DAV® MAGAZINE
JULY | AUGUST 2025

‘COURAGE TO ADVANCE’

Adaptive sports enable personal and practical breakthroughs for severely disabled veterans

Page 8



Medal of Honor recipient, longtime advocate named veteran of the year

Page 20







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.la/vegas25**.

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

DAV, a champion for caregivers

Without the unwavering support of caregivers, countless veterans would be unable to remain in the comfort and familiarity of their homes as they navigate disability and age.

The stark reality is that an estimated 8.3 million veterans are already over 65, and in the next decade, the number of those 75 and older will more than double. At the same time, the percentage of veterans with significant disabilities is projected to skyrocket. These statistics forewarn a looming crisis that will overwhelm our nation's health care infrastructure if we don't act decisively.

While the Department of Veterans Affairs offers caregiver support to eligible veterans, significant gaps persist. This undeniable need and the chasm in support compelled us to create DAV Caregivers Support. Our mission is simple yet profound: to be the lifeline that connects these selfless individuals with the vital public and private resources they desperately need to navigate the complexities of caregiving and, ultimately, improve their quality of life and that of those under their care.

Since its inception in October 2023, DAV Caregivers Support has become a beacon of hope for over 1,550 caregivers. As your national commander, and as a veteran caregiver who continues to benefit from this crucial support, I can personally attest to its transformative power.

Caregiving is not a task for the faint of heart. It demands immense physical and emotional strength, often leaving caregivers feeling invisible and isolated and teetering on the brink of burnout. Tragically, over 60% of caregivers experience burnout, and far too many are unaware of where to turn for help. In my role, I've had the privilege of witnessing the tangible impact of DAV Caregivers Support, and I've had the honor of amplifying caregivers' voices and testifying to their critical needs.

What drew me to this organization more than 25 years ago was the opportunity to secure justice for my fellow veterans and ensure that our nation's sacred promise to them was upheld. But none of that would have been possible without the steadfast support of those around me—including our members; leaders; my exceptional chief of staff and right-hand man, Enrique Ramos; and above all, my beautiful wife, Teresa.

As I write these words to my final magazine column as national commander, I'm as inspired as I have ever been by the passion and dedication of so many.

Let's all continue to ensure that no veteran, family member or caregiver ever faces their journey alone.

If you know a caregiver who could use a helping hand, I urge you to connect them with the resources at **davcaregivers.org**. It could be the most meaningful action you take today—one that brings real relief to someone who may be quietly struggling. ■

CONTENTS



8

Cover story
Learn how DAV's annual winter sports clinic drives innovation, and meet this year's Freedom Award recipient.



16

Clearing the path
Find out how a former Green Beret found healing through ketamine—a psychedelic option used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.



20

Disabled American Veteran of the Year
Meet the Medal of Honor recipient who continues to serve his brothers- and sisters-in-arms.

1 DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras reflects on the looming crisis of an aging veteran population and what that means for caregivers.

5 Legislation that would eliminate an unjust offset, which denies certain disabled veterans their full benefits, is back before Congress.

6 After a Gulf War veteran's diagnosis of aggressive cancer linked to burn pit exposure was rated at 0%, DAV stepped up to make certain justice was served.

12 DAV job fairs help veterans with strong job qualifications who find themselves underemployed in entry-level civilian jobs.

14 As she recovered from severe wounds sustained in an enemy attack, Iraq War veteran Latoya Lucas quickly discovered new ways to serve.

23 In a new memoir, former Marine sniper Alexander Lemons chronicles his military service and what he calls the "hidden violence of modern warfare."

26 Check out highlights from the second annual DAV Community Impact Day, dedicated to making a difference in the lives of veterans.

DAV MAGAZINE

Daniel Contreras
National Commander

Barry A. Jesinoski
National Adjutant/CEO/Publisher

B. Cody VanBoxel
National Headquarters Executive Director

Daniel J. Clare
Chief Communications and Outreach Officer

Rob Lewis
National Communications Director

Matt Saintsing
Assistant National Communications Director

Kevin C. Miller
Assistant National Communications Director

M. Todd Hunter
Assistant National Communications Director

Jonathan Kaupanger
Associate National Communications Director

Elizabeth Stetler
Associate National Communications Director

Brian Buckwalter
Senior Communications Associate

Elizabeth DePompei
Senior Communications Associate

Nikki Herrmann
Strategic Engagement & Marketing Writer

Doreen Briones
Production Manager

Marissa Coffenberry
Senior Graphic Designer

DAV MAGAZINE • JULY/AUGUST 2025
Contact us: dav.org • Toll-Free 877-426-2838 • 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018 • feedback@dav.org. Volume 67, Issue 4, *DAV Magazine* (ISSN 0885-6400). Editorial Office: DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. Telephone 859-441-7300 or toll-free (877) I AM A VET. Published and circulated bimonthly bulletin by the Disabled American Veterans, a congressionally chartered, nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. DAV homepage is dav.org. Available on recording for people who are blind or who have physical disabilities that preclude reading printed material. The magazine is mailed free to DAV and Auxiliary members who are paid subscribers. Nonmembers may subscribe for $15 per year. Periodical postage paid at office of publication, Erlanger, KY 41018, and at additional offices. Printed in the U.S.A. Change of Address: When notifying of a change of address, send former as well as new address, including ZIP code, to: DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550.



From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT
BARRY A. JESINOSKI

Staying vigilant

Nearly every day in recent months, concerned veterans have reached out to DAV, eager to know our position on the proposed staff cuts and cost-saving measures at the Department of Veterans Affairs. There's been understandable fear and anxiety. News of reductions that risk interfering with veterans' health care and earned benefits is deeply troubling, especially when those changes were first discovered through leaked documents and implemented without consultation from veterans groups like DAV.

Let me be clear: DAV will always demand a strong, fully funded and adequately staffed VA that delivers world-class health care and timely benefits to those forever changed by their service. Period.

Others may weigh in on partisan dynamics, but DAV will stay laser-focused on protecting veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors.

The VA, as the federal government's second-largest agency, certainly has room to improve how it manages its over $350 billion budget and 480,000-strong workforce. At our recent mid-winter conference, I was encouraged to hear Secretary Doug Collins pledge to redirect wasteful spending into better care and customer service for veterans. But now, that promise is being tested as the VA begins implementing a reduction in force of around 70,000 employees.

Veterans are being told that services won't be affected, but this reassurance rings hollow. The proposal to return to 2019 staffing levels ignores the present-day reality that more veterans than ever are choosing the VA, especially following the passage of the historic, bipartisan PACT Act, a major expansion of health care and benefits DAV was proud to help achieve.

DAV is not categorically opposed to reductions made in the name of efficiency. But these decisions must be guided by transparent, meaningful dialogue before the fact, not after. Too often, veterans are left out of the process and treated as an afterthought. Our members are alarmed by a troubling pattern: Veterans' voices are ignored until the damage is already done.

We demand accountability. How are these cuts being determined? What metrics are driving them? How will the VA prevent harm to veterans and their families? Without honest answers, fear grows—fear of promises broken and a heavy-handed bureaucracy replacing care with cold calculations.

Veterans are still lining up. They need and deserve dedicated, knowledgeable employees to serve them. Drastic staffing cuts now would be like removing the best mechanics from a pit crew midrace. We simply can't afford to gamble with veterans care at such a critical moment.

Any large-scale personnel change must be transparent, purposeful and grounded in veterans' needs.

Veterans can always count on DAV to shine a light on the VA when it keeps America's promise—and to hold its feet to the fire when it falls short. ■

LETTERS

Hitting a home run

In the 1932 World Series, Babe Ruth pointed to the left field stands with his bat, and when the ball arrived, he hit a home run. In National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski's article in the March/April issue ("Veterans benefits are earned, not 'generous'"), his words also hit it squarely, a home run. It's worth the read, better to copy it and carry with you should you be asked to justify benefits. "They need to be made aware that true generosity is the selfless service our veterans perform while wearing our nation's uniform." ***Harlan Mehlhop, Mankato, Minnesota***

Medal of Honor recipient Ken David

The story you shared about Ken David (March/April issue) is poignant. It's close to a miracle that he survived. Imagine throwing satchel charges back to the enemy! I send my deepest respect and admiration to Ken David and the people who did the years of research to get the first medal upgraded. The story of the medal would make a good book. The research itself is actually as interesting as the battle David was in. ***Arnold Howard, Converse, Texas***

Editor's Note: *Learn more about Ken David, who was selected as the 2025 Disabled American Veteran of the Year, on Page 20.*

Compensation for widows

My husband spent 1969–1970 in Vietnam. He died Feb. 2 from an inoperable brain tumor and diabetes from exposure to Agent Orange. I think spouses should be compensated for losing their loved ones from PTSD, Agent Orange and tumors from burn pit exposure. I lost the love of my life of 52 years. Too many veterans are dying from these tumors. ***Nancy Gibson, Baltimore, Maryland***

Editor's Note: *DAV benefits advocates can assist family members with obtaining survivors benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Visit* ***benefitsquestions.org*** *to get in touch with assistance in your state.*

Recommending DAV to my brothers and sisters

DAV helped me before I became a life member, so I also put my brother in touch with the organization. With DAV's help, he was able to keep his stress level down and control his PTSD. I continue to support DAV and their programs. I also recommend that my brothers and sisters seek DAV for assistance and information on the latest services available. ***Jerry Farrington, Cambria, Wisconsin***

MDMA therapy for PTSD

Thank you for supporting and championing a disciplined approach to helping vets. There are so many layers to our onions that it takes multiple ways to get our compasses reoriented. Well done for your ongoing care and support of vets everywhere. ***Rodney Furr, Southampton, Massachusetts***

Winter sports clinic veterans research

Thank you to the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and DAV for including our research from the Human Engineering Research Laboratories, a joint venture between the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and the VA. The veteran participants and their families were wonderful and, as always, provided important information to further our research and development and identify new needs to improve VA health care and veterans' health, independence and quality of life. It was a pleasure to meet DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras and share an overview of our research and development. ***Dr. Rory Cooper, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania***

DAV support

As a surviving spouse, I went to two other organizations for assistance. One never called me back. On a call with the other, the representative curtly said that I didn't qualify for any benefits. A friend recommended DAV. So I called and explained my situation. They told me to come down right away and fill out the paperwork. Within a couple of months, I had benefits. This is the best veteran organization! ***Marina Doerfer, via Facebook***

Filling the gap in DAV membership

I'm forever grateful to DAV. I attended a VA Homeless Veterans Stand Down in California, and a lady literally pulled me into their DAV trailer. I had no idea what a VA claim or benefits were. I just knew I was homeless and needed food and shelter. The transition from military to civilian is no easy feat. But together, we are stronger. I'm continuing the mission to fill that gap so that the next generation can do the same, if not better than us. ***Ray Apolinario, Port Saint Lucie, Florida***

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.

Major Richard Star Act reintroduced

Proposed legislation would eliminate unjust offset that denies some disabled veterans full compensation from military service



By Kevin C. Miller

Under current law, not all retired service members with a service-connected disability receive their full retirement pay and disability benefits.

A veteran must have completed a minimum of 20 years of service and have a combined Department of Veterans Affairs disability rating of 50% or more to qualify for both programs without any financial offsets. DAV has long advocated that the current law is unfair and denies some disabled veterans, those with a disability rating of 40% or less, the full compensation they earned from their years of military service.

Additionally, retirees who were unable to serve the full 20 years due to combat-related disability have their retirement pay reduced dollar-for-dollar by the amount of their disability compensation. This offset currently affects over 50,000 combat-injured military retirees, including DAV life member and Purple Heart recipient Latoya Lucas.

Lucas medically retired in 2003 after suffering a near-fatal blow from a rocket-propelled grenade that directly hit her Humvee. (For more on Lucas' remarkable journey and recovery, read "Here for a reason" on Page 14.)

"Every year since I retired, I see the pay that was offset when I receive my end-of-year statement from the [Department of Defense]," said Lucas. "We need to fix this long-standing injustice for veterans who had their military careers cut short due to combat-related injuries like myself."

The Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 2102), reintroduced in March, would eliminate the offset between military retirement pay and VA disability compensation, extending eligibility for concurrent receipt to another subgroup of veterans: those receiving combat-related special compensation but who have fewer than 20 years of service.

"The Major Richard Star Act is critical if we hope to do justice for our combat-disabled veterans, who deserve to receive full military benefits," said U.S. Rep. Abraham Hamadeh, a former Army intelligence officer and member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "The Major Richard Star Act has rightly earned bipartisan support. We cannot deny the fact that we as a nation have an obligation to those who have served so selflessly. The veteran is entitled to the full concurrent receipt of benefits they've earned. I am proud to support this bill as an original co-sponsor."

The bill is named for Army Maj. Richard Star, an Ohio native who enlisted in 1988 and later became an engineering officer. Suspected lung cancer from burn pit exposure in Iraq and Afghanistan led to his medical retirement and untimely death in 2021 at age 51. Until his death, Star was a dedicated advocate for his fellow disabled veterans.

"For too long, a policy has existed that unfairly reduces the retirement pay of medically retired combat veterans who also receive VA disability compensation," said DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras. "Medically retired combat veterans should never be penalized by having their earned benefits reduced. DAV looks forward to working with Congress to correct this significant injustice." ■

Stay Informed

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

JUSTICE delivered in a flash

DAV helps Gulf War veteran quickly correct VA claim error after aggressive lymphoma diagnosis linked to burn pit exposure

By Matt Saintsing

Steve Visco sat in a state of shock as his oncologist explained that his cancer had advanced and chemotherapy would be the next step. The retired Air Force colonel had grown suspicious because of symptoms like fatigue.

"I was feeling really tired, and I wasn't eating; I had no appetite," said Visco. "These are all classic examples of lymphoma, and I knew it had progressed."

By the summer of 2023, he had lost nearly 20% of his body weight. Lymph nodes around his beltline, upper thighs and back were swollen, ranging from the size of a pea to larger than a walnut. Doctors biopsied the cancer and found that one-third of Visco's lymph nodes in his upper back had transformed from follicular to diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, a potentially more aggressive and faster-growing subtype of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

In consultation with his doctors, Visco agreed to chemotherapy.

He also filed for disability through the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2024 without assistance. When the claim for the cancer came back approved but at 0%, he was more than discouraged.

"I knew something was wrong. I just knew this was a mistake," said Visco. "I was confident that if I got the right person, it would all be resolved."

That right person was DAV benefits advocate Amanda Almaraz.

"As I was listening to what he was telling me about this type of lymphoma and the treatment





Retired Air Force Col. Steve Visco as a captain standing below an aircraft (above). He was diagnosed with lymphoma, a PACT Act presumptive condition, years after his service in Saudi Arabia. It would take DAV to correct an error to secure his earned veterans benefits.

> “I knew something was wrong. I just knew this was a mistake. I was confident that if I got the right person, it would all be resolved.”
>
> —*Steve Visco*

that he underwent, [I realized] that it’s basically considered still active,” said Almaraz.

Visco was first diagnosed with lymphoma four years earlier, after he found a lump on his neck that surgeons then removed and biopsied.

The follicular lymphoma was indolent, meaning it was progressing gradually and might not cause symptoms. In many cases, it’s considered an uncurable chronic disease, according to the American Cancer Society. So Visco’s doctors initially adopted a “wait and watch” strategy rather than jumping straight into other treatments.



Almaraz

Visco has no family history of cancer in any part of his immediate or extended family. However, one oncologist wrote in a medical note that the cause may be environmental and noted his 27 years of service in the Air Force.

Lymphoma of any type is a presumptive condition under the PACT Act. The DAV-championed legislation was the largest expansion of veterans benefits for toxic exposures in history, unlocking VA disability and health care for Vietnam War, Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans who served in qualifying countries. In Visco’s case, he deployed to Saudi Arabia during the lead up to the Gulf War and in subsequent years.

As a staff officer responsible for planning during Operation Desert Shield, Visco’s first stint in Saudi Arabia was just outside the capital city of Riyadh. But when he returned three more times, Visco found himself 60 miles away in the middle of the desert.

“We were staying in tents, and burn pits were there,” Visco said.

American military burn pits were ubiquitous in many countries, including Saudi Arabia. They were efficient at reducing large amounts of waste, but they were also found to cause varying diseases and cancers, including lymphoma. Burn pits were used to dispose of everything from extra equipment to computer hard drives, tires, tents and even human waste. What was less clear at that time was how the billowing black smoke would affect service members and veterans for years to come.

As burn pit exposure is a PACT Act presumptive, the VA must, by law, conclude that Visco’s cancer stemmed from his service. And according to federal regulations, a 100% rating should be granted for non-Hodgkin lymphomas when there is an active disease in treatment or with an indolent phase.

When Visco contacted DAV after receiving his disappointing news, Almaraz, the national service office supervisor in Washington, D.C., knew she could help. She unearthed an error in which the compensation and pension examiner neglected to check a box next to the word “indolent.”

Realizing a clear and unmistakable error, Almaraz contacted her counterparts at the VA to rectify the inaccuracy. After speaking with VA officials, they granted Visco the proper rating within hours.

“It’s obvious that DAV has the knowledge and the resources and contacts to make things happen,” said Visco. “I’m very grateful to DAV. I’m very grateful to Amanda. I’m just very grateful.”

“When DAV and VA work together, we can make great results for our veterans,” added Almaraz. ■



CRITICAL PEAKS

Annual winter sports clinic drives advances in rehabilitation and therapy for disabled veterans

By Brian Buckwalter

Trigger warning: *This story contains a graphic account of military sexual trauma.*

Dana Liesegang's first time Nordic skiing was the freest she ever felt, and nearly three decades later, she's still at it.

"It's just so peaceful and gives me the ability to move," she said. "It just opens your heart."

For someone who once felt trapped in her own body, the sensation of movement is restorative. Liesegang says adaptive sports, especially Nordic skiing, have been her reason to live and seek healing.

"It's given me the courage to advance further than I ever thought I'd go," she said.

Looking to get out on her own, Liesegang enlisted in the Navy when she was 18. College wasn't for her, and she loved being around ships. Her father had been a sailor and worked at Northwest Marine Iron Works in Portland, Oregon. She remembers as a kid tagging along and running around the decks of ships in the yard.

But in 1990, her military career ended only a few months after it started. Liesegang was raped by another sailor, thrown off a 75-foot cliff in San Diego and left to die.

She woke up from an 18-day coma with most of the vertebrae in her neck broken. The spinal cord injury left her paralyzed from the neck down. Her doctors told her she'd never be able to breathe on her own again. As dire as her prognosis was, Liesegang was determined to have the final say and began doing what she could to get off a respirator.

"Had I not fought for my ability to breathe, I would probably still be on a respirator," she said.

Breathing on her own meant Liesegang was able to leave the intensive care unit in San Diego and transfer to a Department of Veterans Affairs spinal cord injury unit

in Seattle. There, doctors discovered that her injury was incomplete—meaning it was possible she could regain some motor function.

Liesegang's physical therapist in Seattle introduced her to adaptive sports, and nine months after her injury, she was far from a hospital, playing rugby in her first National Veterans Wheelchair Games. That experience was the springboard to attending the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in 1993. The clinic is co-presented every year by DAV and the VA.

At the time, most of the participants were Vietnam veterans.

"It was a lot wilder back then," Liesegang said. "But they taught me the ropes; they taught me everything I know. Without the Vietnam veteran [participants], we wouldn't have any of what we have right now."

Those veteran participants in the early years of the clinic were mentors to Liesegang, and through their encouragement, she started Nordic skiing in 1996. They were also early advocates of the benefits of the clinic, which has become a hub of innovative solutions for therapists and a center of treatment for thousands of severely disabled veterans over its 39-year history.

"Adaptive sports is something that is an underutilized tool in most rehabilitation," said Justin Laferrier, a physical therapist and volunteer with the clinic's seating and prosthetic team. "I've had a number of patients tell me in the past that this is the first time they've felt like themselves, even if they weren't athletes before."

Laferrier is the associate department chair of the physical therapy department at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. He's also a Marine and Army veteran, serving as a physical therapist in the latter. He's led amputee rehabilitation programs at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and the Center for the Intrepid at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in Texas.

He said there are strong links between adaptive sports and reductions in depression, increases in self-esteem, post-traumatic growth and overall physical benefits in veterans.

Nearly 400 participants, including Liesegang, went to Snowmass Village, Colorado, in early April for the 2025 winter sports clinic to experience these benefits. Veterans with disabilities, including blindness, paralysis, severe traumatic brain injury and limb loss, had the opportunity to participate in Alpine and Nordic skiing, scuba diving, sled hockey, curling, cycling, rock climbing and more.

Kendra Betz, the clinic's seating and prosthetics team lead and a physical therapist with the Veterans Health Administration's National Center for Patient Safety, said each activity is designed to expose veterans to movement despite their disability.

"If we can encourage people to get off the couch and out the door and doing stuff, then somehow everything falls into place," Betz said. "[This clinic] really empowers people to make those adjustments for the rest of their life."

For VA recreational, occupational and physical therapists, the clinic also serves as an annual think tank and proving ground for many adaptive scenarios, allowing clinical providers to come together to discuss, innovate and evaluate technologies and advancements in both adaptive sports and daily life for veterans with complex impairments.

Betz said they do this by looking at every step of a veteran's experience, starting the moment they leave their house, learning where friction points are as they navigate the challenges of traveling by air, staying in a hotel, navigating unfamiliar places and participating in activities. Because there's a large gathering of providers and veterans with a wide variety of limitations, therapists can quickly iterate and develop tailored solutions for improved quality of life.



A fall off a 75-foot cliff in 1990 left Navy veteran Dana Liesegang paralyzed from the neck down, but adaptive sports like Nordic skiing have given her the chance to move and feel free. Her desire to have more freedom of movement on the course led her to help develop an adaptive device called a slider for the sport.

2025 DAV FREEDOM AWARD RECIPIENT: **Devora Exline**





Navy veteran Devora Exline is working to become an adaptive sports coach to bring the joy she found through them to others.



Devora Exline spent 26 years serving as a Navy corpsman, but multiple traumatic brain injuries, other debilitating injuries and chronic pain made adjusting to civilian life difficult.

"I've always had a positive attitude," Exline said. "I know for a long time that was gone, and it really scared me."

In 2012 she was introduced to adaptive sports, attending the VA's National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic in San Diego. The following year, Exline attended her first winter sports clinic and has never looked back.

"[Adaptive sports] really brought that joy back into my life that I missed," she said.

For several years, surgeries to address some of her injuries prevented her from being able to Alpine ski standing up. She became proficient using a sit-ski, but her goal at this year's clinic was to go back to standing.

"That would be my 'miracle on the mountainside,'" she said.

On her first day on the slopes, she achieved her goal.

"You can do anything you set your mind to," Exline said. "It's just a matter of how hard do you want to work for it."

"When you meet Devora, you see her perseverance, you see her passion, and you see her willingness to get back out there and ski upright," said DAV National Commander Daniel Contreras. "But you also see her devotion to wanting to help others—something she's become so passionate about that she's devoting her life to mentoring others. And that's why she's so deserving of the DAV Freedom Award."

Wanting other veterans to experience the therapeutic benefits of adaptive sports, Exline is in the process of becoming a certified adaptive sports coach.

"Regardless of what you consider a disability is, it's just the opposite; it's an ability," she said.

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

"This clinic is leading the way with providing the types of devices that are out there that we can use to help them with those goals," Betz said. "We want to get the perfect setup and teach you how to use that so that you can have baseline skills."

As a participant, Liesegang has played a major role in one of the innovations that has come from the clinic. Wanting to find a way to participate in Nordic skiing standing up, she first tried bringing a walker fitted with cross-country skis to the course. She had bracing for her knees and ankles to help support her and was able to go 10 feet.

Then, she worked with long-time volunteer ski instructor Bobby Palm over the course of several clinics to adapt and test an adaptive downhill skiing device called a slider to work with cross-country skiing. A Nordic version of the slider is now a common device used at the course, opening the sport and sensation of standing up to people who previously couldn't have that experience.

"My heart explodes with joy just seeing other people use it," Liesegang said. "That's what it's all about: passing it along. I get to see other people succeed."

It's because of that growth and progress in veterans that physical therapists like Laferrier and Betz are fierce advocates for the winter sports clinic and other adaptive sports clinics.

"If we're not gathering and taking care of these veterans, there's going to be tremendous deficits in their quality of life," Betz said.

For Liesegang, her clinic experience is shifting from being a pioneer to being a mentor, much like the Vietnam veterans were to her. She still skis, but osteoporosis means she has to take it a little easier with the activities.

"The baton has been passed, and now I'm reaching back and bringing people up," said Liesegang. "It's how we are. It's how veterans roll. You reach back and bring your brothers and sisters up. They did it for me. Now it's my turn." ■



From the NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTOR
LAMARR COUSER

Got the right skills?

We're observing a rapid work evolution. Economic swings, shifting social priorities and technological advances are changing how we do our jobs.

For many veterans, meaningful employment is about more than earning a paycheck. It's about stability, identity and the opportunity to continue serving in another capacity. But when you transition out of the military or even switch career paths, it may feel like there are too many choices and too little time to get up to speed.

Our goal at DAV is to help you prepare to face the current market with confidence. We want you to land a job you'll love—one that will provide security and satisfaction for years to come. To do that, you must understand the current labor market and what that means for you as a job seeker in the veteran community.

Across multiple sectors, hiring has slowed. Whether because of layoffs, hiring freezes, fewer job postings or longer hiring timelines, the current employment landscape has some serious challenges. Employers can be selective and have more leverage in the recruitment process, resulting in increased competition for open positions.

Tasks previously performed solely or predominantly by humans are also declining as technology becomes more versatile. But even with the rising influence of automation and artificial intelligence, human oversight is still needed.

Some industries face more uncertainty than others. For example, the federal sector is experiencing a great deal of turbulence, with budget cuts, shuttered departments, and mass firings or reductions in force.

These shifts are taking place in a world where crises are more frequent and companies need leaders and capable teams that can adapt to uncertainty and navigate complex social dynamics.

As a job seeker, you can stay competitive by focusing on industries with steady or growing demand; being open to different types of opportunities; and honing your analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, agility, leadership, social influence, resource management, quality control, technological literacy and problem-solving abilities—skills that highlight someone who can lead teams, manage talent effectively and adapt to an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Sound familiar? That's because your military training prepped you in many or all of these areas.

Use that to your advantage when applying for jobs and meeting employers. Even if you want to work for yourself or as a contractor, understanding the market and possessing the right skills remain essential.

Build your skills, grow your network and stay informed on industry trends and changes. Use our services at **jobs.dav.org** to meet people and get a feel for what companies are looking for. ■

RUNWAY TO A NEW CAREER



Job seekers from the military community face unique challenges. DAV job fairs help them get up to speed.

By Liz Stetler

After five deployments and over two decades in uniform, Eddie High was ready to retire from the Army. But the prospect of switching careers after so long in the same field came with doubts.

"After 22 years of combat, deployments and living in various locations, I am looking forward to spending more time with my family," High said.

In March, he joined more than 330 other service members, veterans and military spouses at a DAV job fair in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He spent the day networking with over 50 employers who were searching for high-quality talent to add to their teams.



High

For many transitioning service members, the job fair represents more than a chance to hand out résumés—it's a critical step in navigating an uncertain and often intimidating journey to civilian life.

High wasn't sure what to expect from the job fair or how to approach employers.

"A lot of us in the military don't know what to say to employers, because we never had to present ourselves this way," he said. "Finding the right words to say and trying not to use military jargon is a very big thing.

"And trying not to cuss," he joked.

Like many veterans, High understands that while military experiences are valuable, translating a military career into civilian terms is no easy task. That gap often results in underemployment.

"Most employers don't know how military skills translate into roles at their company, and many veterans don't know how to describe their strengths and experiences in a way that employers will understand," said DAV National Employment Director Lamarr Couser.

"This misunderstanding is a leading factor for underemployment among the veteran community, because these veterans are not employed at their skill level, and they are not being compensated for what they are actually worth on the job market. Attending DAV job fairs can alleviate that through face-to-face conversations in a military-friendly, pressure-free environment," Couser said.

Despite his initial uncertainty, High left the job fair encouraged and motivated to continue his journey.

"Because of the military, I bring reliability and expertise to my next role," he said. "Veterans have discipline, team cohesion and responsiveness. I was a little skeptical at first, but I'm glad I came."

Still a year out from his retirement date, active-duty Army soldier Adam Eisenhauer attended the Fort Campbell event with a forward-looking mindset.

"I am a maintenance supervisor. I'm mostly looking to network and make connections that might help me when I get closer to my retirement date," he said. "After so many years in the Army, I'm just looking to have a more normal work-life balance and regular schedule."

For Eisenhauer, meaningful civilian employment would allow him more time with his family and a more stable lifestyle. "There are a lot of opportunities at this job fair. It is like a runway for me to get things started now so I can lift off when I get to that point," he said.

For those at or near transition out of the military, DAV job fairs offer the chance to not only explore multiple career opportunities but also receive guidance on benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other available programs.



Eisenhauer

Couser, a service-disabled veteran who served 12 years in the Navy before transitioning to the Army National Guard and eventually retiring, recognizes the added value of benefits assistance.

"Utilizing the resources available can make or break your military transition," Couser said. "These job fairs are only one of the ways DAV supports veterans and their families, but meaningful employment is an integral part of adjusting to civilian life. It's an honor to help." ■



‘Here for a reason’

An enemy attack ended her military career 22 years ago, but this combat-wounded veteran wasn’t done serving

By Elizabeth DePompei

Combat-wounded Army veteran Latoya Lucas used to worry about people seeing the burns and scars of war that cover her body. But now, she’s proud of the sacrifice and resilience they represent. “It’s a liberated feeling, where you can just go out and just be yourself,” she said.

For Latoya Lucas, becoming a veterans advocate started from her hospital bed at what is now Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Lucas remembers waking from a deep, medicated sleep and seeing a card left by her bed. The card was from DAV.

“Just so I knew that they were there,” she said.

As someone whose life had just been forever changed by war, Lucas knew how a small gesture could be deeply meaningful. Soon, her husband was pushing her in a wheelchair, going room to room visiting other wounded service members and trying to lift their spirits.

“I couldn’t serve in uniform anymore, but I knew I wanted to continue to serve in another way,” she said.

It’s a goal Lucas has since far surpassed.

“Latoya has been a staunch advocate for ill and injured veterans and has been an incredible inspiration to so many women veterans,” said DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “I could not be prouder of her—for all her years of serving her fellow veterans and for her personal growth and tenacity to never let her injuries define her or hold her back from living a full and meaningful life.”

Lucas joined the Army in 1999 and became a heavy construction equipment mechanic. By the time she deployed to Kuwait in April 2003 at the start of the Iraq War, she was married and had a 2-year-old daughter.

As Lucas’ unit made the more than 650-mile haul from Kuwait to Mosul, in northern Iraq, Lucas was on high alert. Through intense heat and sandstorms, her convoy drove past burned-out American military vehicles. She thought of Shoshana Johnson, one of seven soldiers ambushed and captured by enemy forces on a similar

journey just weeks before. Eleven other soldiers had been killed.

Then, on July 21, 2003, three months into her deployment, Lucas came face-to-face with the perils of war. Before daybreak, Lucas was in a two-Humvee convoy and headed down the dark, desolate road they so often traveled.

She remembers seeing the first rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) narrowly miss the lead vehicle and hit the front of hers. A second RPG hit directly under her seat, ejecting her from the Humvee. As Lucas woke on the ground bleeding, she heard enemy gunfire. Then she saw her Humvee start rolling down the hill toward her.

"And then my sergeant sat on the back tire to prevent it from really crushing me," Lucas said.

The left side of her body was severely burned. Her pelvis was broken. Flesh from her thigh and arm had been blown off. What followed were multiple surgeries, painful skin grafts and five months of inpatient care at Walter Reed.

Lucas was left with the scars of war and the invisible battle with post-traumatic stress. Twenty-two years later, she still struggles with that trauma, along with pain, limited mobility and cognitive issues. The anniversary of that day is one of reflection, but there isn't a day that goes by that Lucas doesn't think about what happened in Iraq.

And yet, the feeling that overwhelms her most is gratitude. She thinks about how, if she had died that day on the road in Iraq, her 2-year-old daughter would have been left without a mother and her husband without his life partner. Instead, she survived, watched her daughter grow into an accomplished woman and celebrated her 25th wedding anniversary in 2024.

"I just feel so blessed … that, you know, God has allowed me since that time to see so much," Lucas said. "I feel like I'm here for a reason, and over the past 20 [plus] years, I've just been trying to chase that purpose."

Lucas has publicly shared her story countless times, including through DAV's national public service announcement campaign, "Victories for Veterans." She also represented DAV as a member of the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

"To be on that board and represent the combat-wounded female veteran community, it was important," Lucas said.

Today, her advocacy is focused on securing the passage of the Major Richard Star Act, which would allow combat-disabled retirees with fewer than 20 years of service—like Lucas—to collect retirement pay, without reduction, along with VA disability compensation.

"I had aspirations of being a career soldier," Lucas said. "That was cut short because I was serving my country."

Lucas said the inability to receive disability and retirement pay concurrently is one "injustice that really needs to be corrected" for herself and so many others like her.

Advocating for the bill's passage is just one more opportunity for Lucas to continue her service to veterans, a mission that began in the aftermath of July 21, 2003.

"It's just been a remarkable journey," she said. ■



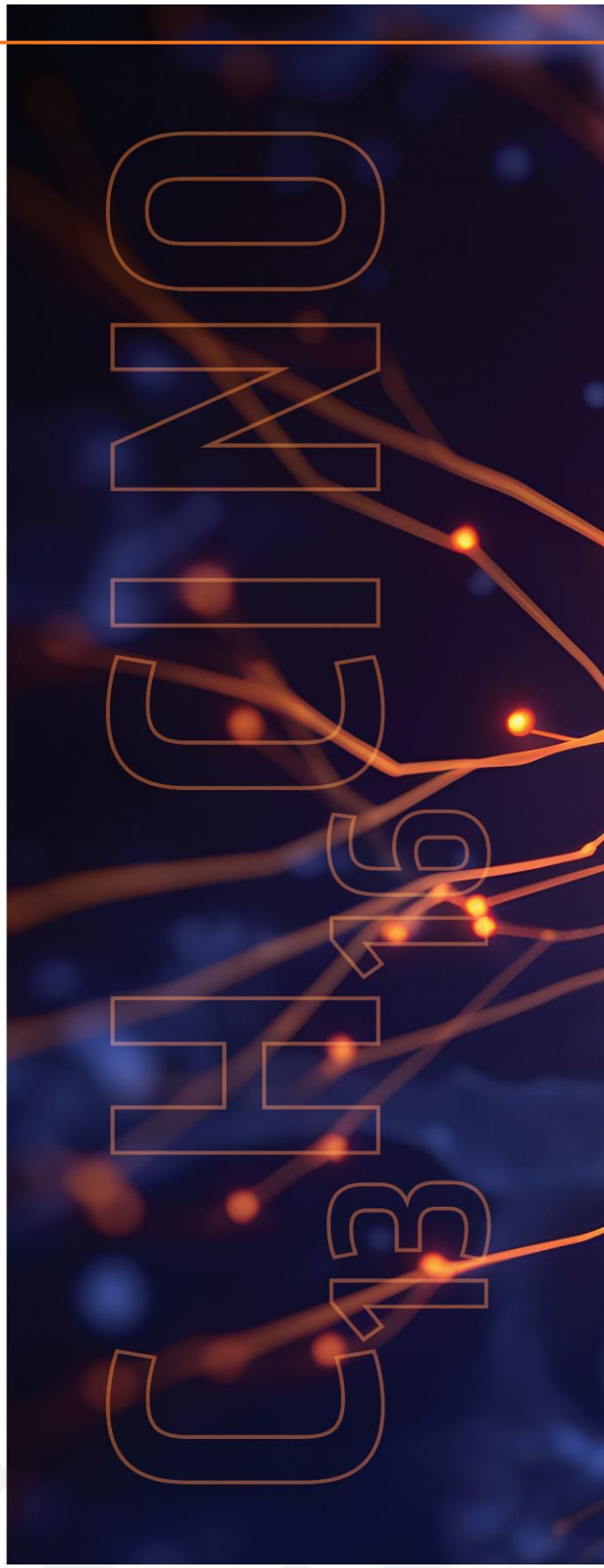


On July 21, 2003, two rocket-propelled grenades hit Lucas' Humvee. One struck right under her seat, ejecting her from the vehicle. The left side of her body was severely burned and her pelvis was broken, among other injuries. Lucas underwent multiple surgeries and skin grafts and was hospitalized for five months.

Guided by ketamine

A former Green Beret finds unexpected healing from at-home psychedelic treatment

By Matt Saintsing



The first time Mathew Bessler handled ketamine was for his military working dog, a Belgian Malinois. Army veterinarians issued the anesthetic controlled substance in the unfortunate event that dogs like Bessler's—trained to track personnel and detect explosives—became injured.

"If they got shot, had any trauma or anything like that, they'd use ketamine to sedate them," said Bessler, who served with the 10th Special Forces Group as an engineer sergeant.

Thankfully, he never had to administer the drug.

But little did Bessler know he'd one day use ketamine as an at-home treatment for severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—a condition he developed after service in Somalia, Haiti and multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ketamine was first synthesized in 1962. During the 1970s, service members in Vietnam used it for battlefield surgery; however, much like other drugs, ketamine left the lab and the field and was quickly abused. By the 1990s, much of the conversation about the anesthetic centered around its illicit use, and in 1999, it was listed as a federally controlled substance.

However, a new dawn of research has sparked scientific inquiry into ketamine's potential healing power for mental health disorders. Studies conducted in the early 2000s showed ketamine could be effective for treatment-resistant depression. Today, medical professionals use it to provide long-awaited relief for those suffering from that condition.

Service had taken a toll on Bessler. He once had a hamstring reattached, extensive injuries to both of his feet, and torn ligaments and tendons in his shoulders. He also suffered a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) in his pre-frontal cortex, the part of the brain that regulates emotion, cognitive control and decision-making.



Beyond his physical wounds, Bessler has struggled with the mental and emotional scars of war. His TBI mimicked another serious health condition's symptoms, which included mood swings, irritability and impulsiveness.

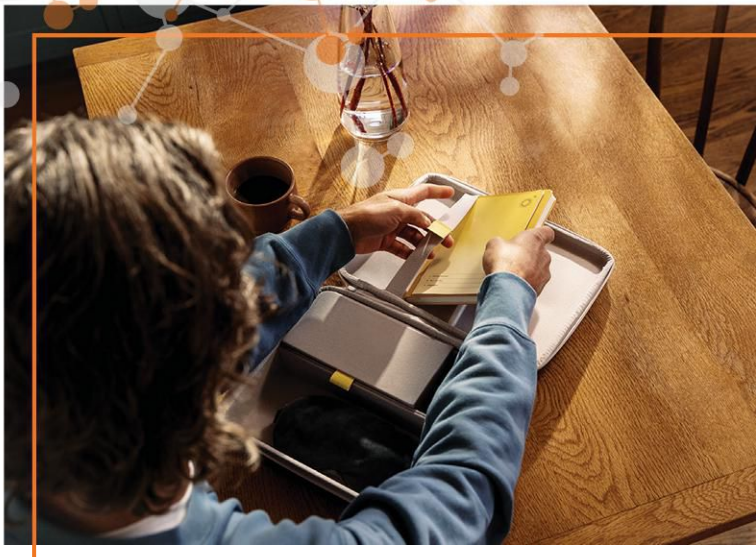
"It was almost like a bipolar psychosis," he said. "There was no way to get control of it because somebody could say one thing, or I could smell something, or I could see something, or something would happen, and it would flip the switch, and it was downhill from there."

The growing interest over the past 25 years in researching ketamine's potential therapeutic use has led to hundreds of private clinics offering it nationwide and to companies offering at-home treatments.

"I've been through almost all of the drugs [the Department of Veterans Affairs] would try to give you," Bessler said. "And the only ones they gave me are the ones that mess with my psyche so much they don't work."

He receives his ketamine in a kit made available by Mindbloom, a U.S.-based telehealth company specializing in at-home, clinician-guided ketamine therapy.

A 2022 study from scientists at Johns Hopkins University and New York University School of Medicine found that 62% of Mindbloom clients reported significant improvements in depression or anxiety, and more than 25% achieved remission. Other clinical studies indicate ketamine can improve moods and decrease suicidal ideation.



Mindbloom provides at-home kits that clients can use to enhance and guide the ketamine experience.

"The huge upshot is, you don't have to take a daily pill for the rest of your life," said Michael Petegorsky, chief strategy officer at Mindbloom. "So it is more effective and helps many people get better fast and stay better."

For Bessler, it began with a pill that he placed under his tongue. After seven minutes, he spat it out and waited for the effects before drifting off into a dreamlike, surreal state. For the treatment to be most effective, Petegorsky said that setting intentions and holding integration sessions between treatments can increase ketamine's benefits.

"Ketamine helps just on its own, but when you do the work around it, you get more benefits, and they last longer," Petegorsky said.

"Set and setting" is a key concept in psychedelic therapy, referring to the mindset of the individual and the environment where the experience takes place. Positive mindset and safe surroundings can help make the experience healing rather than distressing.

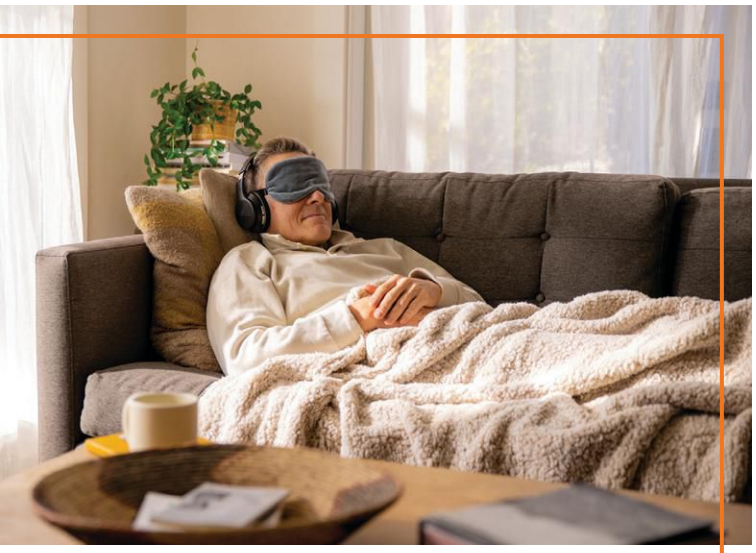
Bessler felt the drug's effects fade. When the session ended, he contacted his guide to discuss what he experienced.

"It forces you to go through and evaluate some things," Bessler said. "In my case, it allowed me to accept and move past things."

Ketamine induces a dissociative state, often making patients feel detached from their surroundings and even their bodies. Its effects on neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to make new connections—may help reverse trauma-related patterns.



Matthew Bessler stands with a Belgian Malinois military working dog before a mission in Iraq. Bessler would complete numerous deployments, eventually leading to him seeking ketamine for treatment of PTSD.



Once a client ingests ketamine, they relax under a blanket before discussing the experience with a guide online who can help the client make sense of their experience.

In those with depression and PTSD, neuroplasticity is often impaired, reinforcing harmful thought loops. After a ketamine session, a brief "window of plasticity" opens, creating an opportunity for therapy and reflection.

For Bessler, it helped reduce anxiety and hypervigilance. He's now able to eat in restaurants, attend crowded events and spend time in downtown Austin—free from the shadow of past trauma like the Battle of Mogadishu.

While ketamine therapy is legal in all 50 states when prescribed by licensed medical professionals, the landscape of its administration is rapidly evolving. The proliferation of ketamine clinics—estimated to number between 1,200 and 1,500 across the U.S.—has led to a wide variance in treatment protocols. Some clinics offer intravenous infusions, others provide lozenges or nasal sprays, and the frequency and dosage of treatments can differ significantly. This inconsistency raises concerns about patient safety and the efficacy of treatments, especially in facilities lacking rigorous medical oversight.

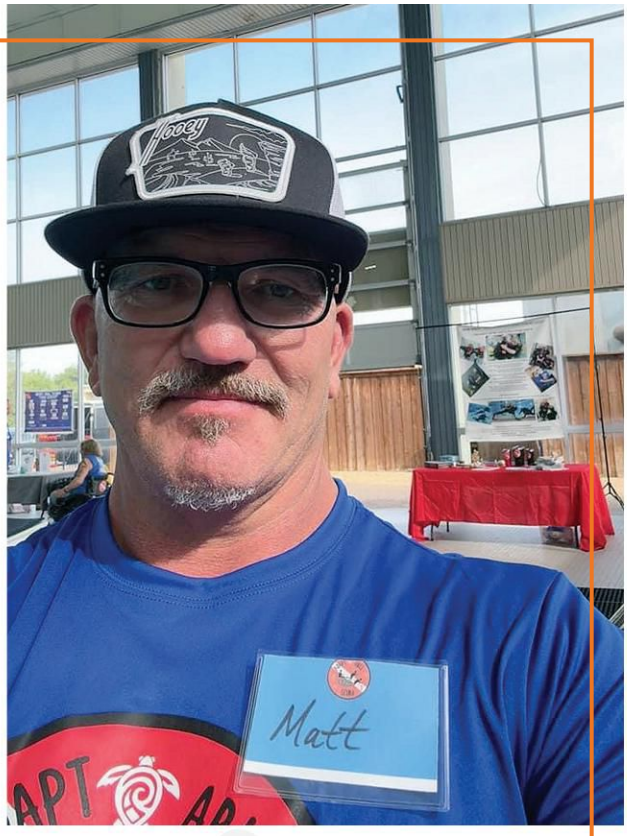
Moreover, the rise of at-home ketamine treatments has prompted warnings from health authorities. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has expressed concerns about the risks associated with unsupervised use, including potential abuse and adverse psychiatric events. Experts caution that without standardized protocols and proper monitoring, some treatment models could inadvertently hinder patient recovery rather than help.

The VA offers ketamine treatments for certain mental health conditions. The FDA-approved nasal spray, Spravato, is available through the VA for veterans with major depressive disorder or treatment-resistant depression. Unlike Mindbloom's in-home treatments, Spravato is administered only under medical supervision, meaning veterans cannot administer the drug to themselves. Less common are intravenous treatments offered by the VA.

While the FDA has not approved ketamine for PTSD, it is often prescribed off-label, as research has shown promise in treating PTSD. However, more robust data is needed. Researchers at the VA are investigating the safety and efficacy of multiple ketamine infusions with prolonged exposure therapy for veterans with PTSD. Yale University is studying ketamine's effects on PTSD when paired with trauma-focused psychotherapy. And several Stage 2 trials are hoping to uncover similar facts.

Bessler remains an advocate for ketamine and hopes the treatment will someday be widely available to veterans.

"Ketamine has broadened the road," said Bessler. "It took me from a rocky trail up the side of a cliff to a broad, flattened road. I can actually see my path and pick where I'm going." ■

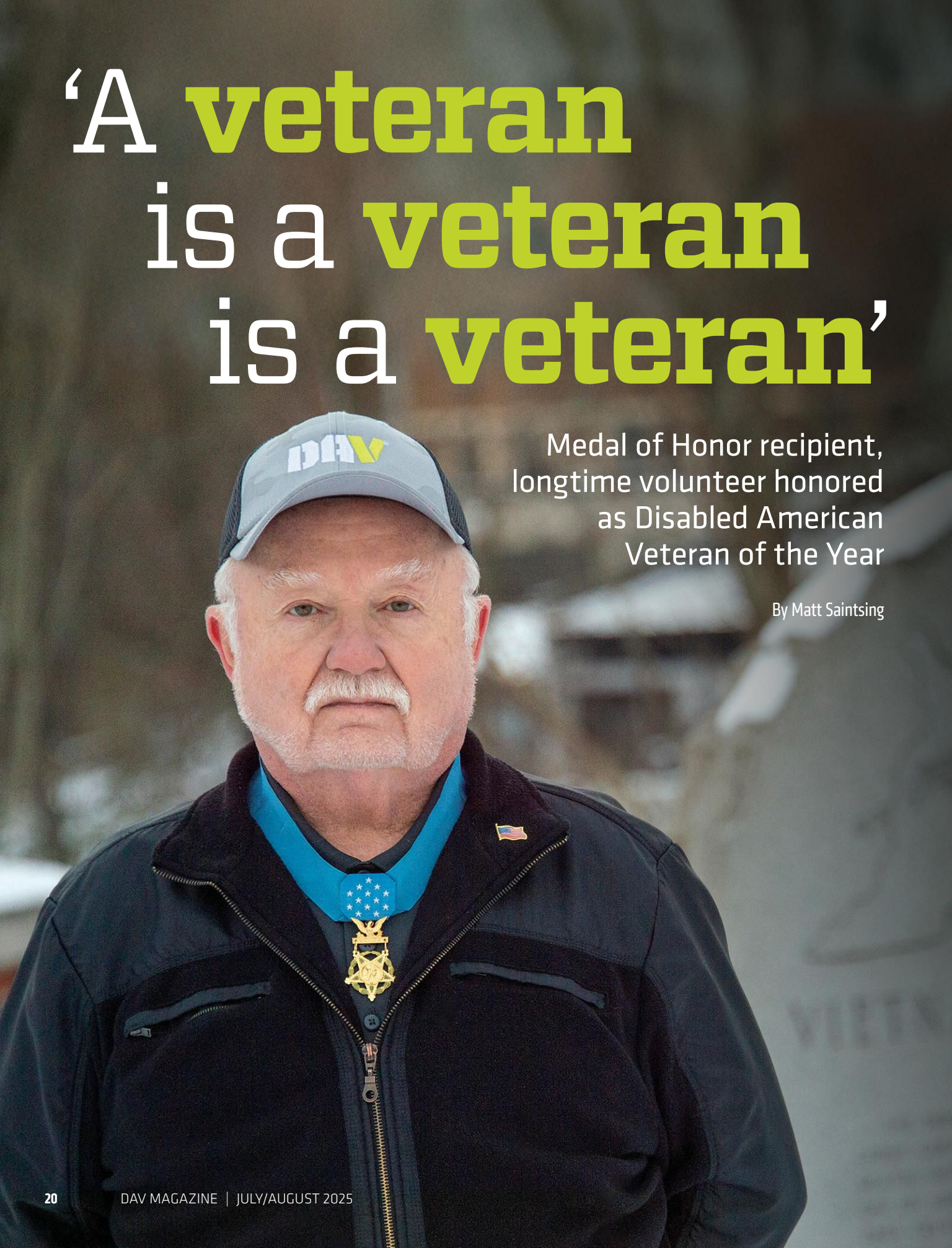


Today, Bessler has seen healing success through at-home ketamine treatments. He remains an advocate for their use and hopes other veterans can find the same relief.

‘A veteran is a veteran is a veteran’

Medal of Honor recipient, longtime volunteer honored as Disabled American Veteran of the Year

By Matt Saintsing



To those who know him, Ken David is as humble and caring as they come. Despite recently receiving the Medal of Honor—the nation's highest military award for bravery and valor in combat—his continued willingness to serve his fellow veterans hasn't wavered.

As a determined volunteer and adjutant of DAV Ohio Chapter 11, which has strong ties to its community in Warren, David always sets everything aside to lend a hand to his brothers- and sisters-in-arms. He helps organize and run free dinners for veterans and their families, thanks to donated food from a local restaurant. He's helped cover the cost of groceries or a meal for veterans who walk into his chapter, to ensure no one goes hungry.

"It just shows the kind of caliber of man he is," said Sherry Williamson, an administrative assistant with the DAV Department of Ohio, who has known David for over a decade.

David's courage on the battlefield earned him the Medal of Honor, and now, his continued service to fellow veterans has secured him the title of 2025 Disabled American Veteran of the Year. He has remained a devoted advocate, never letting hardship deter his mission to help others, since returning from Vietnam.

On May 7, 1970, David's unit came under intense enemy fire. When the platoon leader was killed, David handed off his radio and launched a fierce counterattack. Though vastly outnumbered, he held the line. David also left the safety of the perimeter to protect his wounded comrades.

"Each time the enemy attempted to concentrate its fire on the wounded ... David would jump from his position and yell to draw fire away from his injured comrades and back to himself," his Medal of Honor citation states. "Refusing to withdraw ... he continued to engage the enemy."

"I kept fighting, not knowing I was even wounded," David said. "The adrenaline was pumping so high, and Sarge kept screaming on the radio for help."

Through it all, one thought drove him: "I got to help my boys." Despite being injured by a satchel charge, he continued hurling grenades to protect incoming medevac helicopters. He wasn't evacuated until the enemy retreated—thanks in large part to his fearless resolve.

Of the 17 men he saved that day, 14 received Purple Hearts, as did he. Although he earned the Medal of Honor in 1970, it would take over half a century to be officially recognized.

After recovering and serving briefly at Fort Dix, New Jersey, he was discharged from the Army and returned home to Warren, where a new battle awaited.

When David returned, he felt isolated. Living with his parents on a dead-end street, he spent much of his time near the creek in the backyard, building a rock wall to create a barrier when it overflowed. David found the running water to be peaceful.



Ken David (middle) stands with Frank Gillespie (left), a DAV life member and commander of Chapter 11 in Warren, Ohio, and Bob Marino (right), chapter sergeant-at-arms, at a chapter meeting honoring David's service and sacrifice.

> "I told myself, whatever I can do to fight to make it easier for the next person behind me, that's what I'm going to do."
>
> —*Ken David*

"He pretty much did that on a daily basis just to be by himself," said Karen Williams, David's sister. "He had a lot to deal with. When you are at war, and you see your friends and buddies blown up and die right next to you, how can anyone go through something like that and be OK?"

His persistent memories from combat affected his relationships. David instructed his family never to come upstairs to wake him up. When his mother did, he screamed in terror. David was engaged to his high school sweetheart, a carefree 20-year-old. But after

Vietnam, he was inclined to detach, often sitting in a corner. The two eventually broke up.

In addition to the mental scars of war and issues reintegrating back into American life, the physical toll of war continued to creep.

"The government took my smile away because, when you live with pain in your back and your knees, it just goes away," said David.

Williams said he was different, but his warmhearted nature endured. When he found DAV, his whole world changed, benefiting not only David but also fellow veterans in Warren.

"I told myself, whatever I can do to fight to make it easier for the next person behind me, that's what I'm going to do," David said.

David met Sam Lanza, a combat-wounded Marine who fought in the Battle of Okinawa in World War II, who quickly got David up to speed on everything about DAV and took him under his wing. Lanza died in 2018, but his legacy remains throughout Warren and Ohio.

"Sam always used this line: 'A veteran is a veteran is a veteran,'" said Herm Breuer, a member of Chapter 11. "And what he meant by that was, it didn't matter where they came from, what their upbringing was, what they did wrong or right in life. If they served in the military, then Sam would treat them with the respect they deserved."

"Ken's in this patriotic community of Warren, Ohio, and he's trying to emulate what Sam Lanza taught him," said DAV Department of Ohio Adjutant Michael Stith. "Sam was his mentor."

Lanza, who was like a father to David, was instrumental in the advocacy campaign to get David the recognition he'd earned decades ago. He enlisted the help of Breuer, who was a dedicated advocate himself, and gladly picked up the torch for David.

"There's no reason that the individual responsible for 17 other human beings still alive today isn't worthy of the nation's highest medal," said Breuer.

Then-President Joe Biden bestowed that honor on David last December, following through on Lanza's, Breuer's and others' campaigns and opening up new opportunities for David to share his story.

"He's the kind of guy who doesn't say much," said Williamson. "He's not boastful, and he would never tell you what he's gone through for this nation, but now we all know, and others will soon."

David has now reached national prominence as one of the 61 living Medal of Honor recipients. But to those who call him a friend, he's just Ken, a dedicated DAV member who is always willing to help.

"I feel that DAV membership, not just in this area but all over the United States, are elated to have one of their members receive the Medal of Honor," said Jeffrey Wittneben, Department of Ohio commander. "It's an honor of a lifetime, and Ken certainly deserves it." ■





DAV life member and World War II combat veteran Sam Lanza (above) fought hard for David to receive the Medal of Honor. Lanza was David's mentor, and his legacy lives as the namesake of the building housing Chapter 11, where David serves as adjutant (left).



PHOTO BY DAVID FURST/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

HIDDEN VIOLENCE OF MODERN WARFARE

After multiple Iraq deployments, Marine sniper Alexander Lemons faced mysterious illnesses, likely from toxic exposures, TBI and PTSD

By Kevin C. Miller

Former Marine Corps scout sniper Alexander Lemons is one of countless veterans battling the effects of the "toxic triangle"—a deadly intersection of toxic exposure, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that is common among combat veterans. These invisible injuries often overlap, making diagnosis, treatment and recovery exponentially more complex.

"As infantry veterans, we expect injuries like torn rotator cuffs, aching knees and compressed vertebrae," Lemons said. "But what you don't expect is stories of coughs, headaches, breathing problems and other mysterious illnesses."

Lemons' time in uniform and exposure to this triangle included three combat deployments to Iraq, where he took part in the 2003 invasion, the Battle of Najaf against the Mahdi Army, the bloody Second Battle of Fallujah—the largest urban assault by U.S. forces since Vietnam—and heavy fighting in Ramadi. He later served as a special assistant to Army Gen. David Petraeus.

Lemons' warfighting role placed him in near-constant proximity to death and violence, leading to emotional desensitization, moral injury and psychological strain, all hallmarks of PTSD. But his fellow Marines had no idea he was struggling.

"My routine with food became rigid," Lemons said. "I began to weigh food, and it started to have no taste. I took no pleasure in food and began to drop weight."

Between deployments, Lemons endured countless hospital visits for a mysterious illness. Doctors eventually discovered that an unknown virus had attacked his body. But it wasn't just physical. At the same time, Lemons was fighting a psychological battle he didn't yet understand.

Adding to his invisible wounds, Lemons was also repeatedly exposed to environmental toxins. The list was long: lead from ammunition; JP-8 jet fuel; firefighting foam; thick clouds of dust from Iraqi sandstorms; and, perhaps worst of all, open-air burn pits.

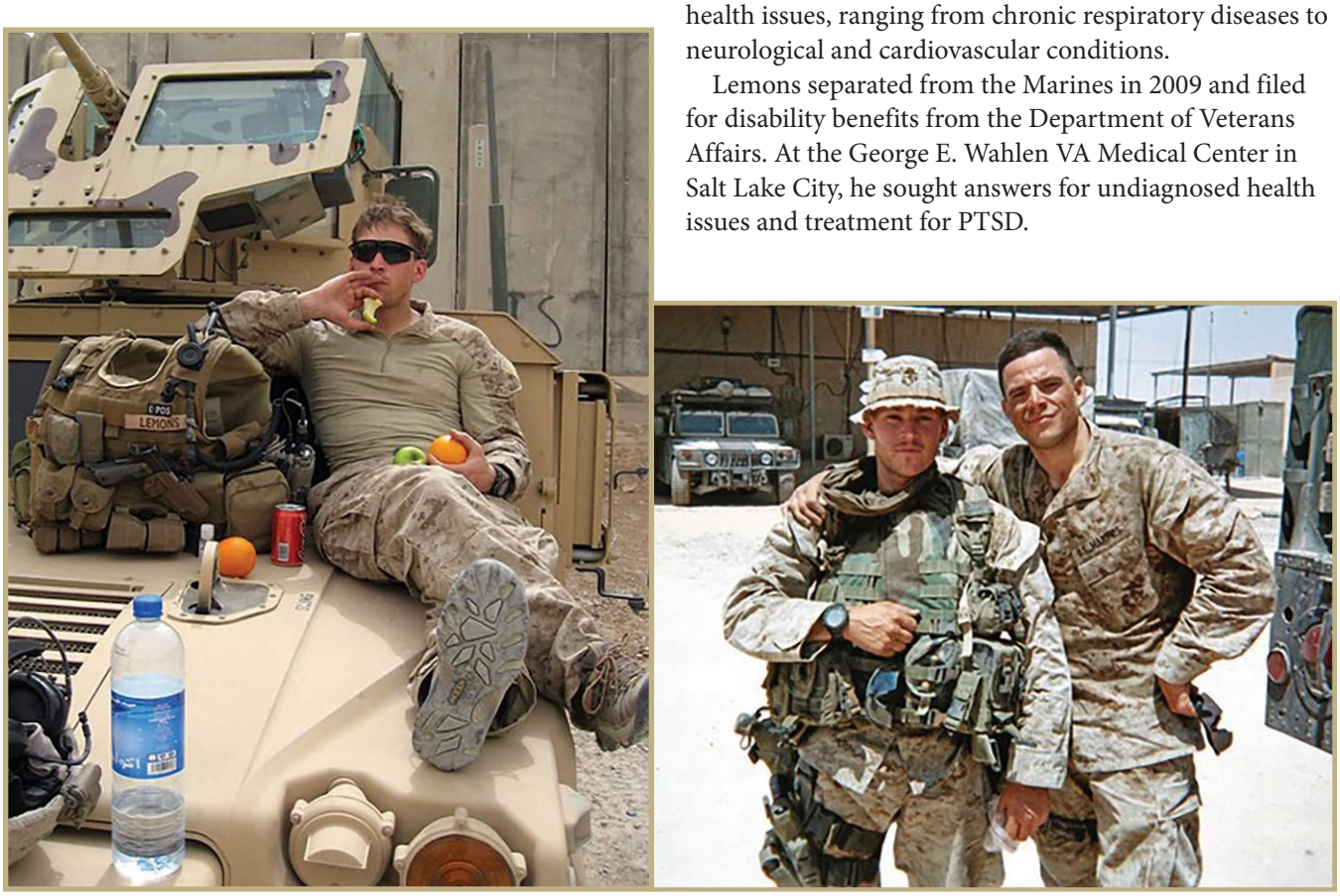
"Lithium radio batteries, blown-out tires, oil containers, brass ammo casings, medical waste and plastics were all thrown into a pit," he recalled. "We would douse it with JP-8 and light it with matches from rations until another Marine would relieve us."

Fellow Iraq War veteran Dan Clare was serving in the Air Force in Iraq in 2006 when he came across a Department of Defense memo acknowledging the health hazards of those burn pits.

"The government knew that the burn pits were toxic at the time," said Clare, who serves as DAV's chief communications and outreach officer. "This was on top of the other hazards deployed people were facing, especially the folks outside the wire. Lives were being saved at the Air Force Theater Hospital, but anyone operating on the base was being exposed daily."

Burn pit exposure has since been linked to serious health issues, ranging from chronic respiratory diseases to neurological and cardiovascular conditions.

Lemons separated from the Marines in 2009 and filed for disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. At the George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City, he sought answers for undiagnosed health issues and treatment for PTSD.



Sgt. Alexander Lemons is pictured in Basra, Iraq, in 2008 (left) and in Najaf, Iraq, in 2004 (right) alongside Chief Scout Sgt. Randy Revert. Lemons, a former Marine scout sniper, deployed to Iraq three times and took part in the Second Battle of Fallujah. During his years of service, he was exposed to a litany of illness-causing environmental toxins and was left with symptoms of PTSD and TBI.

> "Burn pits are our generation's Agent Orange. I have the receipts—and so does everybody else that served near them."
>
> — *Alexander Lemons*

During intake, clinicians uncovered the extent of his mental health struggles and his battle with disordered eating. He was diagnosed with PTSD and anorexia nervosa and referred to both an eating disorder specialist and a psychiatrist for intensive behavioral therapy.

According to a study published in the journal Military Medicine, trauma-exposed veterans face an elevated risk for eating disorders. The 2022 study revealed that nearly 8% of men and 19% of women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan self-reported symptoms of an eating disorder.

"There is no one-size-fits-all model for treating PTSD and eating disorders," said DAV Deputy National Legislative Director Jon Retzer. "The VA's understanding of military culture and its use of evidence-based treatments provide the specialized care needed to address the complex relationship between these two conditions."

Lemons also pursued a TBI screening and continued investigating the long-term effects of the virus he contracted during service. He was eventually diagnosed with severe plantar fasciitis but was not found to have sustained a TBI.

Still, the chronic cough, headaches, joint stiffness, fatigue, memory issues, and skin and eye irritation persisted. Frustrated by a lack of answers, Lemons turned to alternative therapies outside the VA. His private doctors ultimately determined he had heavy metal poisoning, likely stemming from his service-related toxic exposures.

Armed with this new information, Lemons filed a new VA disability claim related to toxic exposure. But a VA examiner ruled that none of his symptoms were linked to his deployments in Iraq.

"Burn pits are our generation's Agent Orange," Lemons said. "I have the receipts—and so does everybody else that served near them."



PHOTO BY CPL. ALFRED V. LOPEZ/U.S. MARINE CORPS

Although the PACT Act addressed many long-standing gaps in care for veterans harmed by burn pits and other known exposures, it didn't cover all toxic wounds or reform the process for how the VA presumes connections between service and illness.

To fix that, DAV and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) released *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans: A Post-PACT Act Blueprint for Reforming the VA Presumptive Process*. The 2024 report proposes a new framework to comprehensively improve how the VA responds to toxic wounds, ensuring that veterans like Lemons no longer fall through the cracks.

Despite the setbacks, Lemons has never stopped working to reclaim his health. Today, he works as an environmental restoration technician in Utah and has chronicled his military service and the lasting effect of toxic exposure in a new memoir, "Warbody: A Marine Sniper and the Hidden Violence of Modern Warfare."

"While the PACT Act was a generational legislative victory," Retzer said, "stories like Alexander Lemons' remind us that the job is far from over. We must do everything possible to finally end the wait for toxic-exposed veterans." ■

Community Impact Day 2025

Volunteers showed that heartfelt gestures can make a big difference

By Brian Buckwalter

From New Jersey to Hawaii, nearly 1,000 people committed to participating in the second annual DAV Community Impact Day in April, serving and making a difference in the lives of veterans. Many participants shared what they did with us. Here are some of our favorites.



★ HONOLULU ★

Hawaii Chapter 1 Adjutant Juan Castillo came up with the idea of having members call their roster of Oahu veterans to conduct buddy checks.

Chapter member Jacqueline Elisca was one of the volunteers. She said the veterans she spoke with were very grateful for the conversation and were touched that she took the time to reach out.

"I really enjoyed the day," Elisca said. "It was very interactive. We do the little things, but sometimes we don't see how it affects that individual."

She was even able to help one veteran who was having trouble with his Department of Veterans Affairs medical care by providing him with the information needed to resolve the issue.

"When I left, I felt like I did some good that day," Elisca said.

★ PITTSBURGH ★

Members of Pennsylvania Chapter 76 and their family members visited with residents at the Southwestern Veterans Center.

Chapter member Amber Borders, who regularly volunteers at the assisted-living facility, organized the event, which included festive decorations, snacks, cooking classes, and arts and crafts.

"We just want to bring something a little bit enjoyable for them to do, something interactive, and some people that will love and care on them," she said.

Borders' two children, daughter Adalynn, 9, and son Greyson, 5, volunteer, too. She said they both love going and help plan the visits.

"They ask me when is the next time we can go," Borders said. "We make it a whole event each time."

Her children aren't going to be the only people joining her on the next visit. Because of this experience, several others have already committed to going along.



★ SAN ANTONIO ★

Air Force veteran Zakiya Norris, her husband Juan, and her sons Aidan, 12, and Ashton, 17, spent the day helping spruce up the Soldiers' Angels flower and vegetable garden at the VA Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center.

They did general maintenance, weeded, and trimmed bushes and tree branches so patients at the facility could safely navigate the garden's paths.

"This is a great way we can all do something together," Norris said. "We enjoyed it, and the boys got a lot out of it. My older son was ready to go back the next weekend. I told him, 'Don't worry; we're going back for sure.'"

The Norris family has plans to continue beautifying the space more on their next visit.





★ MARION, ILLINOIS ★

Despite the pouring rain, about 20 members of DAV Chapter 71 and Auxiliary Unit 71 hosted a fish fry for residents at the Marion VA Community Living Center.

DAV Department of Illinois Commander Donnie Houghland said volunteers spent the afternoon cooking food, visiting veterans and helping them fish in the stocked pond at the facility.

"We want to make sure our veterans that are in long-term care facilities know that they are not forgotten," Houghland said.

He said many of the veterans who live there are permanent residents or in hospice care.

"It's one way our organization and community can come together to say thank you and give back to those who have served," said Sarah White, the Auxiliary unit commander. ■

Teaching patriotism to future generations

Fifth grade teacher uses DAV Field of Flags to show students the importance of honoring veterans on Veterans Day

By Nikki Herrmann

Growing up as the son and grandson of veterans—and after 26 years in education—Brad Puckett believes in the importance of teaching students about our nation's veterans and the meaning behind Veterans Day.

"I tell the kids just about daily, but especially on Veterans Day, the sacrifice our nation's veterans make," he said. "I tell them that veterans not only sacrifice time away from home, but they also sacrifice their lives."

In 2023, while working as a fifth grade social studies teacher at Commerce Middle School in Commerce, Georgia, Puckett decided to teach his students about patriotism with the DAV Field of Flags program after learning about its focus on honoring local veterans while also raising critical funds for ill and injured heroes.

Puckett pitched the idea to the school faculty to host a field of American flags with DAV, and he was thrilled by the support he received. Though excited that the school embraced the concept, he admitted he was initially intimidated by the workload required to bring it to life. Those worries quickly disappeared once he realized DAV provides all the necessary resources to make the event a success.

"I was afraid that it was going to be very time-consuming, but it was a really easy process to get everything set up," Puckett said.

With all the needed resources and their flag kit in hand, the school community came together to build its own field of flags. The event was such a success, they brought it back for Veterans Day in 2024.

That year was particularly special for Puckett. One evening while putting out flags, he found himself wondering about the impact the field actually had. Just then, he noticed that a man who had been driving by had pulled over. Wearing a Vietnam veteran hat, the man came over to Puckett and introduced himself as Marvin, a former Army medic.



Fifth grade social studies teacher Brad Puckett (left) stands with Vietnam veteran Marvin (right) in front of Commerce Middle School's DAV Field of Flags.

Marvin thanked Puckett for honoring veterans and for involving the younger generations, because when he and other veterans returned home from Vietnam, they were often ignored and unappreciated.

"The flags mean so much to me and all veterans," Marvin said. "The greatest tragedy is to be forgotten. Thank you for contributing to the education of the next generation. You are the hope of our nation."

After receiving that message, Puckett realized what the program truly meant to his community.

"When Marvin stopped that day, it reminded me that even if people don't say anything, they do notice," Puckett said. "And if just one person expresses gratitude, it's all worthwhile, especially when it comes from someone who didn't always receive it."

"Moments like Marvin's heartfelt thanks remind us why programs like DAV Field of Flags matter—not just for honoring our veterans but for sharing their service with our next generation," said DAV National Adjutant and CEO Barry Jesinoski. "It's thanks to teachers and supporters like Brad that we are able to continue supporting our veterans and ensure their sacrifices are not forgotten." ■

For more information If you are interested in learning more about the DAV Field of Flags program and how to get your local school involved, visit **dav.org/flags**.

VA log-on options simplified



On March 5, the Department of Veterans Affairs began modernizing its online experience to simplify sign-in options for veterans and continue to protect their identity and benefits.

The first significant change was the removal of the My HealtheVet option to sign in to all VA websites and apps. The DS Logon option will be removed after Sept. 30. Veterans can still access the My HealtheVet portal—they just need to sign in using a Login.gov or ID.me account.

Login.gov is the government's account provider for VA and other government benefits and services. ID.me is a nongovernment account provider that contracts with government and nongovernment organizations to verify a veteran's identity.

For more information

For more information on how to create an account, visit **va.gov/initiatives/prepare-for-vas-secure-sign-in-changes.**

Federal EHR deployed at 9 additional facilities

On March 31, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it will deploy the Federal Electronic Health Record (EHR) system at nine additional VA facilities in 2026. The goal of the new EHR is to provide a seamless and paperless experience for veterans as they transition from receiving care at the Department of Defense while on active duty to receiving care at VA facilities.

The following VA medical centers and their associated clinics will go live with their EHR updates in 2026: Cincinnati-Fort Thomas in Kentucky; Chillicothe, Cincinnati, Dayton and Louis Stokes Cleveland in Ohio; Fort Wayne, Marion and Richard L. Roudebush in Indiana; and the Alaska VA Healthcare System.

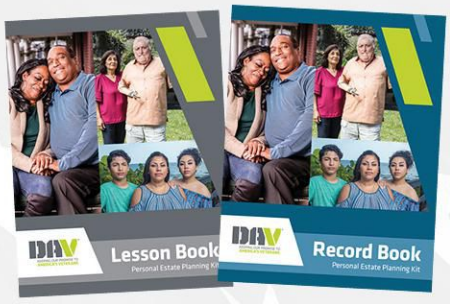
The VA plans to deploy the EHR system to 13 sites in 2026. Full implementation at every VA facility is expected as early as 2031.



This EHR system is the same one operated by the DOD. It aims to modernize the health care system and improve customer service and convenience for both VA and DOD patients.

Creating a legacy that protects you, your family and DAV

Whether you call it gift planning, estate planning, legacy planning or any other term, please know that DAV has resources available to help you create a plan that protects your family and loved ones, lessens your tax burdens, and builds an impactful legacy that will help ensure the future of your family and our nation's veterans.



LEGACY PLANNING KIT

The Lesson Book shows you the steps to get started creating a plan to protect you and your family. The Record Book helps you keep all your important information in one place.



STOCK GIVING

By donating appreciated assets that you've held for more than a year, you can save on capital gains taxes and get a charitable deduction for the full value of your gift.



FREEWILL.COM/DAV

You can use this no-cost online platform to create a legally binding last will and testament specific to the requirements of the state you live in.



BENEFICIARY DESIGNATIONS

Each institution has a specific process for naming beneficiaries (primary and secondary). You could also consider naming DAV as a beneficiary as a potential tax savings.



QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION–IRA

By making this type of donation directly to DAV, at age 70 1/2 or older, you remain in a tax bracket you're comfortable with and avoid adding any ordinary income.



CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITY

A gift that pays you for a lifetime! This type of donation ($10,000 or more) over age 60 can provide you with regular payments for life and allow DAV to further our mission.

Contact a gift planning expert at **800-216-9802, press 1**, or email **giftplanning@dav.org**.

DAV®

To learn about more ways to give, scan the QR code or visit **davplanmygift.org**.

The partner promise



Ford Model Ts headed to the second DAV national convention held in San Francisco.

For-profits help ensure promises are kept to America's veterans

By Victoria Short

Philanthropic organizations have been making DAV's mission possible since its inception. To help veterans attend the second DAV national convention, which was held in San Francisco, Henry Ford organized a cross-country caravan of 50 Model Ts, marking **Ford Motor Co.** as one of DAV's first corporate partners. Such dedication from organizations like Ford, which has donated 269 vehicles to DAV's Transportation Network, has long helped ensure promises are kept to veterans and their families. Today, corporate partners from various industries are joining the mission to expand efforts.

» Veteran Debt Assistance (VDA)

In 2024, Veteran Debt Assistance (VDA) joined DAV's ranks as a corporate partner. The organization empowers veterans to overcome the burden of debt by providing free financial resources and personalized debt relief solutions as they transition into civilian life. This year, VDA will sponsor the 2025 DAV Patriot Boot Camp entrepreneur program networking events and national convention seminars. In addition, it will participate in the Homeless Veterans Stand Down at DAV National Headquarters this fall.

"DAV's unwavering commitment to helping veterans access the benefits they've earned—and the meaningful, on-the-ground support they provide through events and outreach—reflects a deep commitment to those who've served," said VDA CEO Vlad Rosca. "We're proud to stand alongside DAV in advancing that mission."

» Otsuka

Another way companies show their commitment to veteran wellness is through advocacy and policies. Otsuka joined DAV as a corporate partner last year. Its Government Affairs Alliance Development team builds partnerships to advance policies that improve access to timely, effective care for those living with mental health conditions and brain diseases, advocating for relevant legislative and regulatory solutions. At the 2025 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in Las Vegas, Otsuka will sponsor the women veterans and psychedelic seminars focused on treatments to improve mental health.

"At Otsuka, we hold a deep respect for the value of every mind. We will not rest until mental illnesses and brain diseases are approached with the same priority and urgency as our physical health," said Otsuka Senior Director of Alliance Development and Strategic Advocacy Caroline Fisher-O'Neill. "Our collaboration with DAV highlights our shared commitment to ensuring that veterans living with mental illnesses and brain conditions receive the same priority, early intervention and equitable access to care as any physical health challenge."

» Heritage Distilling Co.

Companies also have the opportunity to customize their collaboration. This summer, Heritage Distilling Co. is creating a limited-edition DAV-branded whiskey for its Salute Series and will donate $10 per specialty bottle to DAV. The premium "whiskey that honors the worthy" is slated to be available for purchase on the company's website beginning in July. The hand-drawn artwork on the bottle pays homage to DAV's 105-year history and wide range of veterans served.

"Our latest Salute Series bourbon, Service to America Salute: Disabled American Veterans Edition, honors all our nation's veterans whose service to our great country came at a personal cost," said Heritage Distilling Co. co-founder and U.S. Army veteran Drew Kellerman. "We are thrilled to partner with DAV on this initiative and have bottled this whiskey at 105-proof in proud recognition of the 105 years that DAV has been honorably serving our disabled veterans."

"Although a lot has changed in 100 years, this remains: The generosity and creativity of organizations who partner with DAV help us keep the promise," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "What began as a forum to advocate for veterans has turned into a network of hundreds of organizations, of all different industries, who assist 1 million veterans each year." ■

By joining DAV's mission as a corporate partner, you support veterans, elevate your brand and drive change. If you know an organization that would like to join the mission, please contact **partners@dav.org**.



From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER
CHRISTOPHER J. EASLEY

Remembering. Connecting. Serving.

One year may seem like a small measure of time, but in the life of a community, it can reshape hearts, deepen connections and define purpose. A single year holds the power to honor the past, influence the present and lay groundwork for the future.

My year as Auxiliary commander is ending. The best way I can describe the past year is that it's been a song of resilience, played through both highs and lows. Looking back, what resonates most deeply is the sheer strength of our DAV and Auxiliary family. An unbreakable bond and a commitment to stand shoulder-to-shoulder bind us. That is the heart of who we are.

There are many instances from this past year that stick out in my mind. However, placing that wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was something special—a top moment in my life, no doubt. It hits you hard, standing there, thinking about all the folks who gave everything.

It was tough, though, because I missed my dad. We'd talked about him being there with me if I ever became commander. He died before that happened. But standing at the tomb, I felt him. While I was there, taking part in a poignant symbol of American sacrifice and remembrance, he was with me, making sure everything went right.

I am profoundly grateful to Brian and Ann Wilner. Their steadfast support has been an unshakable foundation, not just on that memorable day but through every step of this Auxiliary journey. They are a shining example of true compassion in action, and my appreciation for them knows no bounds. Their dedication beautifully illustrates that our mission is, at its core, deeply human. It's about making a tangible difference in the lives of real veterans and their families, moving beyond theoretical concepts to create genuine impact.

Experiences like the one I had with the Wilners serve as powerful reminders of the human element in our work. It's about more than abstract needs; it's about real people, like the veterans and their families we strive to serve through the Auxiliary.

The Auxiliary plays a vital role in championing the needs of our nation's heroes and their families by informing both policymakers and the wider public of disabled veterans' needs. Through our unified voice and unwavering dedication to service, we will continue to secure the benefits veterans have earned.

I hope you will help end my year with a renewed commitment to personal connection, reaching out to those who may need a listening ear or a helping hand. And let's welcome new members with open arms, sharing the camaraderie and purpose that make our family so special. Together, we can ensure our legacy of care and support continues to flourish. ■

Deputy National Legislative Director


Retzer

Jon Retzer, a service-connected disabled veteran of the U.S. Army and Army National Guard, was appointed as deputy national legislative director of the nearly 1 million-member DAV in May 2025. He is based at DAV Washington Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Retzer's DAV career began in 2003 as a national service officer trainee in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was first promoted to assistant supervisor of the Fort Snelling National Service Office and then to supervisor, where he served until his appointment as assistant national service director at DAV Washington Headquarters in August 2017.

In 2022, Retzer transitioned into legislative advocacy and joined DAV's legislative team as assistant national legislative director, working to shape policies that make a meaningful impact on the lives of veterans and their families. Retzer was appointed deputy national legislative director for health in August 2024, and he focused on advancing key health-related policies until his current appointment.

A native of Fridley, Minnesota, Retzer served in the Army infantry from 1991 to 1995 and continued his service with the Army National Guard until his medical separation in 1999. He is a life member of Chapter 39 in Coon Rapids, Minnesota.

Stay informed. Follow along with updates to legislation affecting veterans and their families by joining DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) at davcan.org.

DAV Auxiliary
Making a Difference

National Fall Conference
Sept. 25–27, 2025

Don't miss out. Preregister today!
Reservation cutoff is Sept. 10.

DoubleTree by Hilton
51 Walnut St., Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
- **Call 812-539-8888** and ask for the DAV Auxiliary group rate or visit **dav.la/3t5**.

Conference registration: $50
- Includes Friday evening reception

Saturday evening dinner: $TBD
- Dinner tickets must be purchased in advance and no later than Sept. 12.

Get more information:
auxiliary.dav.org/news-events/events



From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

DEBRA VARNER DANCER

Chaplains are beacons of hope

On Feb. 3, 1943, the U.S. Army transport ship SS Dorchester was carrying approximately 900 soldiers across the Atlantic Ocean when it was torpedoed by a German submarine.

As the boat sank, four Army chaplains—Lts. John Washington, a Catholic priest; Alexander Goode, a Jewish rabbi; George Fox, a Methodist minister; and Clark Poling, a Reformed Church in America minister—helped soldiers into lifeboats and gave up their life jackets when the supply ran out. Some sources say the four chaplains were last seen arms linked and singing hymns as they went down with the ship.

The Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation's website recounts their story, with one survivor, Army Pvt. William B. Bednar, recalling the situation.

"I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," he said. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going." Every Feb. 3, we commemorate their actions on Four Chaplains Day.

As chaplains, we serve our fellow comrades by standing as beacons of hope, offering spiritual guidance, comfort and support in an uncertain world.

We do this through acts of listening, prayer or simply our presence. It doesn't matter what our denomination is; chaplains are there for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation. As the four chaplains displayed, chaplains are all joined together with a common goal of serving others.

This July, I ask that we take time to show appreciation for all the chaplains within DAV. During your chapter meetings, express your gratitude for your chaplain's dedicated service.

Chaplains play an important role in the support DAV has provided to millions of veterans and their families over the years, showing up alongside our members when disaster strikes or when a loved one is in the hospital or during both the challenges and joy of life.

Chaplains recognize the difficulties encountered, the sacrifices made and the steadfast commitment that directs us to serve others. We will continue to fulfill our dedication and uphold our mission to help veterans and their families live full, rewarding lives.

But there are times when chaplains also need support and consolation, often pushing their own needs aside to address the needs of others. Should the need be a kind word, a helping hand or a shoulder to lean on, you can show your chaplains that they are cared for.

Let us all affirm our commitment to serving others with compassion, integrity and unwavering faith. Our commitment is genuine concern for not only our fellow veterans but also all humanity. Like the four chaplains demonstrated, may our continued service be a testament to the power of spiritual care, and may we continue to be a source of comfort, strength, encouragement and hope. ■



SAVE THE DATE! **REGISTRATION OPENS JULY 4TH WEEKEND**

IN PERSON
Cincinnati
Saturday,
Nov. 8, 2025

VIRTUAL
Veterans Day
Weekend
Nov. 8–11, 2025

$2 OFF WITH PROMO CODE **LASVEGAS2** (DISCOUNT APPLIES TO ALL PARTICIPATION TYPES)



Applications for DAV entrepreneurship program now open

Are you an entrepreneur or know of one who is looking to grow a for-profit business? DAV Patriot Boot Camp is a transformative program that empowers founders in the veteran and military community, including spouses, with comprehensive entrepreneurship education, one-on-one mentorship and a vital community committed to their success.

Through in-person events and digital programming, DAV Patriot Boot Camp taps into the unique experiences and skills veterans bring to the table, channeling their exceptional leadership, discipline and adaptability into the realm of entrepreneurship.

Applications are now open for the next DAV Patriot Boot Camp cohort, to be held Oct. 15–17 at DAV National Headquarters near Cincinnati.

Learn more and apply at **patriotbootcamp.org**.

REUNIONS

ARMY

1ST SIGNAL BRIGADE Sept. 7–10, Charleston, SC, Contact: Bob Van Pelt, Ph: 518-210-2868, Email: bvpcsm@aol.com, Web: 1sba.wildapricot.org

24TH INFANTRY REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM ASSOCIATION (BUFFALO SOLDIERS) July 24–27, Middletown, DE, Contact: Barbara Fitzgerald, Ph: 410-713-0812, Email: barbarafitzgeraldvfw10065@comcast.net

25TH INFANTRY DIVISION ASSOCIATION Sept. 28–Oct. 5, Springfield, MO, Contact: Sarah Krause, Email: tropicltn@aol.com, Web: 25thida.org

27TH FIELD ARTILLERY AND SUPPORT GROUPS (VIETNAM/CAMBODIA) Sept. 23–26, Branson, MO, Contact: Keith Porter or Bruce Dees, Ph: 318-393-9372 or 405-570-5374, Email: porterkeithalan@gmail.com or brucedees@reagan.com

35TH LAND CLEARING TEAM/538TH LAND CLEARING COMPANY Sept. 11–13, Traverse City, MI, Contact: John Norconk, Ph: 231-228-6711, Email: johnnorconk@gmail.com

205TH MILITARY POLICE (95B) COMPANY (1971–73) Sept. 3–5, Fort Leavenworth, KS, Contact: Larry Grebe, Ph: 574-209-0273, Email: ldgrebe@gmail.com

249TH ENGINEER BATTALION ASSOCIATION Sept. 14–17, Charleston, SC, Contact: Robin Wandell, Ph: 660-815-1166, Email: firewoodfriends@hotmail.com

AMERICAL DIVISION VETERANS ASSOCIATION (23RD INFANTRY DIVISION) Sept. 3–7, Fort Worth, TX, Contact: Dave Hammond, Ph: 503-319-2421, Email: dave.hammond@ymail.com, Web: americal.org

ARMY SECURITY AGENCY (ASA) CHITOSE, JAPAN Sept. 17–21, Dayton, OH, Contact: William Mitchell, Ph: 989-835-7803, Email: mitchell4142@sbcglobal.net, Web: asachitose.com

A TROOP, 4TH SQUADRON, 12TH CAVALRY (VIETNAM 1968–71) Sept. 17–21, Columbus, OH, Contact: Keith Eaton, Ph: 614-266-8848, Email: keaton47@ameritech.net, Web: atroop412cav.net

COMPANY C, 2ND BATTALION, 8TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (MECH), 4TH INFANTRY DIVISION (1969–70) Sept. 8–12, Townsend, TN, Contact: Dave Snowden, Ph: 865-567-2434

COMPANY D, 2ND BATTALION, 14TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION (VIETNAM, 1969–70) Sept. 29–Oct. 2, Charleston, SC, Contact: Tom Monahan. Ph: 609-923-6131

NAVY

FLEET OILERS ASSOCIATION Oct. 19–24, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Bob Grant, Ph: 781-249-5501, Email: bobgrant1942@gmail.com

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FLEET TUG SAILORS Oct. 19–24, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Jim Wassmuth, Ph: 347-946-9677, Email: yojimbo157@earthlink.net

NMCB-11 AND NMCB-8 ASSOCIATIONS Sept. 15–18, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Larry Hagler, Ph: 512-796-2834, Email: mcb11.2025@earthlink.net, Web: mcb11.com and nmcb8.com

USS CHARLES P. CECIL (DD/DDR-835) Sept. 14–20, Akron/Canton, OH, Contact: Greg Wells, Email: glw513@yahoo.com

USS FOX (DLG/CG-33) Oct. 20–22, Middletown, RI, Contact: Michael Hare, Ph: 419-310-2958, Email: mhare3362@gmail.com, Web: ussfox.org

USS GEORGE K. MACKENZIE (DD-836) Oct. 2–5, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Stan Baggett, Ph: 619-209-7072, Email: slbag66691@cox.net, Web: facebook.com/DD836

USS HALIBUT (SSGN/SSN-587) Nov. 9–13, Galveston, TX, Contact: Tom Rabb, Roy Armstrong or John Long, Ph: 832-372-8891, 809-429-6727 or 503-390-2086

USS HOLLAND (AS-32) Aug. 24–29, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Gary Stowe, Ph: 573-231-1130, Email: ussholland@socket.net, Web: usshollandassociation.org

USS ROBERT A. OWENS (DDK/DDE/DD-827) Oct. 6–10, Norfolk, VA, Contact: Bill Miller, Email: 15644@gmail.com, Web: ussrobertaowens827.org

USS SARATOGA (CV/CVA-60, CV-3) Oct. 8–12, Nashville, TN, Contact: Mike Curry, Ph: 907-748-1792, Email: rmcurry75036@outlook.com, Web: uss-saratoga.com/reunion

USS SOUTH DAKOTA (BB-57, SSN-790) Aug. 9, Sioux Falls, SD, Contact: Diane Diekman, Ph: 605-271-0815, Email: info@battleshipsouthdakota.org

USS WAINWRIGHT (DLG/CG-28) VETERANS ASSOCIATION Sept. 22–25, Fairborn, OH, Contact: Rodney Shafer, Ph: 269-967-3536, Email: usswainwrightveteransassn@gmail.com, Web: usswainwright.org

USS WILHOITE (DE/DER-397) Oct. 21–24, Grand Prairie, TX, Contact: Steve Gergens, Tom Morrissey, or Elisabeth Rider Ph: 682-558-5822 or 479-280-2776, Email: stevegergens@gmail.com or tmmorri2010@hotmail.com, Web: usswilhoite.org

MARINES

1ST BATTALION, 5TH MARINE REGIMENT Aug. 27–30, Arlington, VA, Contact: Chris Lehmuth, Ph: 540-222-8461, Email: jlehmuth@1stbattalion5thmarinesassociation.com, Web: events.afr-reg.com/e/1Bn5Mns2025

1ST BATTALION, 5TH MARINE REGIMENT 1985–92 (MARINES AND NAVY) Sept. 4–7, Macomb, IL, Contact: Scott Hainline, Ph: 309-351-2050, Email: ptimfi@yahoo.com

"BATTERY ADJUST" MARINE ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION Sept. 18–21, Dallas, TX, Contact: Ed Peterson, Ph: 732-754-8755, Email: ed66541@aol.com, Web: marinesartillery.com

HMM/VMM-165, CH-46/V-22 SQUADRON (1965–PRESENT) Aug. 21–24, Miamisburg, OH, Contact: John Head, Ph: 720-841-1214, Email: jfhead1@msn.com, Web: 165whiteknights.com

MARINE CORPS INTERROGATOR TRANSLATOR TEAMS ASSOCIATION Sept. 25–29, Salt Lake City, UT, Contact: Kendall Perry, Ph: 801-205-2305, Email: kenperry@yahoo.com, Web: mcitta.org

VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION Sept. 10–15, San Diego, CA. Contact: John Wear, Ph: 719-495-5998, Email: johnwear2@verizon.net, Web: usmcvta.org

AIR FORCE

AC-119 AND AC-47 Nov. 10–17, Fort Walton Beach, FL, Contact: Jim Dunn, Ph: 517-669-9216, Email: ac119kjimd@aol.com, Web: ac119gunships.com

RED HORSE AND PRIME BEEF ASSOCIATION Oct. 14–17, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Dick Aldiger, Ph: 407-859-7436 or 407-399-8937, Web: rhpba.com

ALL SERVICES

BIEN HOA AIR BASE Sept. 17–20, Omaha, NE, Contact: Chuck Golba or Rick Martinchalk, Ph: 913-915-6093 or 719-371-4845

FIRE SUPPORT BASE (FSB) RIPCORD, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION, VIETNAM (MAR 12–JULY 23,1970) Oct. 26–29, Myrtle Beach, SC, Contact: Frank Marshall, Ph: 609-472-0970, Email: fbripcord@gmail.com, Web: ripcordassociation.com

KHE SANH VETERANS ASSOCIATION Oct. 14–18, Pensacola Beach, FL, Contact: Russ Turner, Ph: 314-368-5853, Email: rkt88@prodigy.net

INQUIRIES

- Searching for Gary E. Alberts, originally from Saginaw, MI. Served in Vietnam with 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (AM). Later assigned to Fort Riley, KS. Contact: Sam Kephart, Ph: 828-308-7199, Email: samk769@embargmail.com
- Searching for Eric Smith from Richmond, VA. We went to Parris Island together on July 15, 1968. Looking for Eric or anyone who was in Platoon 386. Contact: David Burnett, Ph: 423-766-1250
- Searching for anyone from the 3rd Armored Division in Friedburg, Germany, during the 1976–78 period. I would like to have a unit patch and communication with someone. Contact: Jesse Purkett, Email: jessepurkett@yahoo.com
- Searching for any Vietnam combat veterans who served in the 1st Infantry Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, near Pleiku and surrounding areas in the Central Highlands during 1968 and 1969. I want to see if I can meet with any members. Contact: Thomas Stone, Email: silenttrumpets8@aol.com
- Searching for anyone who served 532nd Military Intelligence Battalion in Hanau, Germany, from 1954–56. Contact: Israel Hirsch, Email: izih613@gmail.com
- Searching for, Gunnery Sgt. Courtney, Staff Sgt. C.T. Duran, and Cpl. John R. Roach, with 5th Communications Battalion, 1969–70 Vietnam. Contact: Ed Borneman, Ph. 850-296-4846, Email: edborneman6@gmail.com or pomansyot@hotmail.com
- Searching for a copy of the 1970 unit history of 173rd Assault Helicopter Company. Finder's fee awarded. Contact: Rick Hausladen, Email: rickhemi426@aol.com
- Searching for anyone who has copies of the "Red Dog Express," which was the biweekly newsletter for the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion. It was put out by Lt. Col. Joseph Starker, CO; 1st Lt. Lewis Green; Pfc. Scott Mays; and Spc. 4 Ronald Weakley. If anyone knows how I can get some of the newsletters or if anyone knows how I can get in touch with any of the above guys involved, please email me. I served with the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company at Lai Khe from October 1966–67. Contact: Rick Hausladen, Email: rickhemi426@aol.com
- Searching for aircrew, ground crew, support personnel, friends and family associated with the AC-119 gunships used from 1967–72 in Southeast Asia, also AC-47 "Puff the Magic Dragon" folks. Contact: Jim Dunn, Ph: 517-669-9216, Email: ac119kjimd@aol.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. Photos should be at least 3 x 5 inches at 300 dpi. Please include a description of the event and 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.

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 BATTOCLETTE

NOW ACCEPTING REAL ESTATE DONATIONS

TO SUPPORT VETERANS



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

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

YOUR CAR DONATION SUPPORTS VETERANS



Help the brave men and women who served by donating any car, truck, RV or boat, and you could qualify for a tax deduction.

Always offering free vehicle pickup

855-510-5437 | dav.org/car

DAV®

KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO
AMERICA'S VETERANS

STOCK UP FOR SUMMER FUN WITH

New DAV Gear



Adidas Textured Polo
Aluminum Grey
S-XL **$79**
2XL **$82**



Radiant Performance Polo
Red and Royal
S-XL **$28**
2XL-4XL **$31**



Next Level Cotton Pocket Tee
Navy and Black
S-XL **$18**
2XL-3XL **$21**





Riptide Hybrid Shorts
Light Grey
S-3XL **$63**



Flag Cap
Navy
$16



Capital Performance Tee
Platinum Grey
S-XL **$12**
2XL-4XL **$15**
Black
S-XL **$13**
2XL-4XL **$16**



Terra Arma Murphy Hat
Black/Camo **$42**

VETERAN OWNED, SOURCED AND MADE IN THE USA



Ladies' Athletic Shorts
Grey
S-XL **$24** | 2XL-4XL **$27**



Rhine 30 oz. Bottle
Black
$24

Place your order at davstore.org

davstore.org | sales@dav.org | 877-426-2838, press 5 | 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018 | M–F, 8 a.m.–4 p.m. ET

Tax is only collected for orders shipped to OH, KY, IN, FL and AZ. Call for shipping and tax rates on mail orders.