



MAGAZINE

MAY | JUNE 2025

A GENERATION'S LEGACY

50 years after the end of the Vietnam War era, its veterans recount their trials and victories

Stories begin on Page 16



Las Vegas to host 2025 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention

Aug. 9-12, 2025 | Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino

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 41.6 million visitors in 2024, 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 Hotel & Casino 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 Hotel & Casino is known for its half-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower at 541 feet tall, which is the tallest reproduction of the original. ■



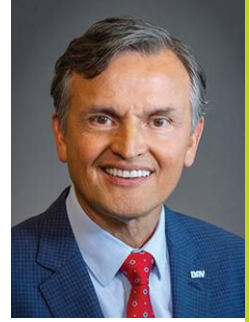
For more information and to make your hotel reservation in the DAV room block, scan the QR code or visit dav.org/events/2025-national-convention.

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 COMMANDER DANIEL CONTRERAS



Honoring their sacrifice

A Memorial Day reflection on 50 years since the end of the Vietnam War era

For many Americans, the last Monday in May marks the unofficial start of summer—a long weekend with a family barbecue or a gathering of friends. For those who served and their survivors, Memorial Day can be an occasion for both grief and celebration, a reflection on the tragic loss of life and a recounting of the courage of military service.

On April 30, we recognized 50 years since the end of armed conflict in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. This convergence allows for a deeper reflection on the sacrifices made by those who served during that war.

While I was too young to shoulder a rifle in Vietnam, the war's echoes resonated through the stories of DAV mentors and leaders with whom I have had the privilege of serving over the years. Leaders like DAV Past National Commander Alan Bowers, who sadly died last December.

Early in my time with DAV, I witnessed Commander Bowers—an Air Force major whose spine was severely injured when he ejected from an OV-10 over Vietnam—testify before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. His expertise and poise in delivering DAV's recommendations for Congress to keep its promise to America's ill and injured veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors inspired awe.

Let us show our respect and admiration for the fallen this Memorial Day through acts of remembrance, heartfelt gratitude and a dedication to upholding their legacy. To honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, we should all take a moment, whether by visiting a gravesite or placing flags, wreaths or other mementos at their final resting place in our communities.

But their graves should not be the only space we gather, share memories or sit in quiet contemplation. To truly honor their lives, we must share their stories. By keeping their memories alive, we give others a glimpse into the truest form of patriotism and inspire them to be the change that creates a stronger nation.

In this magazine, you will read reflections on Vietnam from DAV leaders, like former Washington Headquarters Executive Director Dave Gorman, and stories from women veterans who served as nurses during the war. In many ways, their stories and post-military contributions honor their fallen brothers and sisters.

For many Vietnam veterans and their families, Memorial Day commemorations offer a chance for healing and long-overdue recognition. So this year, make sure you reach out to your fellow veterans, including those who served in Vietnam. I can think of no better way to pay tribute to the fallen this year than by sharing their stories and reaching out to connect with those who are still with us. ■

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Cover photo by Art Greenspan/Associated Press

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Vietnam veterans came home to an ungrateful, unprepared nation and fought to ensure that no other generation had to go through the same.

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- 1 In recognition of 50 years since the end of the Vietnam War era, DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras reflects on and honors those who came before him.
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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT BARRY A. JESINOSKI



Meeting post-traumatic stress head-on

Suddenly, a veteran screams, jolted awake from a dream all too real. An inescapable reliving of an agonizing event. A desperate avoidance of people, places or activities reminiscent of the most anguishing days of one's life. These are more than symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); they are realities faced by veterans afflicted with this invisible scar.

First recognized in war veterans, post-traumatic stress has had many names over the years. In World War I, it was “shell shock,” a reaction to being in proximity to exploding artillery shells. “Battle fatigue” was used during the Second World War to describe the psychological impact of combat. There are even accounts of Civil War veterans suffering from flashbacks.

No matter what we call the phenomenon, the connective tissue running through wars of the past to today is the panic-induced symptoms that can affect every facet of a veteran's life.

In 1977, following the end of the Vietnam War, DAV funded the Forgotten Warrior Project, pioneering research that resulted in the addition of PTSD to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. That seminal recognition was critical in recognizing and treating PTSD and ensuring justice could be achieved for veterans of all eras.

DAV's involvement in funding this research meant that our nation could no longer ignore the cold truth of what so many of our Vietnam veterans endured. The willingness of these veterans to confront their struggles has left a lasting impact that still echoes and will continue to do so for generations to come.

June is PTSD Awareness Month, a time dedicated to raising our collective consciousness and educating the public about PTSD's causes, symptoms and treatment options. It's also a time to reduce the stigma associated with this mental health condition.

While many questions remain surrounding post-traumatic stress, what we know is that veterans who have PTSD aren't alone. Combat isn't a prerequisite to feeling the full effects of the psychological prison many veterans find themselves in.

Even during training, veterans have witnessed horrible events and experienced life-threatening events. Others have been tragically betrayed by one of their own in what we now call military sexual trauma.

No matter the source of trauma, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress aren't just clinical criteria; they are reminders of the true cost of service.

DAV's dedication to helping veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress remains steadfast. We assist veterans in submitting claims for PTSD and accessing the care they need. But I implore you to look for ways to discuss this diagnosis with your family, friends and, undoubtedly, other veterans—no matter how uncomfortable it may be.

Only together can we conquer what once seemed insurmountable. ■

Veterans facing societal disconnect

America often struggles to understand the challenges combat veterans face upon returning home, because the realities of war are far removed from civilian life. Most people cannot fathom the physical and emotional toll of combat, including PTSD, survivor's guilt and the difficulty of reintegrating into a society that seems indifferent or uninformed. Civilians may offer superficial gratitude but lack the deeper understanding needed to address systemic issues like inadequate health care, unemployment and broken support systems. The disconnect is compounded by a culture that glorifies service while ignoring its consequences, leaving many veterans to face their struggles in isolation.

Gregory Alderete, Steilacoom, Washington

Editor's note: *The DAV Podcast explores veteran isolation in two new episodes, "Loneliness and Veterans—Understanding the Connection" and "Connected We Stand—Addressing Veteran Loneliness." Listen now at dav.org/podcast.*

VA health care vs. private sector

I am happy with the way the VA system is working in general. I especially approve of the VA's care in the community. If they can't see you within 30 days, you can request a doctor or surgeon in the community. If the VA doesn't have a doctor in that occupation or if that doctor can't figure it out, you can see an outside doctor. Many doctors in the community have no idea about what a person in the military has been through, where many VA doctors do. There are pluses and minuses to each, but the VA has improved a lot since I started going

in the early 1980s. **Mike Chepa, Lakefield, Minnesota**

My local VA is short-staffed and underfunded. Critical programs I thought I would find when I presented at the emergency room had been shut down due to funding. I wanted a day treatment where I could go to daily sessions and be with other unemployed veterans. The VA hospital system is designed specifically for the unique needs of the veteran population. You simply cannot replace that in the private sector. **Nathan Wendland, St. Paul, Minnesota**

DAV Field of Flags

At McCormick Stevenson, we proudly embrace a mission to serve America's heroes, as only engineers can. This past Veterans Day, as part of our 25th anniversary celebration, we were honored to host a DAV Field of Flags in front of our office along US 19. Each flag represented a veteran and symbolized our deep gratitude for their service and sacrifice. Through the incredible support of our team and community, we raised funds to support DAV and its life-changing services for ill and injured veterans and their families. It was a privilege to stand with DAV in keeping the promise to those who've served, ensuring they receive the support and benefits they've earned. Seeing the Field of Flags waving in tribute was a powerful reminder of our shared commitment to honoring our veterans. We are deeply thankful to everyone who joined us in this

meaningful effort. Together, we made a difference for those who have given so much for our country. **Robin Hussong, Clearwater, Florida**

DAV support

I joined DAV after another female veteran friend invited me to a local chapter meeting in Alabama. I was active there until my move in 2013 to Kansas. My experience with my chapter and assistance from the benefits advocates were instrumental in furthering my claim. It also gave me a family of veterans who were like-minded and supportive in welcoming me to the area. I will miss my comrades as I move to another state next year but am excited to expand my family in a new state. **Karin Myron, Spring City, Tennessee**

Thank you, DAV! I was in need of reliable assistance with dealing with the VA claim system, and DAV took the stand to help me with my claims. They told me that they couldn't promise any percentage but did say that they are there for me through thick and thin, and they made sure that I was taken care of. **Eric Kurtz, Bakersfield, California**

DAV Patriot Boot Camp

It was an honor to be selected to attend DAV Patriot Boot Camp. Not only did we forge new connections within our community, but each session was also incredible and thoughtfully crafted and provided practical insights for military-affiliated entrepreneurs. **Yomika Alexander, Chicago**

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.

2026-2027 *Independent Budget* released

DAV members advocate for VA funding recommendations on Capitol Hill

By Kevin C. Miller



For nearly 40 years, DAV, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) have worked to develop and present concrete recommendations through the release of *The Independent Budget*. In February during an in-person event on Capitol Hill, the coalition presented its budget recommendations for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. With staff members from over two dozen congressional offices in attendance, organization representatives provided critical insights to policymakers on what those who served require from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Our nation has a solemn duty to honor its commitment to America’s veterans by ensuring timely access to the high-quality health care and benefits they have earned and deserve,” said Randy Reese, DAV Washington Headquarters executive director. “This year’s *Independent Budget* recommendations would prevent future budget shortfalls, which would jeopardize veterans’ care, and ensure they receive the benefits they earned to make ends meet.”

In 2024, the VA set records in nearly every facet of care. The VA provided over 127.5 million health care appointments. Through community care, the VA delivered a record 3.4 million additional visits to over 330,000 veterans. Furthermore, nearly 800,000 veterans enrolled in VA health care in the past two fiscal years, a 37% increase, largely due to the PACT Act.

However, in July 2024, the VA informed Congress, DAV and other stakeholders that it had an impending shortfall of nearly \$15 billion in its accounts for benefits and health care. Of that, the VA reported a nearly \$3 billion shortage in the mandatory accounts that fund VA disability compensation, survivor and education benefits. Shortfalls in funding can lead to

potential delays in processing claims and potential reductions in benefits and can affect the delivery of health care services.

The additional request for funding, commonly called a “second bite,” didn’t sit well with lawmakers. It also caused tremendous anxiety for veterans and their families who rely on the high-quality health care and benefits they have earned.

Shortly after the in-person event on Capitol Hill, DAV members reinforced the importance of this year’s *Independent Budget* during their member meetings at the 2025 DAV Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D.C. Altogether, DAV members from across the nation brought the recommendations from our critical policy goals and *The Independent Budget* to over 100 members in Congress.

Delivering *The Independent Budget*’s recommendations has come at a pivotal time. They outline the resources needed to support veterans and counter threats like proposed reductions in the VA workforce or cancellations of VA research contracts that could negatively affect the delivery of veterans health care and benefits.

“This grassroots approach of member advocacy helps our organization build public support, educate lawmakers and hold them accountable for their decisions regarding veterans care and benefits,” said Joy Ilem, DAV national legislative director. “These meetings remind our elected officials that, behind every policy and statistic, there are real people that are impacted by their decisions on the VA budget.” ■



Learn More Online

The Independent Budget is available at independentbudget.org, and an accompanying podcast episode is available at dav.org/podcast.

Navigating new waters

A chance encounter transformed the journey of a Navy veteran

By Matt Saintsing



Edward Nachel had been a rideshare driver for five years before a chance encounter changed his life. Two DAV national service office supervisors were catching a ride from the airport to the DAV national service office in Salt Lake City when one noticed a disabled placard.

“[Nachel] was a veteran, and naturally, the conversation turned to his service and what we do,” said DAV National Area Supervisor Joe Kauffman. “Ed mentioned he never filed a claim before, so we asked him if he had time to meet.”

Kauffman was showing Maria Ruvalcaba, a then-new DAV national area supervisor, the ropes when the chance to help a fellow veteran was sitting in the driver’s seat.

“Joe asked if I had ever thought of applying for disability through the VA,” said Nachel, a Navy veteran who served in waters off the coast in Vietnam. “It might be something I probably should have pursued a long time ago.”

It’s never too late for veterans to get the benefits they’ve earned, even decades after. So Nachel began to receive assistance from DAV and justice for his



Edward Nachel had served on the USS Myles C. Fox, a destroyer, during the Vietnam War. The Navy veteran’s experience at sea continued to impact his health, which led to DAV stepping in to help.

service and sacrifice, and what started as a coincidental meeting on the job became a pivotal moment in his life.

After Nachel met with DAV benefits advocates, National Service Officer Robert Darby submitted claims on his behalf for degenerative arthritis of the spine, Type 2 diabetes due to Agent Orange exposure, diabetic neuropathy in three extremities and tinnitus.

“He had never filed a VA claim previously,” said Darby. “It was a new experience to him, and like many other veterans, he didn’t know this was even possible.”

Nachel joined the Navy in 1968. After initial and job training, he was assigned to Newport, Rhode Island, where he underwent electronic countermeasure training. He was then assigned to

USS Myles C. Fox, a Gearing-class destroyer. After years of cruising around South America and once worldwide, the ship was deployed to Vietnam in 1972.

The ship operated north of the demilitarized zone, a few hundred yards from shore. “We were involved in many major offenses over there,” said Nachel. “We got shot at every day.”

“ This should be a reminder to all members to take a moment to ask the veterans they meet if they are receiving benefits from the VA. ”

—Joe Kauffman, DAV national area supervisor

The ship provided ground support for Americans operating north of the DMZ; expelling thousands of .54-caliber rounds was a daily occurrence.

Over time, Nachel found himself in rough waters. During one swell, he fell from a ladder, injuring his back, which still hurts today. Another duty was passing 65-pound projectiles, one after the other, from one person to another in a near-constant twisting and lifting motion that experts say is especially damaging to spinal health.

“Doctors said [the lifting] probably didn’t help,” he added.

Serving only on the water in proximity to Vietnam, Nachel is considered a Blue Water Navy veteran, a moniker given to veterans who served 12 nautical miles or less from the shore.

Despite never stepping foot in Vietnam, Nachel is eligible for service connection, benefits and health care because the Department of Veterans Affairs, by law, must presume that his Type 2 diabetes was caused by Agent Orange exposure. DAV was instrumental in passing the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, legislation that unlocks benefits for veterans



Nachel, returning from a naval deployment, went decades without veterans disability assistance before he found DAV benefits advocates in his passenger seats.

like Nachel. Before the law, this population of veterans had to prove their exposure.

Agent Orange, an herbicide and defoliant that’s been shown to cause several medical conditions, crept into Navy ships off Vietnam through waterborne exposure. The noxious chemicals drifted out to sea after being sprayed on land, contaminating the water supply used for drinking, showering and laundry.

“We were within a few hundred yards of the shore of Vietnam, so we were probably subjected to a lot of it,” said Nachel.

The effects that Nachel has experienced from Agent Orange-induced diabetes have been stark, particularly the tingling, numbness and weakness of his peripheral nerves.

Nachel was thrilled to learn that his claims were approved. The new benefits DAV secured mean Nachel no longer has to drive for a living. The long, arduous journeys he had become accustomed to are a thing of the past. As a result, his back isn’t bothering him as much, and he can fill his days by going to coffee shops and operating his amateur ham radio.

For Kauffman, the chance to secure justice for a veteran decades later is all part of the job.

“This should be a reminder to all members to take a moment to ask the veterans they meet if they are receiving benefits from the VA,” said Kauffman. “If they have not filed a claim or believe they are entitled to something more, bring them to our offices so we can discuss what they’ve earned.” ■



Learn More Online

For claims assistance go to benefitsquestions.org.



Kauffman



Darby



NOT ON OUR BACKS

DAV advocates gather to ensure promise of a ‘Golden Age for America’ strengthens how our nation cares for its veterans

By M. Todd Hunter

A cold Tuesday in February is common in Washington, D.C. A dramatic influx of messages from DAV members, supporters and citizens concerned about the safety and security of veterans benefits and other sensitive information is not.

That’s where things stood for DAV in the days and weeks after the new administration took office. A spate of executive orders and funding freezes, along with the creation of new executive offices amid employee layoffs at federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, created an almost dizzying atmosphere where policymakers, advocates and media were left with more questions than answers.

But just as our nation’s veterans stepped up when their country called upon them, they also don’t sit idle when their benefits and livelihoods are threatened. That’s why hundreds of DAV’s most dedicated advocates descended on our nation’s capital at the end of February—to preserve and strengthen the benefits veterans have earned through their military service.

At the 2025 State Commanders and Adjutants Association Mid-Winter Conference, DAV and Auxiliary members held dozens of meetings in their elected officials’ offices focusing on the organization’s numerous legislative priorities and advocacy efforts—including preventing Congress from reducing, offsetting or taxing veterans benefits; strengthening policies for toxic-exposed veterans; and increasing caregiver support.

“One of our primary objectives here this week is to remind our elected officials of that solemn obligation they have in keeping the promise to America’s ill and injured veterans and their families,” National Commander Daniel Contreras told conference attendees. “With a new administration and new Congress, we start fresh, set new goals and embrace opportunities that create a better future for our veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.”

Contreras pointed to DAV’s 100-plus years of legislative victories as evidence that the organization’s advocacy efforts play an integral role in helping ensure veterans of all generations—past, present and future—have a system



(Right to left) DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras, Washington Headquarters Executive Director Randy Reese, National Legislative Director Joy Ilem and National Service Director Jim Marszalek at the joint House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee testimony.

accountable to them for illnesses and injuries sustained in service to the country.

“Building off the successes of our two most recent reports, *Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness* and *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans*, our national legislative team looks to have an even greater impact on the lives of women veterans and veterans exposed to toxins during their military service,” Contreras said.

“The time to act is now,” he continued. “Our veterans have waited long enough, and their health and well-being depend on our collective commitment to implementing the changes we have recommended in these reports.”

National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski also spoke to the current challenges in Washington.

“In our case, we’re hearing voices with very radical ideas who, it seems, are eager to avoid paying the enduring cost of war. They want to reduce the deficit on the backs of the individuals and families whose sacrifices made our national prosperity possible,” he said. “This week is our

opportunity to put a human face on the issues that will determine the future of veterans health care and benefits.”

VA Secretary Doug Collins also spoke at the conference’s opening session, marking his first address to a major veterans organization since assuming his role as the head of the department.

“Learning that he’s a veteran and served in Congress stood out to me,” said Marine veteran Phellep Snow, a member of Chapter 12 in Henderson, Nevada. “I hope [his time as a congressman] benefits him as secretary to get ideas into action and implement policies that will benefit veterans and their families. He certainly seems to understand the weight of his position.”

In Collins’ remarks, which served as an introduction to DAV and its members, he sought to quell concerns in the veteran community and spoke about his efforts to ensure department funding goes directly to benefits and care.

“It is not about the VA as an organization; it is about the veterans that we serve,” the secretary said before adding that veterans benefits and health care won’t be compromised under his leadership.

“We will hold him and the entire agency and all of Congress to that,” Jesinoski affirmed to the applause of over 450 attendees.

The conference culminated Feb. 25 when Contreras testified before a special joint session of the Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs Committees. Veterans and supporters packed the caucus room so tightly for the hearing that an overflow room had to be used in the Cannon House Office Building.

While the commander capitalized on the opportunity to highlight some of the organization’s pressing critical policy goals, the most powerful parts of his testimony came in sharing his personal experiences.

“When it comes to caregiving, for me it’s personal,” he said. “I know it’s an area that needs more focus because I live it as a veteran and a caregiver to my wife, who is battling stage 4 cancer.

“Like every caregiver I know, I’d do it all again in a heartbeat. And I know with every fiber of my being that if the shoe were on the other foot, she’d be there for me.”

In explaining how veterans need access to a full continuum of long-term care and caregiver support, Contreras called on Congress to “help veteran caregivers by providing comprehensive resources, including training and financial assistance, and requiring the VA to offer more assisted-living care options.”



Left: VA Secretary Doug Collins speaks to DAV members at the opening session of the conference. **Right:** National Service Director Jim Marszalek holds a copy of *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans* during questioning at the joint House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee testimony.

In highlighting the organization's own commitment to assisting caregivers, the commander touted the new DAV Caregivers Support program, which has connected over 1,400 unsung heroes to a host of public and private resources at no cost to them.

"While we are exceptionally proud of the success of this program, the responsibility to provide such support ultimately rests with the VA," he reminded the committee.

He went on to tackle the importance of ensuring that toxic-exposed veterans are not left behind when it comes to recognizing presumptive conditions for their exposures, and he called on Congress to pass legislation that would expand research on toxic exposures, launch an independent scientific review process and establish a veteran advisory commission.

In closing his testimony, Contreras cited numerous proposals seeking to balance the federal budget on the backs of disabled veterans, including taxing VA disability compensation or phasing out certain unemployability benefits when a veteran reaches retirement age, reducing VA disability compensation levels for current and future veterans, and even ending lower disability payments altogether.

"We must ensure that the new administration's promise of a 'Golden Age for America' strengthens how we care for our veterans," Contreras implored. "But we're seeing organized efforts to curtail what veterans have earned and deserve—a VA that is laser-focused on providing the best possible care and timely benefits to veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.

"To follow through on this promise, veterans need Congress in their corner, just as they have been in ours.

"In this gilded era, we must ensure that veterans benefits are reinforced, not clawed back. The Department

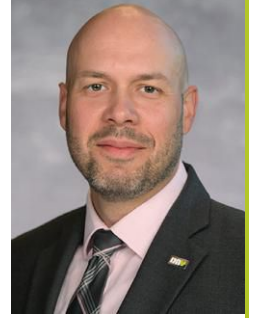
of Veterans Affairs needs to be fully funded and have predictable budgets. Veterans health care should be enhanced and streamlined, all while ensuring VA provides the right options to meet their evolving needs.

"Together, we have the chance to follow through on the social contract disabled veterans have earned. We hope you will join us in this fight. America is counting on it." ■



Top: Members from DAV Department of Illinois meet with Sen. Tammy Duckworth to discuss DAV's critical policy goals during a mid-winter meeting. **Above:** DAV Senior Vice Commander Coleman Nee (center left) and Department of Massachusetts members meet with Rep. Jim McGovern (center right) to discuss ways to improve veterans' well-being.

From NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CODY VANBOXEL



Rally for veterans

DAV has issued a simple challenge that started last May: each member to recruit one new member. We designed the Recruiter Rally to empower members to connect with others and accomplish that goal. Members who recruit at least one new person are entered into the rally to win a trip for two, including hotel and \$2,500, to Las Vegas for the 2025 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention.

Imagine hundreds more voices joining the fight for veterans' rights, demanding action. With your help, we'll have more advocates filling the halls of power in Washington and mobilizing in local communities, ensuring our nation's leaders hear veterans' voices loud and clear. More members also give us the ability to safeguard DAV programs that provide life-changing assistance to veterans and their families, offering a lifeline when they need it most.

Every new member is a force multiplier. Every connection ignites change. Every veteran matters. This isn't just about numbers; it's about honoring the courage, sacrifice and unwavering dedication of our veterans. And DAV has the tools you need to be a successful recruiter.

The Recruit A Warrior program puts the power to make a real difference directly in your hands. The program is simple and effective, and it's time to step up. Here's how:

1. Visit dav.org/warrior to get your personalized referral link. This is your personal call to action.
2. Connect with fellow veterans. Share your own story, and explain why DAV is vital—a community, a support system and a relentless advocate.
3. Use the power of social media, email and even personalized business cards to reach every veteran you know.

We've assembled a comprehensive arsenal of resources to ensure you're equipped for this mission. Visit dav.org and click on "Member Resources," then "Publicity," and select one of the links next to "Recruitment Resource." You will find answers to common questions about eligibility and dues, links to explainer videos as well as the five reasons why veterans choose DAV.

We've given you the tools; now it's your time to use them:

- Our recruitment video gives a concise overview of the resources and how to deploy them effectively.
- Our ready-to-deploy assets (digital and print) are filled with compelling content, crafted to resonate with veterans, for sharing online and in person.
- Our instant engagement tool (QR code) links directly to online resources from printed materials—a powerful tool for immediate connection.

The future of DAV, and the future of veteran support, rests on our shoulders. We're calling on you to recruit the next generation of DAV leaders, the men and women who will carry the torch of service forward. Join us, stand with us, and together, we will ensure that no veteran is ever left behind. ■

..... 2025-2026

Candidates for

The following information is intended to inform membership about the announced candidates for national office. It does not constitute an official endorsement or approval by DAV National Headquarters of any candidate to the exclusion of others who may stand for election. DAV members may announce their candidacy at any time, up to and including the time of election at the 2025 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention, which will be held Aug. 9-12 in Las Vegas.



Coleman Nee

Coleman Nee is a service-connected disabled veteran who served in the Marine Corps Reserve from 1986 to 1994, with an active-duty deployment as a reservist during the Persian Gulf War. Currently, he serves as DAV's national senior vice

commander and vice chair of the board of directors. He was appointed by the governor of Massachusetts to serve as the commonwealth's secretary of veterans' services from 2011 to 2015, overseeing \$100 million in state funding for veterans and dependents, financial aid, and programming.

During Nee's tenure, the department created a number of new initiatives to increase access to services for veterans, including the more than 47,000 veterans returning to Massachusetts from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Nee was elected to serve on the National Executive Committee from 2017 to 2019 and served on the board of directors during the same period. A life member of Chapter 3 in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Nee served as the Department of Massachusetts assistant judge advocate and chair of the Homeless Veterans Advisory Committee. He is also a member of the Incarcerated Veterans Outreach Committee.

Nee is seeking election to higher national office.



John Donovan

John Donovan, a service-connected disabled Navy veteran and DAV life member of Chapter 10 in Conway, Arkansas, currently serves as DAV's national 1st junior vice commander. He served as the National Executive Committee

representative of District 21 for both Arkansas and Oklahoma from 2019 to 2021 and served on the board of directors during the same period. He also serves as adjutant of the Department of Arkansas.

Donovan was honorably discharged from the Navy

in 2004, after serving for 24 years. He went on to earn his bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in organizational management with a minor in organizational leadership.

During his time with DAV, Donovan has played an active role in supporting and volunteering for veterans, including yard cleanups and ramp construction for wheelchair access. Donovan works with Arkansas' national service officers at information seminars and with chapters conducting compensation claims events across the state to raise awareness of DAV programs.

Donovan is seeking election to higher national office.

National Office



Cynthia Madison

Cynthia Madison is a service-connected disabled veteran who retired from the Army. She has been actively involved with the organization at the chapter, department and national levels since becoming a DAV life member in 2002. She earned

a Bachelor of Business Administration from Averett University, Virginia, and a master's degree in human resource management from Troy University, Alabama. She currently serves as DAV's national 2nd junior vice commander and as the assistant adjutant and Time and Place Committee member for the Department of Virginia, as well as adjutant of Chapter 27 in Portsmouth. She was appointed as Virginia's deputy chief of staff to the national

commander in September 2021.

Madison previously served as commander of the Department of Virginia and is a past president of the Commanders and Adjutants Association. She also served on the Department of Virginia's Women Veterans and Employment committees as well as Interim Employment Committee, Interim Hospital and Voluntary Services Committee, and Nominating and Credentials national convention committees.

Madison has a history of volunteering at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and elsewhere in her community in ways that benefit her fellow veterans. She chaired five different Department of Virginia 5K races and served as chairperson of the national DAV 5K in Newport News.

Madison is seeking election to higher national office.



James Procnier

James Procnier is a service-connected disabled Navy and Navy Reserve veteran who served from 1985 to 2013 and currently serves as DAV's national 3rd junior vice commander. During his enlistment, Procnier served in a number of billets as

a hospital corpsman, retiring as a chief petty officer. As a civilian contractor, he served as a project officer for the Navy MRAP (Mine Resistant-Ambush Protected) vehicle program, which saved untold lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, and on other defense-related management programs. Additionally, Procnier served 34 years in law enforcement in Florida and Michigan and is a former firefighter and paramedic.

Procnier is a life member of Chapter 16 in Jacksonville, North Carolina, and Chapter 10 in Fairfax, Virginia. He previously served as a trustee for a DAV department and chapter. He has served in nearly every capacity at the state level in DAV, including commander of the Department of Virginia. For his service with Chapter 10, he was named the chapter's Volunteer of the Year before being honored with the 2016 John Maki Distinguished Service Award. In 2017, he was recognized as the Department of Virginia Disabled American Veteran of the Year. On the national level, Procnier served for seven years on the National Interim Legislation Committee and five years on the Convention Committee for Legislation and Veterans Rights, with two years as the chair. He also served on the board of directors of the National Service Foundation.

Procnier is seeking election to higher national office.



Glenn E. Hohman

Glenn E. Hohman, a service-connected disabled veteran who served in the Army from 1992 to 2013 with combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, is a life member of Chapter 14 in Sierra Vista, Arizona. He currently serves as DAV's national 4th

junior vice commander; Department of Arizona judge advocate and Benefits Protection Team leader; and adjutant, treasurer, transportation officer and driver for Chapter 14. Additionally, Hohman serves as vice chair of

Unified Arizona Veterans and on U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly's Veteran Advisory Committee.

Hohman has earned a Bachelor of Applied Science in intelligence operations and Master of Business Administration in management from Wayland Baptist University, Texas. He previously served as National Executive Committee 18th District representative, National Service Foundation director, National Interim Legislation and National Interim Constitution and Bylaws committee member. Hohman has also served in various other roles at the chapter and department level.

Hohman is seeking election to higher national office.



Brenda Reed

Brenda Reed is a service-connected disabled veteran who served in the Army from 1978 to 1983 and is a life member of Chapter 4 in New Port Richey, Florida. She has been active at both the chapter and department levels, serving in nearly every

capacity at those levels since becoming a DAV life member in 1992. She is the immediate past department commander of Florida and currently serves as the judge advocate of Chapter 4.

Reed has contributed to DAV in many ways, including as a dedicated volunteer. She has also participated in all three DAV women veterans reports, helped establish and serve on the Interim Women Veterans Committee, and assisted the national legislative staff with issues affecting women's health and prosthetics.

She earned an associate degree in nursing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Walker College and a Bachelor of Science in nursing at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Reed is seeking election to national office.



Adam Greathouse

Adam Greathouse is a service-connected disabled Army veteran who has served in nearly every position at the chapter and department levels. He currently serves as commander of the Department of West Virginia.

Greathouse enlisted in 1999 and deployed to Kosovo in 2001. During that deployment, he inhaled an unknown chemical substance, which severely damaged his lungs, causing him to fall into a two-month coma and sustain a traumatic brain injury.

Following a strenuous recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, he was medically retired.

A compassionate volunteer, Greathouse has donated thousands of hours at his local Department of Veterans Affairs medical center. He also serves as a spokesman and public service announcement ambassador for DAV and the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic. He was the recipient of the DAV Freedom Award at the 2017 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and was named the 2020 Disabled American Veteran of the Year.

Greathouse is seeking election to national office.



Michael Dobmeier | for National Judge Advocate

Michael Dobmeier has served as national judge advocate, advising the National Executive Committee (NEC) and board of directors, since 2002. He served as DAV national commander in 1999 and as the 14th District NEC representative in 1994.

Dobmeier enlisted in the Navy in 1969 after graduating from high school. He trained as an engineman; attended the Naval Submarine School in New London, Connecticut;

and completed Navy Dive School in San Diego. In 1972, Dobmeier suffered severe burns on more than 30% of his body after an oil heater exploded aboard the submarine USS Trigger. He was discharged later that year and became a life member of Chapter 2 in Grand Forks, North Dakota. He has since been appointed or elected to nearly every chapter and department office and position and was named the 1985 DAV Outstanding Member of the Department of North Dakota.

Dobmeier is seeking election to another term as national judge advocate.



Debra Varner Dancer | for National Chaplain

Debra Varner Dancer, a service-connected disabled Army veteran, currently serves as DAV's national chaplain. She has been a life member of Chapter 4 in Birmingham, Alabama, since 2013.

Dancer joined the Army in 1972 and served as a medic. After her military service, she earned bachelor's degrees in business administration from Southern Business College and in theology from Lomax Hannon Bible College in Alabama.

After college, she began working for the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital, where she has

enjoyed a career as a women's service coordinator. She has continued her service there as a resource support specialist in the Veterans Service/Student Affairs office, where she's assisted more than 3,700 veterans and family members requiring assistance with education benefits.

She also serves as a hospital service coordinator for the Birmingham Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, where she helps veterans and their families find resources and learn about earned benefits.

Dancer has more than 30 years of experience in pastoral ministry and support, including serving as a chaplain for the DAV Department of Alabama.

Dancer is seeking election to another term as national chaplain.



AUG. 9-12 | PARIS LAS VEGAS





TURNING TRAGEDY INTO VICTORY

An enemy land mine explosion in Vietnam took his legs but offered him a life of service to others

By Brian Buckwalter

As Dave Gorman remembers it, a command-detonated enemy land mine explosion near his patrol killed three of his squad mates and severed the limbs of several others, including his own legs.

He had arrived in Vietnam only a couple of months earlier and had just linked up with his unit, the 173rd Airborne Brigade. An infantry patrol had found unexploded ordnance, and he was part of the combat engineer team sent to neutralize it.

The mine exploded as he stepped through a hedgerow of trees into an opening. That was Oct. 21, 1969. The monthslong process of being drafted into the Army, going through training, waiting for orders, deploying, acclimating, undergoing more training and finally making it to a unit was over as fast as the Dustoff helicopter that medically evacuated Gorman from the battlefield.

PHOTO BY KATIE LANGE/U.S. ARMY



He was sent to the military hospital at Cam Ranh Air Base, Vietnam, then transferred to another facility outside of Tokyo before the long flight to one at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, near his family. It was a quick transition; by Thanksgiving, he was home and facing a new beginning.

Gorman spent much of his post-service recovery at the West Roxbury VA Medical Center near Boston. At the time, it was mostly a spinal cord injury hospital filled with paraplegic World War II and Korean War veterans, he said, with one ward for Vietnam vets—mostly amputees like himself.

At the time, the Veterans Administration was struggling to keep up with the rehabilitation needs of all the veterans.

“Back then, if we were able to get [physical therapy] twice a week, it was a lot,” Gorman said. “There was just so many guys with so few VA resources. Even in 1969 and ’70, they still were so unprepared for the number of veterans coming back; they hadn’t geared up for wartime patients.”

Gorman and the other veterans took matters into their own hands, forming a tight-knit group that would help them navigate a world unprepared to accommodate their disabilities.

“It all had to do with one guy helping another guy,” Gorman said. “And it was mostly the patients who had been there a while taking the guy who had just gotten there by the hand and saying, ‘This is how you do it.’”

They shared tips like how to climb steps with no legs and warned each other to stay on sidewalks and avoid grass with their rudimentary prostheses.

That display of veterans helping veterans foreshadowed the rest of Gorman’s life.

When he left the hospital, he was unsure of what was next. College wasn’t for him, his dream of being a high school football coach didn’t seem possible, and the unemployment office in his town had little more than the unappealing offers of shift work in a factory or overnight police dispatch a couple of towns over.

It was only while trying to get a letter from the VA for a disabled veteran license plate that he found his life’s calling in Providence, Rhode Island, thanks to a gruff World War II Marine veteran named Maurice “Frenchie” Pion, a benefits advocate with DAV.

The VA office was crowded the day Gorman went, with nowhere to sit in the waiting room. Looking for help, he saw a sign for veterans service organizations and followed it down the hallway. As he made his way, every service officer he passed was busy helping a veteran, except Pion.

Pion, who lost his arm during the Solomon Islands campaign in 1942, was part of the first class of the DAV National Service Officer program at American University



In 1975, Dave Gorman served as supervisor of DAV’s national appeals staff, representing veterans before the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

in Washington, D.C., graduating in 1945. He looked up from his desk, briskly asking Gorman what he needed before disappearing.

Ten minutes later, Pion was back with the letter and a job offer.

“And I said, ‘Doing what?’” Gorman recalled. “‘Doing what I do,’ he said. I figured, well, how hard could it be?”

That chance encounter in 1970 led Gorman to become a benefits advocate working in DAV’s Boston office. His supervisor at the time was another Vietnam veteran, Art Wilson, who went on to become DAV’s national adjutant from 1994 to 2013.

Gorman was hooked after his very first case—helping a World War II veteran who had never filed a VA claim for his multiple sclerosis. The statute of limitations for service connection had long passed, but Gorman was able to find medical evidence that supported an appeal and got the veteran his earned benefits.

“It’s a pretty good feeling to have been able to help this one man,” Gorman said. “It became a passion after that one case to see who else we could help.”

From there, Gorman rose through the ranks of DAV, with stints on the DAV national appeals staff, in the service and legislative departments, and ultimately as the DAV Washington Headquarters executive director before retiring in 2011.

"I've never seen him unprepared for a meeting. I've never seen him unprepared for a question when he walks into a room."

—Barry Jesinoski, DAV national adjutant

Like Frenchie did with him, Gorman used his tenure to raise the next generation of veterans advocate leaders in the organization, including DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski, who was a national service officer apprentice in Seattle when he first met him.

Gorman, who was in town for a department convention, visited the service office so he could get to know each member of the staff. That meeting left a lasting impression on Jesinoski, who went on to work for Gorman in Washington, D.C., from 2001 to 2007 and again in 2011 when he succeeded Gorman as the DAV Washington Headquarters executive director.

"Without an inkling of proprietary nature, without a selfish bone in his body, he not only told me and explained to me things that he knew, but he brought me with him. I was his shadow in D.C.," Jesinoski said. "He treated me as a professional and as an equal, as he always did."

Randy Reese, the current executive director in Washington, spent nearly a decade working across from Gorman, learning by his example.

"He calmed my personality down," Reese said. "He taught me to listen to people and to let them put it all out there. Sometimes they'll talk themselves into the right answer. But you've got to hear them all the way out."

It's his calm personality and ability to work with both sides of the aisle that Reese said makes Gorman, to this

day, one of the most respected people on Capitol Hill and within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"He could really guide a lot of policy," Reese said. "There was a time in Dave's career when VA wouldn't do their budget without Dave Gorman at the table. He knew more about the veterans health care budget than they did."

DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem recalled, even when she was new to the organization, Gorman would always take time to talk through specific issues and about how he made decisions on complex issues.

"He always reminded me that it's really pretty simple," Ilem said. "If it's good for veterans, we can support it. And if it's going to benefit service-disabled veterans, it's just a no-brainer."

That simple approach and his ability as a master communicator was steeped in decades of experience, a deep understanding of veterans policy, careful analysis and an ever-present eye on the long game.

"Part of what made him that way was that he was always prepared," Jesinoski said. "I've never seen him unprepared for a meeting. I've never seen him unprepared for a question when he walks into a room."

"He knew what it took to get there, especially on the legislative front," Ilem said. "You have to work for years sometimes to get something accomplished."

Reese said examples of that include his roles in getting the Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000 signed into law and, perhaps his greatest legislative victory, establishing advanced appropriations for VA health care and VA benefits. He spent nearly eight years working to ensure that even if the government shuts down because of partisan battles, veterans will still be cared for.

"The majority of veterans care and benefits today are safeguarded due to Dave Gorman," Reese said.

Gorman remains active in volunteer roles within DAV and is someone Jesinoski, Reese and Ilem said they know they can always call on.

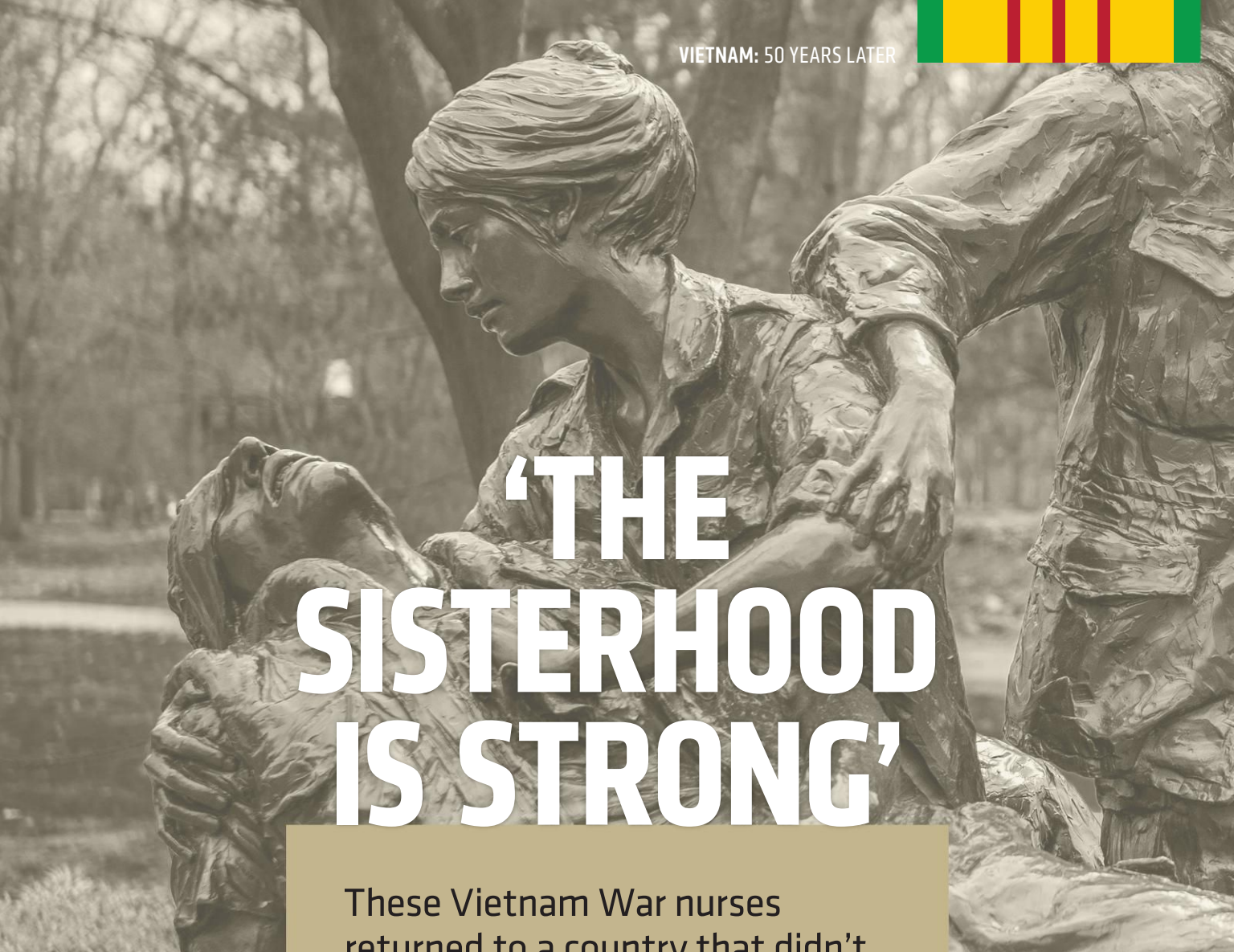
"I've never heard him take any personal credit for anything," Jesinoski said. "It's all about the team. It's about what DAV has done together."

"I think Dave is the epitome of a mentor," Reese said. "Just being around him, you would learn to be better at what we do as DAV, and you would learn to be better as a human." ■



Gorman was executive director of DAV Washington Headquarters in 1996 (right) until his retirement in 2011 (above).





'THE SISTERHOOD IS STRONG'

These Vietnam War nurses returned to a country that didn't see them as veterans. They made sure to change that.

By Elizabeth DePompei

Content warning: The following article contains potentially triggering descriptions of combat injuries.

Sitting on a pile of sandbags, a bronze-sculpted nurse supports an injured soldier sprawled across her lap. His arms and legs seem nearly lifeless. Next to them, another nurse stands, scanning the skies for any sign of a medevac helicopter. A third kneels and slumps slightly forward with an empty helmet resting on her knee.

For many, the Vietnam Women's Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., is their first introduction to the service and sacrifice of a historically forgotten and unrecognized group of heroes.

“We were the last to go under a bed for our protection. This was women protecting men.”

—Diane Carlson Evans

During the Vietnam War, nightly news was dominated by images of fatigued warfighting men navigating Vietnam’s jungles. A female nurse deftly working to save lives inside a makeshift hospital in the middle of a war zone was not the image broadcast into Americans’ living rooms.

Yet more than 265,000 women served across the globe during the Vietnam War, either in uniform or as civilian personnel. An estimated 10,000 of them served in Vietnam, mostly as nurses. They saved countless lives, consoled gravely injured teenage soldiers and held the hands of men as they took their last breaths.

Those same women returned to a country that for years remained largely unaware of their service and sacrifice. They struggled in silence, even as they dedicated their lives to helping others process the horrors of war. When the country began to properly honor its Vietnam veterans, it was women who made sure we remembered all who were there.

And their work isn’t finished.

During an honor flight in April 2024, Donna Korf, who served in Vietnam as an Army nurse, met a Vietnam Navy veteran.

“He said to me, ‘I didn’t know there were women in Vietnam!’” Korf recalled.

At one point, a general shook the hands of the veterans on the flight.

“I was right there,” Korf said. “Never shook my hand.”

‘SEND ME TO VIETNAM’

Korf was a nursing school student when she saw a picture of an Army nurse in a magazine. The ad read “Join the Army; see the world.” This was before the U.S. deployed combat troops to Vietnam, so for 21-year-old Korf, the Army seemed like a safe and grand adventure.

The following year, she was on her way to Vietnam. When she arrived by ship, the men disembarked carrying rifles and wearing steel helmets. The women stepped off in baseball caps.

“Nobody told us to wear our metal hats,” Korf said.

Later, she’d use that hat to scoop water out of the makeshift hospital after heavy rains.

Receiving her commission in 1967 in the months leading up to the catastrophic Tet Offensive, Linda Schwartz knew she’d signed up for a war zone. She chose the Air Force after seeing a magazine ad calling for flight nurses. By 1968, she was at Tachikawa Air Base in Japan, where battle-wounded warfighters from Vietnam would stabilize before making the journey home.

On her first day in Japan, Schwartz helped treat a soldier whose midsection had been blown out by an accidental gunshot. When she turned the patient over to put something beneath his back, Schwartz felt something strange. It was the med tech’s hand coming through the other side of the massive wound.

By the end of the day, she wondered if she had made the biggest mistake of her life.

Like Schwartz, Diane Carlson Evans joined because of the ongoing war.

“I’ll join the Army Nurse Corps if you’ll send me to Vietnam,” she recalls telling the recruiter.

Evans’ brother was drafted in ’65, and she watched as her male neighbors were sent to war. As a nursing student doing clinical rotations before going to Vietnam,

Linda Schwartz served as a nurse at Tachikawa Air Base in Japan during the Vietnam War. After being medically discharged later in her career, Schwartz went on to become a leading advocate for veterans.





Donna Korf served as an Army nurse in Vietnam. For decades, Korf bottled the trauma she experienced during the war, but a book by a fellow Vietnam nurse helped unlock healing.

she cared for four generations of veterans. And at just 15 years old, Evans had assisted her mother at the local hospital.

So once Evans was in country, she said it was “exactly what I thought I was signing up for.”

‘THE NIGHT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE’

Korf quickly learned what she signed up for, too. When mortar sirens sounded, she took cover in bunkers made out of sandbags. When she learned that even Red Cross helicopters took fire, she knew no one was safe.

But like so many Vietnam nurses, what haunts Korf the most are the patients—the ones profoundly changed by war and the ones who didn’t survive.

Korf vividly recalls when nine of her 18 patients were on the brink of death. Korf’s personal mission was to make sure the Americans she treated didn’t die alone.

That night, she was diverted to tend to another patient. With no curtains blocking her view, she saw the moment a corpsman removed the expectant patient.

“And that’s the thing that bothers me, all these years,” Korf said, her voice wavering. “I never got back to him. ... He didn’t have somebody there.”

Most, if not all, Vietnam nurses have stories like Korf’s. Evans filled a book with them.

She learned that sandbags weren’t the only protection from mortar attacks. When sirens sounded, nurses helped patients get under a bed. Those with tubes and ventilators got mattresses on top of them.

“We were the last to go under a bed for our protection,” Evans said. “This was women protecting men.”

Schwartz, the Air Force nurse, recalls the onslaught of casualties during the bloody Battle of Hamburger Hill in 1969. The mess hall at Tachikawa became a triage area.

She remembers two men, both badly wounded and unable to stand. The one who could talk begged nurses to take care of his friend who had a chest wound. It was the “take my buddy first” mentality of so many of the men who were wounded.

“That’s the night that changed my life forever,” Schwartz said.

Becoming a wartime nurse hadn’t been a mistake. It had been her calling.

HEALING WOUNDS

Like the men of Vietnam, women returned home to an America that denounced their service, often cruelly. And while the women were proud of their care for the war’s wounded, the country didn’t even recognize them as veterans, let alone understand their experiences.

Evans went back to a civilian nursing job where starting an IV unsupervised resulted in her being admonished for breaking the rules.

“I had started hundreds of IVs in Vietnam, and I started them in the dark, with a flashlight, when we were being rocketed,” Evans said.

She lasted three weeks before rejoining the Army Nurse Corps.

Schwartz served as a flight nurse across Europe until she had her first child in 1976 and went on reserve duty. Then in 1983, during a training exercise in a C-141, the hatch blew off the aircraft at 30,000 feet. The decompression



Diane Carlson Evans, who wrote the book that helped Korf open up, was a nurse in Vietnam. She later spearheaded the creation of the Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C.

injuries Schwartz sustained to her brain and spinal cord ended her military career.

Even while living with the traumas of service, these women—all of whom are proud DAV members—contributed incalculably to the veteran community.

Korf started a nursing career with the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system. She counseled Vietnam veterans on Agent Orange exposure and post-traumatic stress while ignoring her own struggles. Still, she found purpose and peace in helping veterans.

“They took care of me and I took care of them,” she said.

Evans led a 10-year crusade to get a memorial dedicated to all the women of the Vietnam War. She defied backlash and vitriol, rallied veterans from across the country and worked with organizations like DAV to get her fellow women veterans the recognition and honor they earned. The memorial was dedicated in 1993.

Last year, Korf read Evans’ book, “Healing Wounds.” After decades of pushing down her own trauma, something unlocked.

“Diane’s book is really probably what helped open up this box of tears that for years have been just bottled up,” she said.

After being medically discharged, Schwartz earned a master’s degree from the Yale School of Nursing. She eventually became involved in veterans advocacy, testifying in front of Congress about inadequate care for women veterans and holding leadership positions within Vietnam Veterans of America.

She fondly remembers working alongside Joy Ilem, now DAV’s national legislative director, in the early ’90s to secure the creation of the VA’s first Center for Women Veterans. She also served as Connecticut’s commissioner of veterans affairs and was later appointed by then-President Barack Obama as the VA’s assistant secretary for policy and planning.

Schwartz celebrates how far the VA and the country have come in recognizing women’s military service. She’s confident that women like Korf and Evans, and all those who came after, will protect that legacy and ensure women who served are never forgotten.

“The sisterhood is strong,” she said. ■



Learn More Online

Learn how DAV advocates for women veterans of all generations at davwomenveterans.org.



CLEARING THE PATH TO HEALING

Vietnam-era veterans ensured future generations of service members would have the care they deserve

By Liz Stetler

Bobby Barrera's memories of recovering at the burn ward at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio include waves of searing pain, the foggiest of sedation and the realization that medical staff had brought him back to life multiple times.

"[Before that] I was living my dream to serve in combat," Barrera said of his time as a Marine. But after only six weeks in Vietnam, he was severely injured in an ambush on Sept. 16, 1969. He lost both arms, and over 40% of his body was burned.

"They didn't know if I would survive or not," he said.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES PHOTO_532484

Barrera defied the odds and dedicated his life to improving the lives of other veterans. He began as a social worker helping military families. He was named the 1998 Disabled American Veteran of the Year, and in 2009, he served as DAV national commander.

As commander, he mentored wounded service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, including those at BAMC.

"I remember one young serviceman wearing the protective mask of someone who had experienced severe burns to his face. I know exactly what he was experiencing—the uncertainty, the pain," Barrera said. "I hope I could provide him comfort just by being someone who had been there 30 years before and had gone on to have a family and a career."

Now a motivational speaker for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Barrera understands the hardships Vietnam veterans faced at a time when the country didn't fully grasp the repercussions of war. Given public sentiment toward the war, veterans were often left to fend for themselves.

In turn, veterans like Barrera fought to improve care for future generations, providing community, mentorship and leadership. They influenced advancements in benefits and health care that continue to serve future veterans.

After Vietnam, many service members experienced flashbacks, distressing memories and crippling anxiety, leading to isolation, depression and suicidal thoughts. Recognizing this crisis, DAV funded the Forgotten

"What these Vietnam veterans endured has saved countless lives from my generation of service and beyond."

—Butch Whitehead, DAV past national commander

Warrior Project in 1977. Conducted by Vietnam combat veteran and psychologist Dr. James Goodwin, it studied over 400 veterans, revealing high degrees of mistrust, anxiety, shame, survivor's guilt and despair.

"They have a deep-seated conviction that nothing matters anymore, that they are helpless against the external forces of fate," Goodwin wrote.

The project spurred DAV's Vietnam Veterans Outreach Program, which later inspired the VA's Vet Centers, community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services, including professional readjustment counseling to eligible veterans, service members and their families.

Perhaps the most significant outcome was the introduction of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III), leading to the disorder being codified as a disability by the VA.

As a veteran who suffered from PTSD after serving in Iraq, Butch Whitehead is grateful to Vietnam-era veterans who fought for future generations.

"The Forgotten Warrior Project propelled PTSD treatment in veterans, leading to VA programs like the Vet Centers and the Veteran Crisis Line," said Whitehead, DAV's first post-9/11 national commander. "What these Vietnam veterans endured has saved countless lives from my generation of service and beyond."

Whitehead was mentored by Vietnam veteran and triple amputee Jim Sursely, who served as DAV national commander. "He was more than a fellow soldier and Minnesota native. He was an inspiration and a friend," Whitehead said. "I count myself one of dozens—maybe hundreds—of post-9/11 veterans Jim influenced."

Karen Owoc, a clinical exercise physiologist at the Palo Alto VA Medical Center in California, noted that PTSD remains common among Vietnam and post-9/11 veterans.



Left: DAV Past National Commander Bobby Barrera encourages a wounded soldier at the Center for the Intrepid in San Antonio. Barrera lost his arms in Vietnam. Afterward, he dedicated his life to supporting other veterans. **Right:** Barrera serving in Vietnam with the Marines, 1969.



Butch Whitehead (left), DAV's first post-9/11 national commander, was mentored by Jim Sursely (right), an Army veteran who was wounded in combat while serving in Vietnam. Sursely was elected DAV national commander in 2004. He died in 2021, leaving a legacy of service.

"The nightmares, the PTSD—it's still really prevalent," Owoc said. "Sometimes I'm the only contact they have all week. That's the challenge they face. They feel lonely."

Loneliness can lead to depression, anxiety, substance abuse or suicidal ideations, with physical side effects as well.

"There's a clear association between depression and heart disease," she added.

Vietnam veterans also struggle with illnesses caused by Agent Orange exposure. The herbicide was sprayed to remove enemy cover, exposing millions of veterans to toxic chemicals. Related health conditions include respiratory issues, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, neuropathy and various cancers.

The Agent Orange Act of 1991 established presumptive service connection for affected veterans, laying the foundation for toxic-exposure legislation, including the historic PACT Act of 2022.

DAV Chief Communications and Outreach Officer Dan Clare, who deployed to Iraq in 2006, came into possession of an internal memo detailing burn pit hazards. Clare leaked the memo to ensure Iraq and Afghanistan veterans wouldn't face the same delays in care.

"At the time, DAV was led by Vietnam veterans, and they immediately connected burn pits and Agent Orange," Clare said. "They had developed a playbook on presumptives from years of being underserved and fighting similar battles. DAV's registry, when we first

started getting calls, was the forerunner to the VA's registry."

One of those leaders Clare learned from was David Gorman, a benefits advocate who had risen to the level of executive director at DAV Washington Headquarters by the time Clare began his DAV career.

Gorman said that, in addition to the Forgotten Warrior Project and the Vet Centers, there were countless innovations paid for by the hardship and suffering of Vietnam veterans—including prosthetics innovation. Gorman, who lost both legs while serving as a combat engineer in Vietnam, saw VA rehabilitation evolve dramatically.

"It's night and day," Gorman said. "That's one of the untold accomplishments of Vietnam veterans."

He recalled his first wooden prostheses: "I wore a belt with suspenders to hold them on. Today, you get a computer-assisted prosthesis."

More than 1,500 amputees injured since 9/11 owe gratitude to Vietnam veterans like Danny Werner, who helped the VA improve prosthetics technology until his death in 2024. Werner, a below-the-knee amputee, was a pioneer in neural-connected prosthetics.

"I knew I might not benefit from all this," Werner said. "But somebody down the road will, and that's why I do it."

Barrera also found his initial experience with prostheses to be challenging. "Accepting that I had to learn how to do everything over, this time with prosthetics, was the hardest part for me," he said. Barrera remembers that throughout his recovery, strangers visited to offer kindness. He found strength through what he calls the "four S's of hope:" support, sense of humor, spirituality, and self-belief. The kindness he received inspired him to give back.

"Some nurses asked me to talk to struggling patients," he said. "Later, I realized that's where my counseling career started."

Owoc encourages her patients to build community by helping others, as Vietnam veterans have done.

"Helping others makes you feel better," she said. "That's a therapeutic opportunity."

Vietnam veterans didn't return to a support network, but through DAV and leaders like Barrera and Gorman, they fought to ensure future generations would never be left behind. They exemplify the power of veterans helping veterans.

"People help you along the way, and then you help someone else," Gorman said. "That's what DAV has always been." ■

A gift to future generations

Army veteran gives back through DAV Personal Philanthropy Program

Editor's Note: Daniel, the subject of this story, asked to keep his last name private to keep the focus on the veterans he supports through his charitable giving.

As an Army veteran of the Vietnam War, Daniel knew he wanted to include veterans organizations in his estate planning.

That's why he chose DAV as a beneficiary of one of his financial accounts. "My hope by donating to DAV is that I am doing the most good for the most amount of people," Daniel said.

Having faced his own health challenges and witnessed the struggles of fellow service members, Daniel saw firsthand the impact DAV had on the lives of ill and injured veterans. He also saw the critical role DAV plays in ensuring the Department of Veterans Affairs provides veterans with the care they deserve. He knows just how important that is—because the VA saved his life.

Daniel was at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center for a routine physical when a nurse practitioner insisted he get an ultrasound, leading to the discovery of a life-threatening condition. Though he felt fine at the time, medical staff immediately wheeled him in for further testing.

"They took me down to get a CT scan, then to vascular surgery, where they discovered I had an abdominal aortic aneurysm," Daniel recalled. "I was lucky to still be alive."

Although they couldn't get him into emergency surgery right away, they monitored him closely.

"They couldn't get an operating room until the next day, so they took care of me and fixed me up until I could go in for surgery. They saved my life," he said.

But Daniel's challenges weren't only physical. Like many veterans who served in Vietnam, he struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder long after returning home. During a VA Agent Orange evaluation, Daniel was sent to the psychiatric department, where he realized he needed treatment for PTSD.

His nurse encouraged him to seek help from DAV to file for disability benefits. When he reached out for support, DAV guided him through the claims process and stood by him, even when his PTSD benefits were denied. After later being diagnosed with leukemia, Daniel received the benefits he earned due to the VA recognizing the diagnosis as a result of Agent Orange exposure.

Daniel said he hopes the funds he is leaving will help DAV continue to provide veterans with access to the same lifesaving care, benefits and advocacy that made such a difference in his own life.

By taking advantage of the DAV Personal Philanthropy Program, like Daniel, you can help ensure that no veteran faces their challenges alone and can leave behind a legacy of service and care for those who have sacrificed for our freedom. ■



PHOTO BY CPL. JENNIFER E. REYES/U.S. MARINES

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

For more information about giving to DAV:

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

Did you know you can create a free will by visiting freewill.com/dav?

When completing your legacy gift to DAV, please provide the following to your adviser:

- Legal name:
Disabled American Veterans
- Address: 860 Dolwick Drive,
Erlanger, KY 41018
- Federal tax ID number:
31-0263158

DAV® Guardian Society

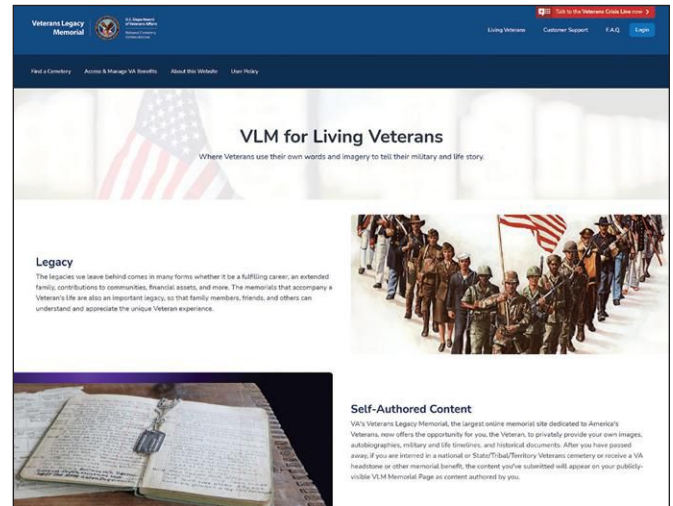
Veterans Legacy Memorial access expanded

■ On Jan. 16, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the expansion of the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM)—the nation's largest digital platform dedicated to the memory of veterans and service members—to allow veterans to tell their own service stories.

The new feature, Your Story, Your Legacy, will allow veterans who have been approved for the VA's pre-need eligibility determination for burial in a VA national cemetery to log in to a secure website where they can privately submit images, stories, military and life milestones, and historical documents.

The VA will keep a veteran's submitted content secure until they die and the VA approves a request for a burial or memorial benefit. Following approval, the content submitted will become public on the veteran's VLM page.

Once a veteran provides their email address, they will receive an email directing them to the Your Story, Your Legacy landing page.



If you need information or assistance with VA burial benefits, please contact your nearest DAV service office at benefitsquestions.org.

Veteran homelessness declines despite national surge

■ As the overall homelessness rate in the U.S. has surged over several years, veteran homelessness has reached its lowest point since tracking began in 2009.

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count measures the number of people, including veterans, who experience sheltered

and unsheltered homelessness on a single night in January each year.

Data from the most recent PIT count showed that veterans were the only group that saw a decrease. The number of veterans experiencing homelessness dropped from 35,574 to 32,882—a nearly 8% decrease from 2023 to 2024.

One contributing factor in this continued decline is increased attention and investment toward addressing veteran homelessness, though targeted resources in specific areas remain critically important.

Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Grant and Per Diem, and other programs have been instrumental in helping veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

If you are a veteran who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, please contact your nearest DAV service office at benefitsquestions.org.



'FULLY IMMERSED'

Veterans benefit from gaming. As entrepreneurs, they're helping shape the industry.

By Elizabeth DePompei



Veteran-run Esports Virtual Arenas is a one-of-a-kind facility akin to a gymnasium where gamers wearing virtual reality headsets interact with the physical space. It's just one example of the kind of innovation veterans are bringing to the gaming industry.

Chris Earl picked up his first video game controller when he was 3 or 4 years old. By age 11, he was playing competitively. At 18, he qualified for a professional gaming league.

At the time, Earl had another opportunity: the Marine Corps. Faced with choosing between a career in gaming and military service, he chose the Marines.

During his four-year enlistment as a logistics/embarkation specialist, Earl continued gaming and competing in tournaments. His hobby fit right in with an institution where gaming is a common pastime for service members and veterans.

So it's no surprise that before he separated, Earl started building the foundation for what became the country's largest military gaming community: Regiment Gaming.

"We use online gaming as a means to unite veterans, build community, build camaraderie, provide a sense of belonging and ultimately prevent suicide," Earl said.

Advocates and health care providers increasingly acknowledge the mental health benefits of gaming for veterans. Gaming also provides a way to reach veterans with information about earned benefits and health care resources. That's why last year, DAV launched a channel on the gaming and livestreaming platform Twitch.

But in addition to benefiting from the medium, veterans like Earl are helping to shape the gaming industry as innovators and business founders. And like Earl, they're taking advantage of DAV Patriot Boot Camp's no-cost programming for entrepreneurs in the military and veteran community.

Earl and Navy veteran Salem Thyne attended a three-day cohort of DAV Patriot Boot Camp in Washington, D.C., last fall.

Thyne spent more than 11 years in the Navy working in the nuclear program and left as a senior chief petty officer. After separating, he worked in the same field before joining his family's oil and gas startup.

During a brainstorming session one Friday, a colleague told him about an innovative company in France that offered in-person esports anchored in virtual reality. It's a newer, less-tested concept in the U.S., but once peers expressed enthusiasm for the idea, Thyne found his next venture.

Now he's the manager and president of Middle Initial LLC, a company bringing Esports Virtual Arenas (EVA) from France to the U.S. Based in Texas, the one-of-a-kind facility is akin to a gymnasium where gamers wearing virtual reality headsets walk, run, duck and

"We use online gaming as a means to unite veterans, build community, build camaraderie, provide a sense of belonging and ultimately prevent suicide."

—Chris Earl



Top: Marine veteran Chris Earl is a lifelong gamer and the founder of Regiment Gaming, the country's largest military gaming community.

Middle: Earl (left) attended DAV Patriot Boot Camp for entrepreneurs alongside Navy veteran and fellow gamer Salem Thyne (right).

Bottom: Thyne is the manager and president of Middle Initial LLC, a company bringing EVA from France to the U.S.

jump through the physical space to navigate the virtual space they're seeing.

"You're fully immersed," Thyne said.

Thyne regularly witnesses people coming together over the shared experience, buzzing with energy and thriving among community.

"I see that light in their eyes again that I think we really were missing and we've been missing for the last couple years ... coming together and just having fun," he said.

Thyne reached out to Earl, looking for ways to bring the EVA experience to veterans and to support Regiment Gaming's mission. Given the isolation and struggles that can come with post-military life, Thyne sees immense potential in what gaming can do for veterans.

He also sees the benefit of veterans influencing the gaming industry, noting that many of them played games—whether video or card games—in the military. That means they are keenly familiar with the social and mental health benefits of gaming.

"And I think that that understanding of what it brought you in the military, and then being able to translate that into this market, is super important," he said, adding that service also equips veterans with leadership and life skills unlike anything else.

Branden Duncan served four years in the Air Force working in electronic warfare control systems. Afterward,

the lifelong gamer got a degree in electrical engineering.

All those experiences uniquely prepared him to create Hedgehog, a gaming mouse with customizable knuckle and finger buttons that also operates as a flat-plane joystick. While Duncan said the gaming device market is saturated, there's really nothing like what he's designed.

Duncan plans to manufacture and sell the Hedgehog in 2025. It took longer for him to get to that point than he expected, but his military service prepared him for the sometimes-rocky journey of entrepreneurship.

"I think it gave me a lot of adaptability," he said.

Duncan attended DAV Patriot Boot Camp in 2022 and credits its experts and mentors with steering him in the right direction to pursue funding. It helped him get to where he is today, and he hopes to attend a future cohort when he's ready to take Hedgehog to the next stage.

"All three of these alumni illustrate the value of veterans as business founders and the positive impact they can have on an industry," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "DAV Patriot Boot Camp is honored to support them on their journeys. When veterans succeed, it benefits more veterans and entire communities." ■



Learn More Online

Learn more about DAV Patriot Boot Camp at patriotbootcamp.org.



Air Force veteran Branden Duncan created Hedgehog, a customizable gaming mouse that also operates as a joystick. Duncan attended DAV Patriot Boot Camp in 2022 and says the experts and mentors there helped him navigate funding for his product. He plans to manufacture and sell the Hedgehog mouse by early 2025.



From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

CHRISTOPHER J. EASLEY



A heart for volunteering

Strong communities thrive because of people who care. And often, dedicated volunteers are the heart and soul of that support. The Auxiliary understands this deeply, and we're incredibly fortunate to have a powerful and readily accessible way to show we care: volunteerism with the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service program (VAVS).

People who donate their time through the Auxiliary with VAVS are game-changing for those who served and their families. It's a lifeline to them, providing real, tangible support that significantly improves their quality of life. Think of it this way: Small acts equal huge impact. Plus, all those volunteer hours translate into serious savings for the VA—dollars that can then be directed where they're needed most, like vital medical care. Finally, people who give back through this program bring credit to the Auxiliary's unwavering commitment to our veterans. We track every single hour, because we're not just saying we care; we're showing it.

Diverse volunteer opportunities are available that may match your skills and interests. The process to become a VA volunteer involves a background check, including fingerprinting. Some roles require a physical, and all roles require tuberculosis testing (available at the VA or through your personal doctor). Flexible schedules are available, and even one-time volunteers are warmly welcomed.

Tracking your valuable volunteer hours is simple and streamlined. The VA uses a new system where volunteers log their time, and that information is sent to the Auxiliary monthly. Each year, we conduct a joint review to tally total volunteer hours, the number of volunteers and the value of donated goods. This demonstrates the overall contribution of volunteer services to the VA.

Ready to get involved? It's easy! First, contact the VAVS department at your local VA medical center. Staffers can tell you about specific needs and volunteer requirements. Second, connect with your state's DAV Auxiliary VAVS representative for insights into local opportunities and coordinated volunteer efforts. Finally, the DAV volunteerforveterans.org website is packed with information about how you can make a difference.

This volunteer program offers a powerful and deeply rewarding way to support our veterans. Its flexible structure, diverse opportunities, and focus on both practical assistance and personal connection make it an invaluable resource for ensuring veterans' well-being. As author Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew so eloquently put it, "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart." The Auxiliary's heart is full of genuine care and compassion, and we're here to make a difference. We invite you to join us, share your heart and experience the profound reward of serving those who have served us all. ■

A new era in diabetes care

More than 1 in 4 veterans have diabetes. But evolving tech is proving to be a lifesaver.

By Matt Saintsing

The maze of shallow waterways along the Mekong Delta proved to be a contested battlespace for Americans during the Vietnam War. The U.S. Navy was charged with patrolling the area of over 3,000 miles of rivers and canals, searching vessels carrying enemy weapons and supplies. However, Jesse Lee, who served on these small patrol boats, was on dry land the day he was injured.

“We had a call that some Marines were about to get overrun along the coast,” said Lee. “They were getting ambushed.”

Lee and his fellow sailors made a beach landing to provide medical assistance and additional fire. But as he raced toward the danger, he became a casualty himself. He stepped in a hole with his right leg, snapping it in the opposite direction and fracturing his knee.



Navy veteran Jesse Lee, pictured aboard a destroyer (left) and present day, said using his Podimetrics SmartMat has revolutionized how he and the VA manage his diabetes.



VETERANS AND DIABETES

43% mortality rate five years after developing their first foot ulcer

70% will die five years after the first appearance of a foot ulcer*

80% of nontraumatic amputations at the VA are caused by diabetic foot ulcers

* SOURCE: EDWARD HINES, JR. VA HOSPITAL

While that severe injury ended his time in Vietnam, the tactical herbicide known as Agent Orange has left a toxic legacy for Lee in the form of Type 2 diabetes.

The Department of Veterans Affairs added the chronic disease to its list of presumptive conditions in 2001 after scientists uncovered a link between Agent Orange and the ailment.

Lee has lived with diabetes for 20 years by managing his diet, exercising and monitoring his blood sugar. What has made that easier recently is a newer technology that shows promise in not only caring for veterans with diabetes but also preventing diabetic ulcers, amputation and death.

The VA has been an innovator in recent years, partnering with a company that connects diabetic veterans with mats that detect foot ulcers before they appear, making medical intervention much more likely.

Diabetic foot ulcer severity has shown to be a better predictor of death than coronary artery disease and stroke. Not only can these wounds lead to amputation, but according to the VA, veterans also face a mortality

rate of 43% five years after developing their first ulcer. One sobering study, conducted by researchers at the Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital in Illinois, found that 70% will die in the same time frame after the first appearance of a foot ulcer, making proactive prevention lifesaving.

One in four veterans have diabetes. In addition to grim mortality rates, diabetic foot ulcers are responsible for 80% of nontraumatic amputations at the VA. So when a VA podiatrist introduced Lee to the Podimetrics SmartMat, he thought it certainly couldn't hurt.

To get into more VA medical centers, with the ambitious goal of ending diabetic foot amputation for veterans, Podimetrics partnered with the VA office of innovation. "The major breaking piece for us was meeting the [VA Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning], realizing you have to adapt to the VA,"

"I could spend whole days in the operating room doing nothing but amputations. It was like a conveyor belt of Civil War-era medicine."

—Dr. Jon Bloom



said Dr. Jon Bloom, CEO of Podimetrics and an anesthesiologist.

That office plays a significant role in improving VA health care options for veterans by expanding telehealth options, exploring the use of virtual reality for training medical professionals and developing digital tools to improve care coordination.

The device requires just a few seconds of use for a veteran. With the user standing or sitting at attention for 30 seconds, the mat scans the feet for temperature changes, an early warning sign of an impending ulcer. As damage to the foot occurs, the body's natural healing method is inflammation, which brings a localized fever to the affected area.

"We're looking for that spike in temperature," said Bloom. "If there's this imbalance in temperature of 2.2 degrees centigrade for two days in a row, that has been recognized in the literature as

a hotspot predictive of an incoming wound."

That data is transmitted to VA health care providers, who can notify the veteran and set up treatment options.

For Bloom, this care is personal. As a son of a Vietnam veteran, he gained cherished insight into the reality veterans face. In his medical residency, putting people to sleep only to remove their affected limb was far too routine. "I could spend whole days in the operating room doing nothing but amputations," he said. "It was like a conveyor belt of Civil War-era medicine."

So, when he was presented with an idea that could possibly end diabetic amputations for veterans, he was all in.

Podimetrics is in 15,000 veterans' homes. Three randomized control trials—the gold standard for medical research—back its efficacy. Published clinical data shows the SmartMat can detect as many as 97% of foot ulcers five weeks before the onset of symptoms, 52% reduction in hospitalizations and 40% reduction in emergency visits.

The product has aided Lee, who said he'd recommend the SmartMat in a heartbeat.

"I think everybody that has diabetes should have one of them, because my ulcer came back that was no bigger than a BB, and that mat picked it up," said Lee. "VA called me asking about my foot and made an appointment with the podiatrist immediately." ■

When a veteran places their feet on the SmartMat, it sends their data to VA medical centers for possible early intervention of diabetic foot ulcers. Catching foot ulcers early can prevent limb amputations and save lives.





From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBRA VARNER DANCER

Building a great nation



Our nation stands at a moment of uncertainty—facing challenges that demand action, not complacency. It may not feel as if we’re standing together, but we are. One nation together. And at such times, we must follow our mission and our love of one another to know which direction to take.

In times of division, DAV’s focus on the best interests of our veterans and families can be the North Star that unites us. It guides us as we continue to seek out and bring into our family those who are effective in making the lives of other veterans greater and better. As Robert Frost wrote, “The best way out is always through,” and we cannot accept standing still. We won’t sit and complain. No, we’re willing to serve and make things better for our nation, our fellow veterans and their families. We know that our nation, despite its flaws, remains a land of greatness.

Let’s work to keep it that way.

Building a great nation takes people who care. As DAV members, we care, and because of that, we seek to bring about positive change. We feel the strife and sense even greater turmoil roiling beneath the surface. Even in these challenging times, we ask how we can help and take steps to make improvements. We’re driven by passion to make things better where we can. There are those who say they care about others but don’t back up their talk with action. That’s not us. We’re committed and willing to be a part of the solution.

Building a great nation takes faith. We believe the services we provide veterans are needed. We’re resolute with passion and purpose to help make things better. We’ve put our plan in motion, but for it to be successful, we must motivate others to see our vision and come along with us.

Building a great nation takes work. When we look out and see things we don’t like, we won’t become discouraged at the size of the task. Some laws are on the books because someone saw an injustice and sought to correct it—even if it took years of effort. Yes, work is hard, and whenever you’re trying to change things, there will be opposition. We’re a nation built by founders who faced impossibility, and this DNA has remained a part of our national character ever since. We’ve faced seemingly insurmountable odds but have pressed on and managed to find a solution.

When building something great, opposition and discouragement will come from those who only complain. At DAV, we work together for the greater good of all. We’re prepared to find the solution to our current challenges and those to come.

We as an organization can serve as guideposts for a nation that feels lost. We’ve overcome adversity in order to carry the title of “disabled veteran.” And we’re willing to work for change and stand up against any opposition because we care, we have faith, and we’ll work to provide a great example to others by steadfastly carrying out the mission to which we’ve pledged ourselves. ■

Assistant National Service Director



Clark

■ In May, **Andrew Clark** was appointed as assistant national service director for DAV Washington Headquarters.

In this role, Clark will support DAV efforts to provide oversight and professional assistance to veterans and their families accessing Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services, including claims, appeals and transition support.

A native of Black River, New York, Clark enlisted in the Air Force in 2001 and served until 2014 when he was medically retired. He achieved the rank of master sergeant. Clark served as a jet engine mechanic, and his military career included deployments to Israel and the United Arab Emirates, with additional service in England and South Korea.

Clark joined the DAV staff in 2016 as a national service officer apprentice in San Antonio. In 2017, he was promoted to associate national service officer in San Antonio before becoming the national service office assistant supervisor in Phoenix in 2020. He was then promoted to national service office supervisor in Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 2021. In 2023, Clark was promoted to national area supervisor for Area 12 out of Muskogee.

Clark attended American Military University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's degree in management. He is a life member of DAV Chapter 88 in Coweta, Oklahoma.

"Having served at nearly every level in the field, Andrew is a proven leader and an excellent addition to DAV's national service department," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "His knowledge and expertise advocating for veterans means Andrew will have an immediate and positive impact."

REUNIONS

ARMY

4TH BATTALION, 9TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

"**MANCHUS**" Sept. 16–20, Cincinnati, OH, Contact: Bob Lannon, Ph: 427-403-0033, Email: bobl99@hotmail.com, Web: manchu.org

34TH ENGINEER BATTALION (VIETNAM) June 18–22, Fort Wayne, IN, Contact: Pat Boldman, Ph: 219-863-0049, Email: pboldman711@gmail.com

37TH ARMORED REGIMENT Oct. 15–19, Gettysburg, PA, Contact: Kevin Seidl, Email: kevinseidl@msn.com, Web: courageconquers.com

196TH LIGHT INFANTRY BRIGADE July 23–27, Pittsburgh, PA, Contact: David D. Eichhorn, Ph: 740-678-2001, Email: sectary196@196th.org, Web: 196th.org

554TH ENGINEER BATTALION (VIETNAM) June 10–13, St. Robert, MO, Contact: Tammy Milam, Ph: 740-339-0553, Email: tammymilam69@yahoo.com

DUSTERS, QUADS, SEARCHLIGHTS, VULCANS AND HAWKS (VIETNAM) June 4–8, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Bruce Geiger, Ph: 914-576-1050, Email: bmggeiger@aol.com, Web: ndqsa.com

NAVY

CONSTRUCTION BATTALION MAINTENANCE

UNIT 302 Oct. 27–29, Frankenmuth, MI, Contact: Tom Vandenberg, Ph: 509-520-5396, Email: peggiv.vandenberg@gmail.com

USS LLOYD THOMAS (DD/DDE-764) June 26–30, Indianapolis, IN, Contact: Scott Sheffer, Ph: 814-797-5458, Email: lloydthomas@atlanticcbb.net, Web: dd764.org

USS MONTICELLO (LSD-35) Oct. 17–20, Branson, MO, Contact: Robert T. Behm, Ph: 573-207-4670, Web: ussmonticello.com

USS RAINIER (AE-5) Aug. 25–29, Washington, DC, Contact: David Tongish, Ph: 303-229-8422, Email: edtongish@msn.com

AIR FORCE

20TH FIGHTER WING ASSOCIATION Oct. 30–Nov. 2, Tucson, AZ, Contact: Gino Passaro, Ph: 787-874-7606, Email: passarog@verizon.net, Web: 20fwa.org

63RD/445TH MILITARY AIRLIFT WING (ALL YEARS) Sept. 19–21, Highland, CA, Contact: Senior Master Sgt. (retired) Kevin Perdue, Ph: 909-534-9685, Email: kperdue24@msn.com

INQUIRIES

- Searching for Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Stark and Sgt. Donald Parker, who both served in Company C, 1st Battalion, 73rd Armor, Fort Beavers, Korea, 1969–70. Contact: Paul Pohler, Email: paulpohler4@gmail.com

PLANNING A REUNION?

Send the details to feedback@dav.org. Submissions must be received at least six months before the event date.

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.



Spread the news! Send photos of your DAV or Auxiliary news to production@dav.org.

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



NOT HOW YOU WOULD'VE DONE IT

YOU BUNDLE THINGS RIGHT

Like when you bundle your home and auto insurance with USAA and save up to 10%.

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VOLUNTEER APPLICATION WINDOW OPEN

2025 National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic

Sept. 7-12 | Riverside Hotel & Golf Resort

With more than 200 veterans expected, the National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic relies on hundreds of dedicated volunteers who work as clinic staff and golf buddies to provide an invigorating and rehabilitative experience for its participants. There are still volunteer opportunities available.

This annual clinic is a premier adaptive sports program co-presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs that provides veterans with blindness and low vision, brain injuries, amputations, spinal cord injuries and other qualifying disabilities the opportunity to experience the therapeutic benefits of golf and other activities. ■



Volunteers must apply to participate.

Application period ends June 6. Scan the QR code or visit veteransgolfclinic.org/volunteer.



DAV Honor Garden

A living monument to our nation's heroes

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

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



PHOTOS BY WES BATTOLETTE





GET READY FOR WARMER DAYS IN **DAV STYLES**



Ladies' and Men's Pursuit Polo
Grey
S-XL **\$38** | 2XL-3XL **\$41**



Nike Striated Polo
Light Blue
S-XL **\$76**
2XL-4XL **\$79**



Valiant Cotton Pocket Polo
White & Navy
S-XL **\$37** | 2XL-4XL **\$40**



Rothco Moisture Wicking Camo Tee
S-XL **\$26**
2XL-3XL **\$29**



Rothco Tactical Cap
Black & Camo | **\$26**



American Apparel CVC Tee
Heathered Army &
Heathered Ivory
S-XL **\$16** | 2XL-3XL **\$19**



TravisMathew Sling Cooler
Kona Green
\$49