working time when a disability affects their ability to earn a living. The ratings also reflect how each condition affects other aspects of a veteran's life, including family and everyday activities. However, adding them together is anything but crystal clear.

Take, for example, a veteran with two conditions rated at 50% individually. Simple math tells us that this combined rating should be 100%. But that's wrong! Perhaps surprisingly, it's 80%. It may look like $5 + 5 = 8$, but there is a method to the madness.

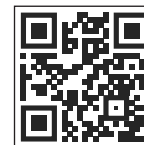
The VA combines disability ratings using a "whole person" concept. First, the highest-rated disability is subtracted from 100%—easy enough. However, each subsequent disability is applied to the remaining percentage of the whole person. Half of the remaining 50% is 25% in the example above. Since $50 + 25 = 75$, and the VA rounds to the nearest degree divisible by 10, the veteran above will receive an 80% rating.

Clear as mud.

But don't worry. You don't have to bust out your pencils and erasers whenever you want to calculate your updated rating. DAV's online VA disability calculator does the math for you. With the click of a few buttons, you can input your individual ratings, including any bilateral factors—situations where you receive a higher disability rating due to having a condition that affects both sides of your body—to uncover your total combined rating in a matter of seconds.

You can also include dependents and any special monthly compensation benefits, meaning the DAV calculator is a one-stop shop for veterans curious about their rating. VA calculations also consider many factors other than combined ratings.

If you need further assistance or would like to file a claim, contact DAV at benefitsquestions.org so one of our service officers can assist you. DAV services, including the VA rating calculator, are always free. ■



For DAV's online VA disability calculator, scan or visit dav.org/disability-calculator.

HISTORY MAKERS

Meet 3 women and DAV members who stared down adversity and thrived against the odds

By Elizabeth DePompei

It's been more than 75 years since women were allowed to officially serve in the armed forces. But restrictions on how they could serve persisted for decades. Until 1967, women could only make up 2% of the total forces. If they became pregnant or adopted a child, they could be discharged. The policy restricting them from combat wasn't reversed until 2013, and not all military specialties were open to women until 2016.

The far-reaching impact of those restrictions or the number of people it took to break through the barriers will never be fully known. But this Women's History Month, DAV honors and celebrates just a few women in DAV's ranks for their extraordinary and history-making service.

CARRIE ROEGER

Today, Carrie Roeger is proud to share how she made history as a Marine. But that wasn't always the case.

In 1991, Roeger was stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, when most of her unit deployed in support of the Persian Gulf War.

"The whole reason I was not deployed is because none of the women in my unit were deployed," Roeger said. "As a young Marine, that was very difficult."

But with one opportunity denied her, another presented itself. As one of the few in her unit stationed stateside, and in recognition of her exemplary service, Roeger's captain asked if she'd like to go to jump school. Naturally, she said yes.

After jump school, Roeger was assigned to an airborne unit, allowing her to continue jump training. With 13 total jumps, she proudly wore the gold Navy/Marine Corps Parachutist Insignia.

"It was kind of like acceptance into a private club," she said. "It was definitely a proud moment."

At the time, it didn't seem all that significant that she was the first female Marine to earn the gold jump wings. Then, a few months later, Roeger's wings were taken away on the basis that the Marine order specified that "male" Marines could be assigned to an airborne unit. Adding salt to the wound, she



Roeger





learned about the stipulation when she was accused of stolen valor by a staff noncommissioned officer who actively pushed to have her wings taken away.

"It was devastating," Roeger said.

Fortunately, the Marine regulation barring her from the recognition was in the process of being updated to be gender neutral. Roeger's captain successfully accelerated changes, allowing Roeger to reclaim the wings she had earned.

The journey was painful, but, Roeger said, "We had ultimately changed the course of opportunity for women Marines coming in the future."

Roeger once struggled to talk about her history-making accomplishment, before people were more accepting of women's expanding roles in the military. Now, as the co-owner of a restaurant dedicated to celebrating veterans and their stories, Roeger shares her own story proudly, recognizing it as an important stepping stone for women in uniform.

"I see these women today, and I'm so proud that they continue to push the limits and to break the ceilings," Roeger said, "and to rewrite the orders."

MELISSA STOCKWELL

While recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, someone informed Melissa Stockwell that she had become the first known woman to lose a limb in active combat.

"And I looked around, and I, I had no idea," Stockwell said. "It just didn't matter.

"You're all there in the same uniform. We had all gone through these traumatic instances. Gender didn't matter."

The former Army transportation officer had lost her left



Stockwell

leg above the knee after her vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb during a routine convoy three weeks into her deployment to Iraq in April 2004. It was a time before women could officially serve in combat.

"But here I am, lost my leg to a roadside bomb," Stockwell said. "And it happened to plenty of women and men."

At 24 years old, Stockwell had to figure out what life without one leg would look like. While at Walter Reed, she learned about Paralympian athletes and watched videos of people with limb loss skiing down mountainsides.

She asked herself, “What can I still do?” And the answer brimmed with possibilities.

“Let’s see what my life can be like; one leg or two doesn’t matter,” she told herself at the time. “I can still get out there and dream big.”

That she did.

Last year, at 44 years old, the mother of two competed in her fourth Paralympics. With her children and a community of friends and family cheering her on, she completed an iconic triathlon course in Paris, which included a swim in the Seine River. She previously competed in Beijing, where she was the first Iraq War veteran to qualify for a Paralympic game; Rio de Janeiro, where she earned the bronze medal; and Tokyo.

“I put on that Team USA uniform before I race, and I never take that for granted,” Stockwell said. “I feel honored to share the course or that elite stage with other veterans who have served and who have been wounded.”

Stockwell is also the co-owner of a prosthesis business, a nonprofit co-founder, a speaker and the author of “The Power of Choice: My Journey From Wounded Warrior to World Champion.”

“I believe that sports gave me my life back,” she said.

ANDREA GAYLE-BENNETT

A postcard launched retired Brig. Gen. Andrea Gayle-Bennett’s 35-year military career.

The new mom was looking for part-time work to keep her skills as a physician assistant sharp. So, when the Massachusetts Army National Guard hit up her mailbox, the rest became history.

“I didn’t find the military,” the mother of four said. “The military found me.”

Gayle-Bennett, a daughter of Jamaican immigrants, was the first in her family to serve. She had next to no reference point for what military service meant but saw it as an opportunity.

When she realized she could make a real impact, opportunity morphed into purpose.

Gayle-Bennett remembers being the only woman

administering the annual physicals required by the Guard. Women would be pleasantly surprised to see a female practitioner, particularly for women’s health.

“And they were able to talk about things that they didn’t feel they could talk about with men,” she said.

“I felt like I was doing my part to serve this country.”

As a woman in uniform, Gayle-Bennett knew firsthand how challenging and isolating it could be. When she deployed to Iraq in 2009 as a lieutenant colonel, she didn’t have many other women around, let alone those of her rank.

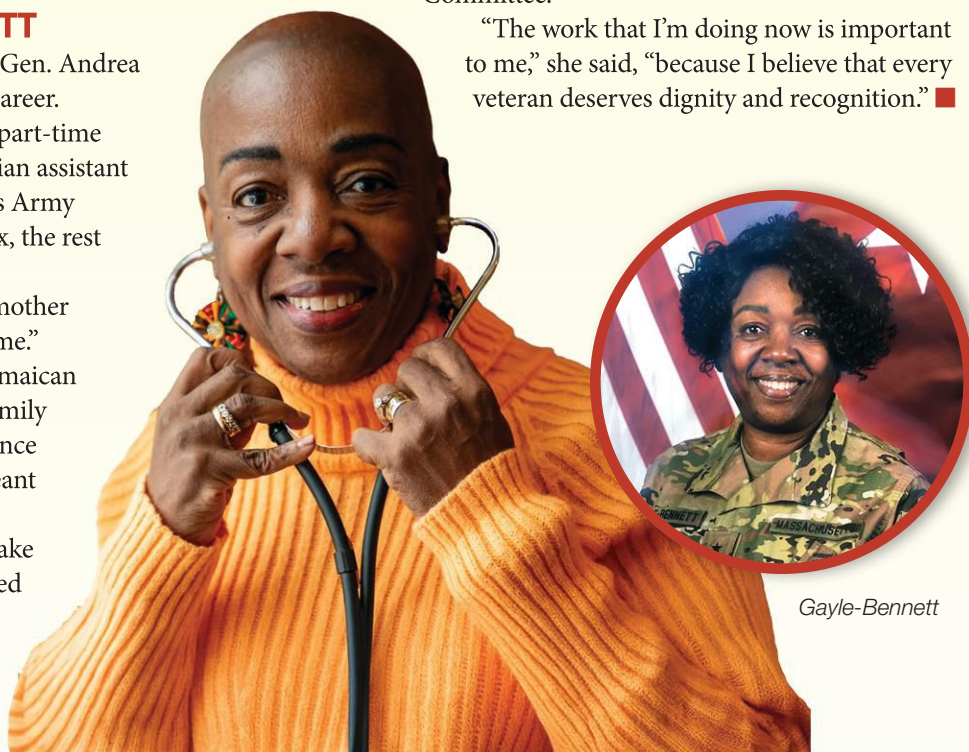
“It is actually a direct result of historic, systematic, intentional and maybe some unintentional exclusion of women and people of color in the senior ranks,” she said.

Before then, Gayle-Bennett was at risk of receiving a mandatory discharge after staying at the rank of captain for longer “than anyone should.” That’s something she attributed to a lack of mentorship for women. Luckily, someone eventually took her under their wing and she avoided discharge.

Despite the challenges, Gayle-Bennett became the first Black female colonel in the Massachusetts Army National Guard and the first Black American to serve as the Guard’s state surgeon. In 2020, she was promoted to brigadier general.

An active DAV member, Gayle-Bennett is also a past state commander, current chapter adjutant and the newest member of the national Interim Women Veterans Committee.

“The work that I’m doing now is important to me,” she said, “because I believe that every veteran deserves dignity and recognition.” ■





Participants of Paramount's Veteran Immersion Program gain valuable experience working in media. **From left to right:** Torrin Fields, Army veteran and senior postproduction editor; Joshua Reyes, Marine veteran and sales associate; and; Chris Murray, Air Force veteran and editor.

Veterans behind the scenes

Offering hands-on experience with the best in the business, this program provides training and opportunity for veterans in media

By Liz Stetler

A streaming hit on Paramount+, “SEAL Team” committed to unwavering authenticity as it followed the fictional Bravo Team of U.S. Navy SEALs. From star David Boreanaz wearing an actual SEAL’s helmet on screen to the numerous military veterans in the cast and crew, the series strove for realism in every detail during its recently ended seven-season run.

Dedication to on-screen authenticity is only one aspect that the Veteran Immersion Program, created by the Paramount Veterans Network in 2020 to guide and support veterans in the media industry, brings to the table.

While offering hands-on experience and the opportunity to network with the best in the business, this unique program supports a culture of camaraderie infused with mentorship, career counseling, skills development and job readiness.



“For the military, as they’re getting out and transitioning, there are not a lot of open doors. It’s important for us to open these doors of opportunities for veterans to work in media.”

—Betty Diaz, Paramount Veterans Network

“We identify skill sets in each of our participants, and then we grow that skill set,” said Betty Diaz, director of programs and operations for Paramount Veterans Network. With an uncle who served in the Marine Corps and a cousin who was wounded in the Army, Diaz has seen the importance of giving back to those who have served.

“We’ve had veterans come into communications, animation, editing, event planning, event coordination, corporate responsibility, info security and tech. There’s a plethora of opportunities.”

These opportunities are often necessary for veterans, who have contributed some of their prime learning years to military service.

“Getting into media is very challenging,” Diaz continued. “For the military, as they’re getting out and transitioning, there are not a lot of open doors. It’s important for us to open these doors of opportunities for veterans to work in media.”

“This industry is a dog-eat-dog world,” said Torrin Fields, a senior postproduction editor at Paramount. “You feel alone; you feel isolated.”

Fields joined the Army as a military police officer in 2001, shortly after 9/11. Between 2002 and 2005, he deployed twice to Iraq, serving in a reconnaissance role both times.

The shared responsibility and mission of these deployments ultimately shaped how Fields views the world.

“The military gave me the opportunity to understand how to be

a leader, a team player and also resilient,” Fields said. “Before I joined the military, I just cared about myself.”

But with service comes risk. Due to an injury he received in Iraq, Fields temporarily lost his ability to walk. He was medically discharged in 2005.

“I sacrificed my body,” Fields explained. “To this day, I have complications. I sometimes use

a cane to walk. I can’t stand for longer than 30 minutes. The injury really did impact my physical ability.”

Fields moved to Los Angeles to begin working in the media field. He quickly found that the civilian workplace did not resemble the team environment he had experienced in the Army. “It was very difficult to find a team. You find a lot of individualistic behavior outside of the military,” Fields said.

When he learned about the Veteran Immersion Program, which was recruiting for its inaugural session, he knew he wanted to participate. Through courses and individual mentorship, he learned skills like public speaking, corporate leadership and networking, eventually landing his current role. However, for Fields, the best part of the program was finally finding his team.

“This program is about camaraderie, family. I always felt like they had my back,” Fields said. “They were always championing me.”

In 2023 and 2024, Paramount Veterans Network (and the immersion program) was recognized as a DAV Patriot Employer for its dedication to the military community. The

organization was also a featured employer at the DAV Job Fair that occurred at the 2023 Military Veterans in Journalism conference.

“Paramount’s program not only provides valuable employment and job training opportunities for veterans but also brings authenticity to programming—a service to the nation as the veteran population continues to shrink,” said Lamarr Couser,



Paramount Veterans Network members attend an advanced screening of SEAL Team with David Boreanaz (actor), Spencer Hudnut (showrunner and executive producer) and Gerry Byrne (vice chairman and board member, Penske Media Corp.).

employment director at DAV. “Ensuring that real veteran perspectives are represented in media helps preserve their stories and contributions for future generations.”

Joshua Reyes can attest to the life-changing impacts of the Veteran Immersion Program. Now a sales associate for Paramount Global, Reyes grew up in an impoverished neighborhood in the Brooklyn borough of New York City with his mother and three siblings. Determined to break the cycle of poverty, he enlisted in the Marine Corps.

“It really gave me a foundation and structure that I needed at the time,” he said. He built a wide range of skills as an aviation ordnance technician and martial arts instructor.

“I learned values like honor, courage, commitment and service—all these things that I didn’t learn growing up,” he said.

But then an accident during an instructor training course changed the trajectory of his life.

Reyes’ back was broken, and doctors said he would never walk again. Refusing to accept that as his fate, he battled every day toward recovery. After a year of rehab in the Wounded Warrior Battalion, Reyes made a 95% recovery, including the use of his legs. But he was still medically discharged from service.

“I was going to be a lifer,” Reyes said. “My identity was so attached to the Marine Corps. Once you get out, you don’t have that support system. I struggled for a long time.”

He studied international business and acting in school, looking for direction and spark. Then he heard about the Veteran Immersion Program, which would offer the flexibility to pursue both his “passion and survival.”

He wasn’t expecting how therapeutic it would feel to immerse himself in other people’s stories through acting.

“You’re taught to really peel back the layers of your soul, your heart, and drop those walls. Acting has taught me to be comfortable with allowing myself to feel emotions of the character and portray those feelings freely,” he said. “It’s liberating.”

The opportunities at Paramount are not just for fully transitioned veterans. National Guard and Reserve members also find a welcome home in the immersion program.

Chris Murray, an editor with Paramount Global, always had a camera in hand before joining the Air Force as a tactical aircraft maintenance technician. After four years on active duty, Murray was ready to pursue a degree in film and business.

But his military career wasn’t over. He also joined the Air National Guard as a satellite operator for the Space Force.

Serving while trying to break into the film industry proved difficult.

“The hardest part is finding work that doesn’t feel like you’re underutilized or overqualified,” Murray said. “You can be called up at any time to serve your country. In a competitive field, you can’t afford to dip away for X amount of time.”

The Veteran Immersion Program provided the solution he needed.

“Paramount goes that extra mile with their immersion program,” Murray said. “You’re temporarily employed under the Veterans Immersion Program in the entertainment industry, allowing you to make connections and bridge that gap along with a community of veterans who have made that transition right before you.”

Those connections go a long way. “When you leave the service, you feel almost isolated,” Murray said. “Being a part of this program, you still feel that connection.”

Building camaraderie in a competitive field is an important aspect to the program, according to participants, but so is giving back to the military community.

“Being a DAV Patriot Employer is an opportunity,” said Diaz. “This award acknowledges all the good work that we’re doing. And we can do more. It’s the gift that keeps on giving.”

For Diaz, the mission is bigger than the program. “If I can show other media companies how to do this, I will,” she stated. “I just want to see vets thrive.” ■



Left to right: Reyes, Marine Lt. Col. Matthew Hilton (director, New York Communication Directorate, Media and Entertainment) and Marine veteran Joseph Perez (information security, Paramount) at Paramount's Global Community Day.



A hero's legacy

Ken David's bravery in Vietnam finally earned him the Medal of Honor, but his service to veterans never stopped

By Rob Lewis

It's a cold, snowy Friday night in Warren, Ohio. Dozens of members of DAV Chapter 11 file into the modest one-story headquarters building. Outside, a placard marks a parking spot reserved for local legend Sam Lanza, a combat-wounded Marine veteran of the Battle of Okinawa. Inside, members stomp salty snow from their boots, sign the attendance roster and find their seats.

Chapter Commander Frank Gillespie raps the gavel, calling the meeting to order. Seated to his left is the chapter's adjutant, Ken David. Unlike the others, David wears his Army green service uniform. Around his neck hangs the nation's highest honor for valor.

A long-awaited recognition

On another snowy day only days earlier, David stood proudly at the White House, where then-President Joe Biden presented him with the Medal of Honor. It came more than five decades after his actions during the Vietnam War.

According to his citation, then-Pfc. David showed extraordinary bravery and selflessness during an enemy attack on May 7, 1970, while serving with Company D,

1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, on abandoned Fire Support Base Maureen in Thừa Thiên province, Vietnam.

In Vietnam for a few months, David had already been wounded, hospitalized once and welcomed to the country by enemy flak as his aircraft circled to land. When the previous platoon radioman was killed, David stepped into the role.

His company's three platoons were stretched out, two at the bottom of the mountaintop fire base they were tasked to hold and David's platoon at the top. With heavy activity in the area, real estate was fought for and secured by the Americans and then abandoned for new ground in a deadly game of "whack-a-mole" with the North Vietnamese enemy fighters who were hiding just outside the perimeter under the thick jungle canopy.

The ambush came early the morning of May 7. As many as 300 enemy fighters zeroed in on Company D's 50–60 soldiers.

Almost immediately, David's platoon leader was killed, and several other soldiers were wounded. Without hesitation, David handed off his radio and moved to the

“Children and grandchildren got to grow up with [fathers and] grandfathers. Generations changed because of Ken David’s actions that day.”

—Herman “Herm” Breuer

defensive perimeter, firing at the enemy. Recognizing his wounded were vulnerable, David repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire, deliberately yelling and firing to draw attention away from his comrades.

Characteristically humble and understated, David simply believes he was doing his job.

“I did what I was trained to do,” David said. “I was the only one on three-quarters of the perimeter that was wounded but still able to fight.”

David had no access to a machine gun, all of his rounds were single shots from his M-16. He also had grenades and the enemy’s satchel charges that were being tossed at the Americans. David picked up several and threw those back.

Despite being wounded and running low on ammunition, David continued to fight using hand grenades. When a medic named Kenneth Kays arrived, David refused treatment, kept fighting and helped secure the safety of incoming medevac helicopters.

Reinforcements came, but after he carried a wounded soldier to safety, David returned to provide covering fire until the enemy retreated.

For his actions, David was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in 1971. What he didn’t know then was that Kays, the medic who came to treat him, would be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the same battle.

The battle back home

After his discharge from the Army in 1972, David found it challenging adjusting to civilian life. He moved back in with his parents. And while he had left Vietnam, the war hadn’t left him.

“I told Mom to never come upstairs and wake me up. She did once, and I scared her as much as I scared myself by screaming,” David recalled, acknowledging that he was in the throes of post-traumatic stress disorder. “The government took my smile away.”

His younger sister, Karen Williams, recalls him being isolated and withdrawn in those early days.

“Kenny didn’t talk about what happened,” Williams said. “We lived on a dead-end street, and he pretty much spent his days in the backyard going down to the creek and building a rock wall behind the house.”

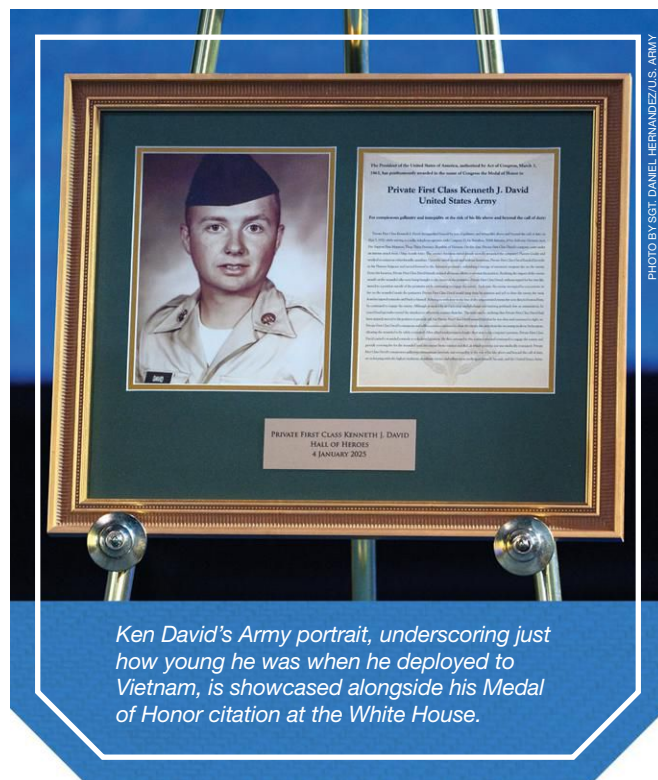
She recognized a similar detachment in her own father, who had been a medical technician in World War II. He was one of the earliest Allied troops in Hiroshima, Japan, after the atomic bomb was dropped.

“[Ken] wasn’t the same person who left,” she said. “How can anyone go through something like that and be OK?”

David slowly emerged from his mental shell. He found a career path in HVAC and purpose when he became involved with DAV.

His DAV journey started with assistance from benefits advocate Garry Augustine, a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran. Augustine, who recruited David, would go on to a storied DAV career that culminated as the executive director of DAV Washington Headquarters from 2013 to 2018.

Through DAV, David said he found a way to continue serving, protecting, being among and providing justice to warriors.



Ken David’s Army portrait, underscoring just how young he was when he deployed to Vietnam, is showcased alongside his Medal of Honor citation at the White House.

“When I got out in ’71, the way I was treated was very disrespectful,” David said. “I told myself whatever I can do for the person behind me, that’s what I’m going to do.”

David learned the ropes of DAV advocacy from past chapter leader Lanza, the local legend, World War II veteran and longtime chapter adjutant.

“Sam was dedicated to service, particularly VA hospitals. He taught Ken to do the same,” said Department of Ohio Adjutant Mike Stith, noting that their relationship was like a student and teacher.

David has gone even further, saying “Sam was like a father to me.”

What David didn’t know was that Lanza had developed an interest in the wartime service of his protégé that would lead to a multi-decade effort to upgrade David’s medal.

A fight for justice

The true recognition David deserved is a testament to the persistence and resilience of his fellow DAV members.

Leading the charge was Lanza and another combat-wounded veteran, Herman “Herm” Breuer, a county service officer in Trumbull County, Ohio, and a member of Chapter 11.

An Army veteran, Breuer was wounded in Iraq by a roadside bomb in 2004. His service continued post-military as a DAV veterans advocate. His passion caught Lanza’s attention when he watched the young soldier navigate the Pentagon’s bureaucratic maze to secure a Bronze Star for a Bataan Death March survivor.

Lanza asked Breuer to help with David’s upgrade, and he agreed. As he interviewed survivors of the battle, the story that emerged only deepened his and Lanza’s commitment.

“All of [the soldiers there] say the same thing: Without Ken David, none of them would be alive,” Breuer said. “Children and grandchildren got to grow up with [fathers and] grandfathers. Generations changed because of Ken David’s actions that day.”

Still, David’s actions had to withstand the scrutiny and iron-clad precision of the Medal of Honor’s vetting process, including concurrence for a newly submitted



Top: David attended a monthly DAV chapter meeting dressed in his Army green service uniform that showcased his newly awarded Medal of Honor. **Above left:** David pays a visit to the Trumbull County Veterans’ Memorial with Herm Breuer, a fellow DAV member who worked tirelessly on the upgrade that ended in David receiving the Medal of Honor. **Above right:** Sam Lanza, a revered DAV leader and longtime Chapter 11 adjutant, was a mentor to David and Breuer. He started the upgrade process of his protégé’s Distinguished Service Cross.

Army Form 638, the first trial in the pursuit of justice. The form requires sign-off from the entire chain of command, the members of which, according to Breuer, were needles in a haystack of Army records.

A trip to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, in 2016 was Breuer’s Hail Mary pass. While he didn’t find the identity of David’s chain of command for the form, he did discover the same information for Kays, the medic who received the Medal of Honor for the same battle.



Speaking at the Jan. 3 event, then-President Joe Biden said of David, “[Ken] couldn’t and wouldn’t give up. Instead, he shouted and fired his weapon to attract attention to him, away from others and away from the wounded men. Imagine that courage. ‘Come get me. Come get me. Don’t get those folks.’ That’s selflessness. Ken, I want to say to you, and I wish I could say to every man we’re honoring today: You’re a hero, a genuine hero, a flat-out, straight-up American hero. And we owe you. The families owe you.”

PHOTO BY HENRY VILLARAMA/U.S. ARMY

That was the clue that cracked everything open, revealing overlaps between the citations for David and Kays, who was injured and extracted earlier in the battle while David stayed behind and fought.

With then-Rep. Tim Ryan helping secure the Archives information, Breuer verified that nearly every member of David’s chain of command was deceased. The sole survivor was a 97-year-old general who was located for a signature on a sworn affidavit in the last days of his life in a Texas nursing home.

A momentous occasion

By the time the letter of justification was submitted in 2017, David’s parents and Lanza had died. But the letter skillfully resolved gaps in early documentation, including eyewitness statements, unit records and official documentation from the battle. Notably, it confirmed that David had fought until the last evacuation helicopter arrived, ensuring others survived while he risked his own life.

The evidence was compelling enough that David received a call from the president last Halloween.

The Medal of Honor ceremony was a poignant moment for David and his supporters. He was surrounded by dignitaries, family and fellow veterans, including Breuer and fellow Chapter 11 members Skip Cole and Bob Marino.

“To sit there and watch your friend receive the highest honor a veteran can receive ... it was emotional for me,” Marino said. “It’s hard to describe how proud I was and

emotional I was when the president put that medal on him and shook his hand.”

Marino found it fitting that Cole, who had a seat close to the front of the room, was able to render David his first salute after he received the medal.

For David, the moment was as much for Marino, Cole, Breuer and his fellow veterans as it was for himself.

“I want them to enjoy the moment with me because it’s not about me, it’s about all the people around me,” David said.

Breuer said he’s especially proud to be a part of this effort that was the legacy of veterans across generations all bonded together through sacrifice and their continued service through DAV.

“There are probably more stories like this lost both to time and veterans not understanding the [medal] process or even just wanting to remain quiet and put their service behind them,” Breuer said.

Back in Warren, David continues to build on his nearly 40-year legacy of service.

As snow falls outside the Chapter 11 headquarters, the meeting adjourns. Members across generations shake hands and congratulate their adjutant. David speaks with each of them. The room empties, and he packs his things and turns off the lights.

Unsurprisingly, he is the last one out. ■



'I'll never forget it'

Korean War soldier's sister thanks those who helped bring her brother home 70 years after he went missing in action

By Elizabeth DePompei

DAV member Patricia Hendrix treasures one of the few childhood photos she has with her brother Billy (left).

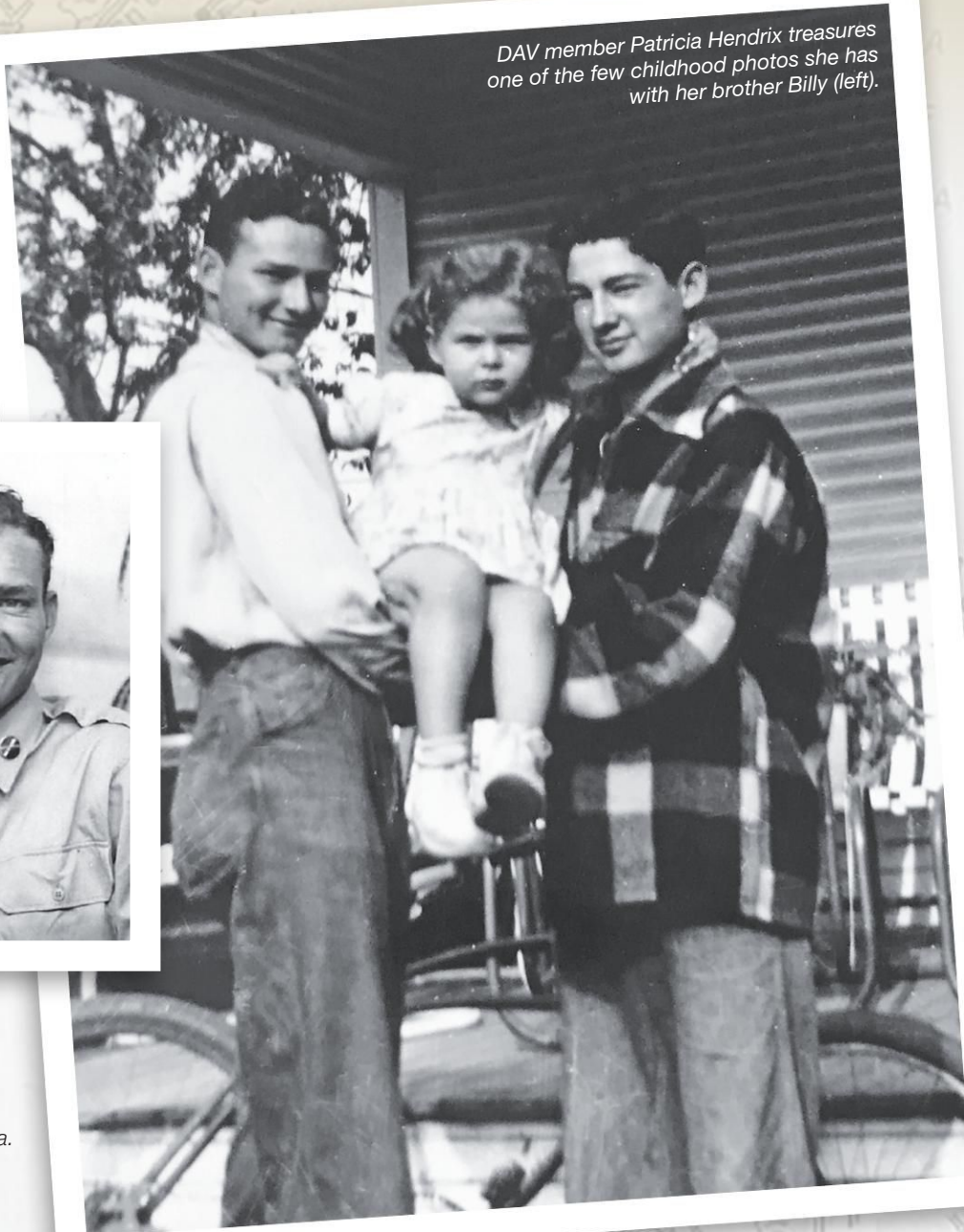


PHOTO COURTESY OF DPA

Above: Army Sgt. Billy V. Rodgers went missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, following an enemy attack in North Korea.

One of the last memories Women's Army Corps veteran Patricia Hendrix has of her brother is preserved in an old black-and-white photo that she often carries with her.

In the photo, her two adult siblings, Billy and Jack Rodgers, cradle Hendrix, their 5-year-old sister, in their arms. Both men soon went on to serve in the military. Jack retired from the Navy and had a family. Billy chose the Army; his family never saw him again.

For 70 years, Sgt. Billy V. Rodgers was considered missing in action (MIA). His unit had been attacked by enemy forces in North Korea on Dec. 2, 1950, just a few months into the Korean War. When the fog of battle lifted, there was no sign of Rodgers.

Hendrix vaguely remembers her mother opening their front door and receiving the news that Rodgers was MIA. Clearer in her mind are the decades that followed as her grief-stricken mother pined for Rodgers' return.

"Mom refused to ever accept that Billy had not survived," Hendrix said. "She refused to believe that he was nothing but missing in action, that he would be back."

It's an experience that tens of thousands of American families have lived and continue to live. According to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), more than 81,500 service members remain missing from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War and the Gulf Wars, as well as other conflicts.

"What exacerbates the loss is the uncertainty attached to it," said DPAA Director and retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague. "Not having the mortal remains of their loved one is something that creates a void in heart and mind for these families, and that void in heart and mind carries over generationally."

Hendrix's mother worked at Fort Ord, California, for about 20 years. Anytime she met someone who was around at the time and place her son had served, she'd pepper them with questions. Maybe one of them had known Rodgers or had seen him since that last-known battle. She kept clinging to that hope until her death in 1976.

A mother's pain passed down through generations of Hendrix's family. Even those in the family who had never met Rodgers inherited the remnants of sorrow.

'Back where he belongs'

Since 1973, DPAA, and its predecessors, have been helping generations of families heal. Its mission is to provide the fullest accounting of missing American service members by working tirelessly to find, identify and repatriate remains to their families. The work requires hundreds of dedicated civilians, service members and scientists and depends on international cooperation.

Of the remains of the more than 7,400 American Korean War service members missing in action, roughly 70% of them are presumably located in North Korea.

Some missions are harder than others. Historically, it's been difficult and at times impossible to recover American remains in North Korea, a country with which the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations. That's particularly problematic given that, of the remains of the more than 7,400 American Korean War service members missing in action, roughly 70% of them are presumably located in North Korea, McKeague said.

Hendrix said she had long accepted that Rodgers was killed in action. She never even considered that his remains would be found, let alone returned home. She accepted that the hole in her family's heart was a permanent fixture.

Then, in 2018, North Korea agreed to repatriate 55 boxes of remains. It was the first cooperation of its kind since 2005. The boxes carried 501 bones, each yielding DNA that enabled DPAA to start identifying remains.

Among the 93 Americans whose remains have been identified was Billy Rodgers. DPAA scientists used



Forensic anthropologists with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency review the contents of cases containing the possible remains of service members lost in the Korean War. The unilateral transfer occurred July 27, 2018, in Wonsan, North Korea.

PHOTO BY SGT. 1ST CLASS DAVID J. MARSHALL/U.S. ARMY



Far left: An American flag is presented to Women's Army Corps veteran Patricia Hendrix during a burial ceremony for her brother, Korean War veteran Billy V. Rodgers, at Arlington National Cemetery. **Left:** Rodgers was buried at Arlington seven decades after he went missing in action during the Korean War.

'Thank you'

As a DAV member and Gold Star sibling of a former missing service member, Hendrix attended the POW/MIA seminar at the 2024 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in Phoenix. McKeague, alongside DAV's Interim POW/MIA Committee members, gave an update on DPAA's work, including the identifying and repatriating of Korean War service members.

After the presentation, wearing a blue shirt as bright as the twinkle in her eyes, Hendrix raised her hand. With McKeague listening intently, Hendrix thanked him and DPAA for identifying and repatriating her beloved brother.

"I'll never forget it," McKeague said.

When the seminar ended, Hendrix and McKeague gravitated toward each other through a packed room. They sat side by side as Hendrix shared stories and photos, including the one of her brothers holding her as a child.

McKeague, keenly aware of how special the opportunity was, didn't rush the moment.

"To be able to sit down with her and hear her story was absolutely powerful," he said.

"It was amazing to me to be able to talk to him and say thank you for all the hard work that they put in finding our young men and women who have died and to identify them," Hendrix said.

Hendrix said publicly thanking McKeague was also a way to encourage other families waiting on their loved ones who are missing in action.

"We waited a long time ... and there are still families waiting," Hendrix said. "And I don't want them to give up." ■



Learn More Online

To learn more about POW/MIA advocacy, visit dav.la/3il.

anthropological analysis and circumstantial evidence to identify Rodgers' remains. His Native American heritage and DNA samples from family helped further confirm he had finally been found.

Rodgers was officially accounted for on April 9, 2020. His remains were eventually reunited with Hendrix and the rest of his family, and he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

"It was like, oh my God, he's actually home. He's here," Hendrix said, pushing through tears. "He's here again. He is back where he belongs."

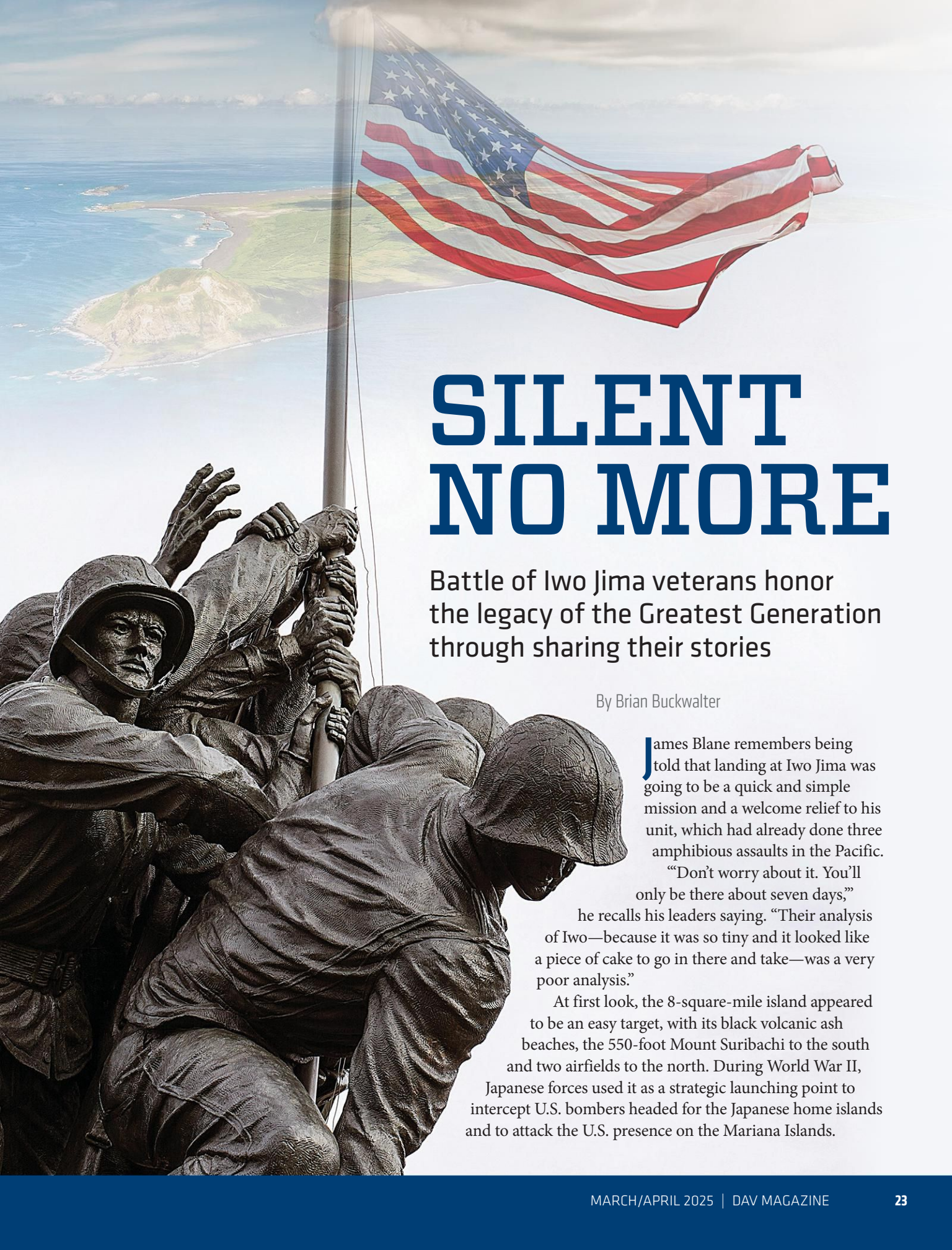
Hendrix said she knew her mother was watching, proud of her son and at peace at last.

"Mom had never given up," Hendrix said, "To be able to have him laid to rest here gave us that final closure.

"We're family and we are all back [together]."



Hendrix, a DAV member, had the chance to meet and thank DPAA Director and retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague during the 2024 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention.



SILENT NO MORE

Battle of Iwo Jima veterans honor the legacy of the Greatest Generation through sharing their stories

By Brian Buckwalter

James Blane remembers being told that landing at Iwo Jima was going to be a quick and simple mission and a welcome relief to his unit, which had already done three amphibious assaults in the Pacific.

“Don’t worry about it. You’ll only be there about seven days,”

he recalls his leaders saying. “Their analysis of Iwo—because it was so tiny and it looked like a piece of cake to go in there and take—was a very poor analysis.”

At first look, the 8-square-mile island appeared to be an easy target, with its black volcanic ash beaches, the 550-foot Mount Suribachi to the south and two airfields to the north. During World War II, Japanese forces used it as a strategic launching point to intercept U.S. bombers headed for the Japanese home islands and to attack the U.S. presence on the Mariana Islands.

The U.S. needed to take Iwo Jima to quell Japan's aerial attacks, to use its airfields as emergency landing points for crippled bombers and to extend the range U.S. planes could reach into Japan's territory.

However, what planners failed to consider was how arduous it was to maneuver in volcanic ash and how dug in the Japanese forces were; they were well trained and heavily armed, and their network of tunnels linked their defensive positions. Days of bombing ahead of the amphibious landing did little to suppress 21,000 Japanese forces spread over the island.

The Battle of Iwo Jima—one of the bloodiest in Marine Corps history—took place 80 years ago. What was supposed to be a weeklong fight started on Feb. 19, 1945, and lasted 36 days.

Any remaining World War II veterans are now in their late 90s and early 100s. At 100 years old, Blane is one of few people who were there and still alive to talk about it.

"Our job was to get the Japanese killed, or get them out of there, and take that island over and hand it to the Air Force," Blane said. "That was that job we were supposed to do, and we did it."

Victory came at a steep cost. More than 19,000 U.S. personnel were wounded and 6,821 were killed.

The Battle of Iwo Jima—one of the bloodiest in Marine Corps history—took place 80 years ago. What was supposed to be a weeklong fight started on Feb. 19, 1945, and lasted 36 days.

Blane, a rifleman with the 4th Marine Division, was one of those injured during the battle.

"I was shot through the foot," he said. "I didn't allow them to try to evacuate me. No, I wouldn't do that. I just had the corpsman look at it and bandage it and put my boot back on and forged on ahead."

He didn't want to leave the squad he considered brothers and feared evacuation would've meant never seeing them again.

Joseph Caminiti, 100, was another Marine who fought on Iwo Jima. He was assigned to an amphibious tractor and was responsible for bringing troops and

supplies from larger amphibious landing craft to the shore.

As the battle continued, he transported the wounded back to those boats or, if they were severely injured, all the way to medical ships.

He remembers standing on the airfield closest to Mount Suribachi when he witnessed the two historic flag raisings on the fourth day of the battle. (The second flag raising was immortalized by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal.)

Caminiti recalled that moment in his personal biography.

"We never thought it was going to be a historical thing,"

Marine veteran James Blane, 100, didn't talk about his experience as an infantryman in the Battle of Iwo Jima for more than four decades. His son Phil said the interest people have shown in hearing his and other veterans' stories has made World War II veterans feel appreciated and honored.



Caminiti said. “The first time, you couldn’t really see it. They called for a bigger flag. I saw the bigger flag go up. We had a clear look at it. We looked right at it, and I said, ‘It’s about time!’”

Personal anecdotes and memories from veterans like Blane and Caminiti add color and depth to the historical accounts of what happened during the war. But for years, many veterans kept their experiences to themselves.

Blane didn’t speak about his military service for four decades after he came home. His son Phil said those years of silence were part of his father’s way of coping with the trauma of the experience.

“He’s doing great now,” Phil said. “But to have had that hanging over his head for 40 years before he started talking about it must’ve been kind of a heavy burden to bear.”

Blane, who is a member of DAV Chapter 7 in Lakewood, Colorado, remained close with three of the four surviving original members from his squad. He would visit them in Pennsylvania or they’d come to him in Denver, but even then, they didn’t talk about the war.

“We didn’t make it a dyed-in-the-wool or crying type thing. We had fun together, and when we were together, we would bring our wives to the party. So it was a joyful way to meet,” he said. “It was a lifetime connection for the three of us.”

Caminiti also attended unit reunions and rarely discussed the war, finding joy in just being around his fellow Marines and their wives.

“We’d just get together and talk,” he said. “It was nice. I used to look forward to those every year.”

The reunions eventually stopped as the rest of the members of their units died.

What both Blane and Caminiti frequently attend now are public ceremonies and commemorations held in honor of veterans of World War II generally and Iwo Jima specifically. Public interest around these events have provided a forum to share personal experiences.

“Unless you keep going with these events, it’s going to fade out,” Caminiti said. “They don’t teach that in school anymore. Some of them don’t even know what Iwo Jima was.”

Blane feels similarly and has taken up the mantle of keeping the legacy of his squad mates alive.

“Well, so many of my friends are gone, and they’re not around to tell stories,” Blane said. “And if people want to know that sort of history, I’ve made up my own mind that I’m still here to do it, if it’s necessary.”

For Phil, these events have deepened his appreciation for the freedom we have today and have been a way to get to know his father.

“Just to hear the whole story, it’s changed my perspective on everything,” he said.

He said the public attention being given to World War II veterans has been heartwarming to witness as well.

“They’ve all been through something very traumatic. I kind of felt like a lot of them felt a little underappreciated,” Phil said. “So, while they didn’t feel appreciated at the time, I think they feel very honored and appreciated today because people have been so interested in hearing their stories.” ■



Joseph Caminiti, 100, was a Marine assigned to an amphibious tractor during the battle. He regularly participates in ceremonies honoring World War II veterans to keep the history of those who served alive.



From the NATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICES DIRECTOR JOHN KLEINDIENST

Igniting the spark through volunteering

My personal journey into volunteering began in 2013 when I flew home to Texas to be by my grandpa's side before he died.

Grandpa was an Army veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars and was forever changed by service. His kidneys and liver were shutting down because of the effects of toxic exposure. He knew his time was short, but he wanted to spend that time at home, not in a hospital.

So, we set him up with home hospice care. He died peacefully not long after.

It was then, sitting by his side, that I realized how meaningful it is to be with people during their final moments. After he passed, I began volunteering in a hospice facility to sit with veterans who faced dying alone.

That sparked me finding other ways I could help more veterans. I didn't have to look far. Right in my own town were motorized scooter batteries that needed changing, dangerous tree limbs that needed cutting and overgrown lawns that needed trimming before residents faced eviction. Each of these were simple tasks but ones that meant a lot to the veterans who couldn't do them on their own.

I learned that an hour of my time really could make a difference in a veteran's life. And it felt pretty good.

I want others to experience that feeling. So many people, including veterans, feel like they don't have purpose in life. Many feel as if they're squandering their gifts and talents. Too many head down a path to some pretty dark places in their minds.

But by encouraging them to give back—whether it's mowing a lawn, driving a veteran to a medical appointment or sitting by a dying veteran's side—lives are transformed, and not just those on the receiving end of someone's generosity.

On April 5, we're hosting our second annual DAV Community Impact Day. It's a great opportunity to give a little of your time to veterans in your neighborhood, and we hope you join us by pledging your time at communityimpactday.org.

You can coordinate a local chapter event or do something on your own. It doesn't have to be grand, just heartfelt. We share lots of ideas on the website.

Here in Erlanger, Kentucky, we host events throughout the year, such as assembling backpacks for our Homeless Veterans Stand Down and putting together our Forget-Me-Not flowers for chapter fundraising drives.

Receiving that flower could be the first time someone learns about DAV's mission. Receiving that backpack could be the touchpoint that changes a veteran's life by getting them connected to the benefits they earned from service.

But whatever you do, you can be sure you'll get far more out of it than you give. And it just may be your spark to do even more.

Thanks, Grandpa. ■

“Thank you for your service” is more than just words. **IT’S ACTION.**

That’s why April 5 is DAV Community Impact Day.

It’s an opportunity to honor the sacrifices of those who’ve served. When you pledge your time—even an hour—at communityimpactday.org, you’re joining a nationwide movement that tells our veterans how much they matter.

After registering, you’ll receive an email with ways to make the most of the day, including service ideas and ways to connect with others in your area.

This is a great opportunity to gather as a community—DAV members, families and friends of veterans are all welcome and encouraged to get involved.

Your participation matters and makes a difference. Your effort doesn’t need to be grand, just heartfelt. Because when we come together, we make a bold statement that the sacrifices of our nation’s veterans matter and that simple acts of gratitude can have profound effects on peoples’ lives.



APRIL 5, 2025
communityimpactday.org



A gift that pays you income

While helping your fellow veterans!

Charitable gift annuity donors receive generous fixed payments for life, largely tax-free; a charitable income tax deduction for those who itemize; and DAV Guardian Society recognition.

Gift annuity requirements

- \$10,000 minimum gift
- Up to two annuitants (payment recipients)
- Minimum age 60; no maximum age

For more information

- Call 800-216-9802, press 1
- Email giftplanning@dav.org
- Return the attached postcard

SAMPLE ONE-LIFE RATES

Age	Rate	Age	Rate
60	4.9%	80	7.6%
65	5.4%	85	8.7%
70	5.9%	90+	9.7%
75	6.6%		

Please call for all one- and two-life rates.



Left: After retiring from the Army, the Arthingtons, who are DAV members, chose to support fellow disabled American veterans through a DAV charitable gift annuity. **Right:** Sgt. 1st Class Rebecca Arthington and 1st Sgt. Bill Arthington enjoyed their first Christmas dinner together as a married couple in 1988.

Paying it forward with a charitable gift annuity

Army veterans and DAV members Rebecca and Bill Arthington were inspired to give in support of fellow veterans

The Army has quite a few quippy phrases, and one of them is, if they want you to have a spouse, they will issue you a spouse. Well, I guess we got issued to each other,” said Rebecca Arthington of her marriage to her husband, Bill. The two Army veterans and DAV members have been married for 38 years.

Bill and Rebecca met while stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas. After they were married, the Arthingtons were fortunate to continue to be stationed together in Germany. Later on, they again served together at Fort Riley. After they retired from the Army, each sought benefits advocacy through DAV and ultimately decided to become DAV life members together.

One day while reading *DAV Magazine*, they came across an article describing the opportunity to support their fellow disabled veterans through a charitable gift annuity. They decided to make a gift to DAV together.

“We have been very blessed with making some good decisions over time. And [when the pandemic happened], we stayed at home and didn’t go to the movies or baseball games, so we saved some money,” said Rebecca. “When we read the article about the annuity program, it made us start thinking about giving.”

Bill has witnessed firsthand the impact of the DAV Transportation Network in helping veterans get to their Department of Veterans Affairs medical appointments.

“In Kansas, there’s the Topeka VA hospital. I see [veterans] coming out of the DAV vans and talk to some of them,” said Bill. “They say, ‘If it wasn’t for the DAV van, I wouldn’t be coming up here [for health care].’”

“It’s a way of giving back, paying it forward,” said Rebecca. “It’s good to know there are folks out there who can benefit from what we can give.” ■

From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER CHRISTOPHER J. EASLEY



How to make a meaningful impact

The Auxiliary relies on the compassion and commitment of our volunteers. Since joining the Auxiliary in 2005, I've witnessed the transformative power of volunteering. It's not just about helping others; it's about enriching your own life.

April 20 marks the start of National Volunteer Week, an excellent opportunity to highlight the benefits of volunteering and express gratitude to the incredible Auxiliary volunteers for another year of service. The truth is, we rely entirely on the dedication of our volunteers.

In 2024, Auxiliary volunteers clocked in over 148,000 hours of community service and Auxiliary members donated over 15,700 hours to the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Program. Our juniors also made a significant impact, donating 24,481 hours of their time. Thank you for your generosity and kindness.

DAV Community Impact Day is another opportunity to call attention to the power of volunteerism. Held annually, this event showcases how volunteer efforts can change lives, especially for our veterans. Last year, more than 650 volunteers took part in the first DAV Community Impact Day. This year's event is April 5. Bookmark communityimpactday.org for details and registration information.

But you don't have to wait until April to make an impact. Whether providing transportation to VA medical appointments, helping at a VA facility or supporting veterans in your local community, you can make a profound difference. Visit volunteerforveterans.org or contact your local chapter today to learn more about these opportunities.

Volunteering isn't just something we should do; it's something we want to do. Humans are social creatures, and volunteering provides a meaningful way to interact with others, build relationships and foster a sense of community. It's also an outlet for expressing values and making a positive impact on the world.

Through our collective service, we not only honor those who have served our nation but also cultivate a more compassionate and fulfilling life for ourselves and a stronger, more vibrant community for all. Your dedication ensures that DAV and the Auxiliary can continue their mission to support our nation's heroes. Thank you for being part of this meaningful endeavor. ■

Whether providing transportation to VA medical appointments, helping at a VA facility or supporting veterans in your local community, **you can make a profound difference.**

VA lowers life insurance premiums



PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. MATT HECHT/U.S. AIR FORCE

■ In December 2024, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that over 3 million veterans, service members and spouses who receive life insurance from VA programs will receive a discount on premiums beginning in spring 2025.

The new lower premiums apply to those insured under Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI), Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and Family Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (FSGLI)—and to those who enroll in those programs in the future.

Currently, VA life insurance programs cover 5.6 million Americans. All those eligible for this update will automatically receive the discounted rates without any action needed on their part.



More information

For questions about VA programs and benefits, please contact your nearest DAV service office by visiting benefitsquestions.org.

VA funds first study on MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD

■ Last December, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the first study on MDMA-assisted therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorder among veterans.

VA researchers will evaluate the potential MDMA-assisted treatment option for veterans with both PTSD and alcohol use disorder. Participants will receive psychotherapy enhanced by MDMA, a psychedelic compound believed to increase emotional openness, reduce fear and promote introspection during therapy sessions.

Psychedelic drugs are a class of organically and synthetically produced substances that alter consciousness or awareness. Veterans should always consult their health care provider before making any treatment decisions and should never self-medicate with psychedelics or any other unprescribed substances.



DAV members have approved a resolution to support legislation directing the VA to research psychedelics and, if it finds these substances effective for therapy, make treatments available for veterans with mental health conditions and traumatic brain injury.



Learn More Online

For more on DAV's stance on psychedelic therapies, please visit dav.la/3lo and dav.la/47PqSKK.

Assistant National Communications Director

■ **M. Todd Hunter** was appointed assistant national communications director at DAV Washington Headquarters, effective Jan. 6. In this capacity, Hunter will support a variety of DAV's public relations and internal communications programs, including strategic planning; media relations; and content creation, including press releases, op-eds, magazine articles, e-newsletters and podcasts.

Hunter's DAV career began in 2014 when he was appointed associate national communications director in Washington, D.C. He was subsequently appointed to assistant and deputy national communications director.



Hunter

He returns to DAV after directing public affairs for an association based in Washington, D.C.

A native of Orlando, Florida, Hunter enlisted in the Marines from 2005 to 2013. He served as a combat correspondent at American Forces Network Okinawa, Japan; American Forces Network Afghanistan; and Defense Media Activity headquarters at Fort Meade, Maryland.

Hunter is a life member of DAV Chapter 10 in Fairfax, Virginia, and has earned a master's degree in strategic communication from American University and a bachelor's degree in communications from Thomas Edison State University. He resides in Herndon, Virginia, with his wife, Karen, and three children.

Associate National Legislative Director

■ **Joseph Lemay** was appointed associate national legislative director at DAV Washington Headquarters, effective Jan. 6. In this capacity, Lemay will support efforts to advance a broad range of federal legislative goals and policies to assist injured and ill veterans and their families.

Lemay is a native of Mashpee, Massachusetts, and served in the Army from 1990 to 1994 and 1997 to 2014, achieving the rank of sergeant first class. He served as a logistical specialist, and his



Lemay

service included three deployments to Iraq and one to Afghanistan.

Lemay began his DAV career in 2018 as a national service officer in Decatur, Georgia. In 2022, he was first promoted to assistant supervisor of the national service office in Washington, D.C., before being promoted to supervisor there later that year.

He is a life member of Chapter 14 in Washington, D.C., and earned a bachelor's degree in health care administration from Georgia Southern University. Lemay and his wife, Tina, reside in La Plata, Maryland, and have three adult children.

Associate National Legislative Director

■ **Shamala B. Capizzi** was appointed associate national legislative director at DAV Washington Headquarters, effective Jan. 6. In this capacity, Capizzi will support efforts to advance a broad range of federal legislative goals and policies to assist injured and ill veterans and their families.

A service-connected disabled veteran, Capizzi enlisted in the Marines and served from 2000



Capizzi

to 2008. She served as an airfield technician and administration specialist and was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, from 2007 to 2008.

In 2021, Capizzi began her DAV career as a transition service officer at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Later that year, she joined the Washington, D.C., office as a national service officer.

Capizzi is a life member of DAV Chapter 10 in Fairfax, Virginia, where she and her family reside.

FINDING PURPOSE AFTER THE INFANTRY

Dealing with disability and seeking a new mission, this Army veteran attended a DAV job fair that launched his civilian career

By Liz Stetler

On the day before the DAV job fair in Phoenix, Chris Peer's plan was to drive from Arizona to Colorado for a ski trip with an old Army buddy. But when nerve pain from a lower back injury he sustained on active duty flared up and caused the left side of his body to go numb, Peer knew skiing was out of the question.

His service-connected disability was not the only challenge Peer was facing after seven years of military service. He was also having difficulty finding meaning in his civilian life.

"After separating, you realize just how deeply ingrained the military lifestyle and ethos are," Peer said. "That sense of purpose is all-consuming in the military. But once you leave, you're on your own."

Peer received an email about the DAV job fair in his area, and initially, he hadn't planned on attending. But when the trip to Colorado was scrapped, new opportunities opened up.

"Long story short, I ended up canceling that ski trip and going to that job fair," he said. "I'm glad I did, because that's where I found my current role."

Now an operations apprentice at Wells Fargo Corporate & Investment Banking in Charlotte, North Carolina, Peer supports fixed-income sales and trading with pension funds, college endowments and other institutional investors. The position is a one-year apprenticeship sponsored by the Department of Labor.

Peer's career has taken some surprising turns, like going into the office every day. "My dad was a bond salesman for about 30 years on Wall Street," Peer said. "I wanted to do the furthest thing from that, so I joined the military."

Peer served in the Army from 2016 until 2023.

"I've always been interested in history and international relations and to serve a purpose greater than myself," he explained. But after seven years of "running, jumping and, deploying all over the world," he was ready to transition out of the military and into a civilian career.



Above: Chris Peer at the Black Rapids site for the Northern Warfare Training Center, Alaska, in 2020. **Right:** Peer at the Wells Fargo campus in Chandler, Arizona, in 2024.



Peer atop Piestawa Peak in Phoenix.



During the transition, Peer considered graduate school and even attended industry conferences, but he continued to keep his career options open.

“I had one or two job offers that, if I’d taken, I might have been selling myself short,” Peer said. “It was stressful, not being employed and trying to regain that sense of purpose.”

He found it at the DAV job fair.

“The companies there were helping veterans, sharing their mission, providing information and doing their utmost to bring veterans on board,” Peer said. He spoke to recruiters at multiple booths, but the Wells Fargo financial apprenticeship stood out the most.

“Meaningful employment is key to a veteran’s success after service,” said Lamarr Couser, national employment director at DAV. “For some, like Chris Peer, an apprenticeship jump-starts their career; for others, it’s a full-time job or further education. DAV job fairs offer a range of opportunities for veterans, military spouses and active-duty personnel—helping them network, explore careers and take that first step toward their next chapter.”

“I felt like I was a little bit behind in the civilian world,” Peer said. “This apprenticeship is very meaningful. I am able to work and learn at the same time, doubling down on the skills that I learned in the military while building up those skills that I need.”

Since joining the program, Peer has noticed differences and similarities between the finance industry and the infantry.

“There are more subtleties to corporate discourse,” he said. “There’s no shortage of acronyms here in the financial industry. I’m trying to replace my military acronyms with banking acronyms.”

Navigating the career journey with a service-connected disability also requires special consideration, Peer said.

“The challenges to overcome are different, depending on your disability,” he said. “Conduct an honest analysis of what is a best fit for your career aspirations. Ask yourself, ‘What are my strengths? What experiences do I bring? And what are my constraints?’ Understanding those criteria will put you in the best place to succeed.”

For Peer, that criteria led him to his corporate mission.

“I actually enjoy coming into the office, being immersed in capital markets on the trading floor, learning from financial professionals with decades of experience combined, and having an opportunity to leverage skills and experiences from the military to benefit clients and stakeholders in the financial industry,” he said.

“I’m grateful to the folks at DAV for giving veterans like myself the opportunity to succeed and to thrive. My disabilities were preventing me from enjoying my life. I pushed through to go to the job fair, and I’m glad I did.” ■



From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBRA VARNER DANCER

Reasons for being hopeful



Nothing is forever in this world, but that's not a reason to despair—it's a reason to be hopeful.

No matter what's happened in your life, your future can be better than your past or your present, and that's because of hope.

Everyone in the veteran community inherently possesses some of the ideals and values connected to hope: courage, freedom, patriotism, bravery, sacrifice and valor.

People have shared about these traits for centuries:

"Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die." —*G.K. Chesterton, author and Christian apologist*

"Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it." —*Pericles, Greek politician and military general*

"Patriotism consists not in waving the flag, but in striving that our country shall be righteous as well as strong." —*James Bryce, former British ambassador to the U.S.*

"Bravery is the capacity to perform properly even when scared to death." —*Omar Bradley, Army general who was the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

"The willingness of America's veterans to **sacrifice** for our country has earned them our lasting gratitude." —*Jeff Miller, former U.S. representative*

"Valor is stability, not of legs and arms, but of courage and the soul." —*Michel de Montaigne, French philosopher*

Living out each one of these traits through service has made you stronger. Never forget how much strength you've gained along the way.

Hope for the future begins when you choose to live authentically, without excuses or unnecessary apologies. Life is an incredible journey, and you are responsible for its quality. This mindset is where hope, courage and expectation take root.

With hope as your foundation, always look forward. Leave the past behind and embrace the endless possibilities ahead. Stay curious and open to new experiences.

In your deepest struggles lie your greatest strength. Your wounds can teach wisdom, and your pain can heal. When light seeps through the cracks, lean on the traits you've gained from service and hold onto hope.

The future thrives on hope. Trust that a beautiful plan is unfolding.

Be kind to yourself and let others care for you. What you're facing does not define you. Surround yourself with people who uplift your spirit, and keep facing life with courage and hope—you are amazing. ■

Death of Past National Commander Alan Bowers

■ Alan W. Bowers, DAV past national commander and former secretary/treasurer of the DAV National Service Foundation, died Dec. 12, 2024. He was 85.

Commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force in 1958, Bowers navigated an impressive career until a service-connected spinal cord injury in Vietnam led to his medical retirement in 1974. Following his retirement, he joined DAV and became an unwavering advocate for veterans.

Bowers was a life member of DAV Chapter 46 in Athol, Massachusetts, and held numerous leadership roles at the chapter, department and national levels.



Bowers

He was elected as national commander in 2003, was elected to a one-year term as chairman of the DAV board of directors in 2004, and was elected as director of the DAV National Service Foundation in 2006. He was elected the Foundation's secretary/treasurer in 2015 and held that role until 2023.

"Alan's leadership, vision and tireless commitment to DAV have left an enduring legacy on our organization," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "He was completely devoted to his fellow veterans and his family and will truly be missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. May he rest in peace."

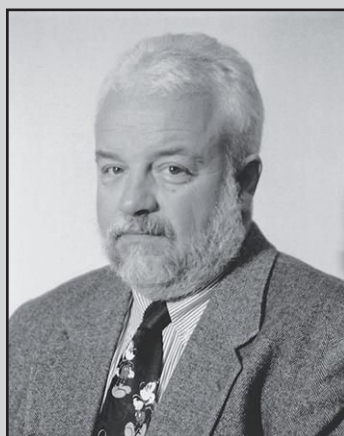
He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Theresa, and their three children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Death of retired benefits advocate

■ Michael Warbois, a retired benefits advocate of the DAV national service office in San Diego, died Nov. 22, 2024. He was 76.

A Purple Heart recipient and decorated Vietnam War veteran, Warbois enlisted in the Marine Corps at 18 years old, serving on active duty from 1966 to 1970. He deployed for over a year to Vietnam, where he and his fellow Marines were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for combat heroism. In 1970, Warbois transferred to the Marine Corps Reserve for an additional two years.

In 1979, he became a national service officer in San Diego. He worked diligently to help the veteran



Warbois

and transitioning military communities access their earned benefits for 20 years, retiring on Jan. 31, 2000.

"Michael Warbois dedicated his life to service—to his country, his fellow Marines and all the veterans he tirelessly supported," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "His courage, commitment and compassion have left an indelible mark on all who knew him. We honor his legacy, grateful for his sacrifices and the many lives he touched along the way. May he rest in peace, and may his memory inspire those who continue in service."

Warbois was a member of DAV Chapter 2 in San Diego. He is survived by his wife, Christina; daughter Britany; and stepchildren Dana Haskell and John Haskell.

REUNIONS

ARMY

3RD PLATOON, 501ST MILITARY POLICE COMPANY, BAMBERG, GERMANY (1990-93) July 11-18, 2026, Alaskan Cruise, Contact: Sgt. 1st Class Robert Howard, Ph: 407-412-1443, Email: rehoward305@yahoo.com
COMPANY C, 1ST/5TH CAVALRY REGIMENT, VIETNAM 1965-71 April 1-4, Biloxi, MS, Contact: Kevin Corcoran or Fred Escalante, Ph: 717-574-8959 or 619-569-9114, Email: kmcorcoran@mac.com or frescalante@yahoo.com

NAVY

USS DONNER (LSD-20) April 28-30, Wilmington, NC, Contact: Dennis Heimbach, Ph: 610-775-7539, Email: dennisheimb@gmail.com, Web: ussdonner.com

MARINES

COMPANY H, 2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT (VIETNAM, 1965-70) May 29-June 1, Des Moines, IA, Contact: Jerry Moorehead, Ph: 515-999-2690, Email: gmoorehead@msn.com

ALL SERVICES

ALL WHO SERVED AS ADVISERS IN VIETNAM OR WORKED WITH THE VIETNAMESE, LAOTIAN, CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENTS AS MILITARY OR CIVILIAN COUNTERPARTS April 29-May 2, Costa Mesa, CA, Contact: David Priddy, Ph: 703-627-2109, Email: dave.priddy@yahoo.com, Web: counterparts.net
KOREA VETERANS April 4-6, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Christ Murphy, Ph: 828-502-2802 or 828-539-0714, Email: koreaveterans@gmail.com

USS ALBEMARLE (AV-5)/USNS CORPUS CHRISTI BAY AND 1ST TRANSPORTATION CORPS BATTALION May 3-7, Newport News, VA. Contact: Steven Nye, Ph: 508-372-9024, Email: srn820@verizon.net, Web: ussalbemarle-usnscorpuschristibay.org
VIETNAM VETERANS LINE HAUL April 29-May 4, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Hoss or Monica Taylor, Ph: 904-335-7402, Email: vietnam566th@yahoo.com

INQUIRIES

- Searching for Charles L. Gross or family members. I found his dog tag south of Fresno, CA. Numbers listed: 01114953 O, T53 P. Contact: Eddie Criswell, Ph: 559-653-7728 or 559-392-5098, Email: eddiecriswell@yahoo.com
- Searching for anyone who served on the USS Wrangell (AE-12) on WESTPAC cruise, 1968-69, and any reunions planned for the ship. Contact: Thomas Nall, Ph: 401-742-2610, Email: frogwelder1@verizon.com
- Searching for anyone that was stationed in Babenhhausen, Germany, in the 1960s with the 2nd Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment, and knew "Hinkey," who was in the survey crew. Contact: Chaplain Albert Hinojosa, Ph: 210-426-7986, Address: 7126 Grand Valley, San Antonio, TX 78242
- Searching for Alan S. Dewey, Company A, 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Riley, KS, 1969-70. Contact: Spencer Allen, Ph: 610-409-1928, Email: sxcxa@msn.com
- Searching for Charles "Chuck" Tenney, who was with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 8th Target Acquisition Battalion, 25th Artillery Regiment, 2nd Field Force, Vietnam, 1970-71. Contact: Edward E. Surber, Ph: 704-456-8524, Email: criminalsurber@gmail.com
- Searching for shipmate Roy Isaccs aboard USS Orion (AS-18), 1966-67. Roy is originally from Harlan, KY. I need to verify an accident that occurred aboard the ship for a claim. Contact: Don Brewer, Ph: 440-376-2676

- Searching for anyone who was in boot camp at Parris Island, SC, in Platoon 3013 in July 1967. Contact: Harry Hopwood, Ph: 352-284-6386, Email: harryhopwood02@gmail.com
- Searching for Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Stark and Sgt. Donald Parker, who both served in Company C, 1st Battalion, 73rd Armored Regiment, Fort Beavers, Korea, 1969-70. Contact: Paul Pohler, Email: paulpohler4@gmail.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. Email the details to feedback@dav.org. Submissions must be received at least six months before the event date and are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety.

NOW ACCEPTING REAL ESTATE DONATIONS TO SUPPORT VETERANS



If you have a real estate asset costing you money or not being utilized and you want to put the equity to good use, donating it is a great way to support disabled veterans. You may even claim a significant tax deduction!

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DAV.ORG/REAL-ESTATE-DONATION
 or call 844-277-HOME (4663)

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VETERANS GOLF CLINIC

SEPTEMBER
7-12, 2025

IOWA CITY, IOWA

Application period is
open until April 4.

This Sept. 7-12, the Riverside Hotel & Golf Resort in Riverside, Iowa, will once again become the epicenter for adaptive sports at the National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic.

Veterans with blindness and low vision, traumatic brain injuries, amputations, spinal cord injuries and other disabilities will experience the therapeutic benefits of golf and other athletic activities such as kayaking, biking and rock climbing during the weeklong event.

Dozens of coaches and hundreds of volunteers will ensure each participant has an experience tailored to their needs. The resource-rich program fosters opportunities for fellowship and camaraderie among the veterans—both returning participants and those discovering the benefits of adaptive sports for the first time. ■



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