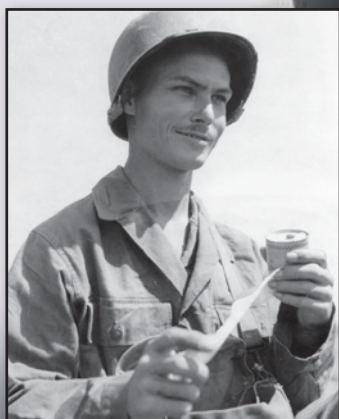




THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY

NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2016

# MAGAZINE



## HACKSAW RIDGE

Epic film catalogues experiences  
of Medal of Honor recipient,  
DAV life member Desmond Doss

Page 12



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# The time is **NOW**

**D**AV has been on the leading edge of veterans advocacy for decades. With so much hanging in the balance—from health care and benefits to claims and appeals—there has never been a more critical time for your involvement and engagement with our network of grassroots activism. As we move forward into 2017, ushering in a new presidential administration, we know critical changes to our benefits will be on the table.

Your voice is a powerful tool in the fight to protect what veterans have earned. Please join the cause at DAV's annual Mid-Winter Conference at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Va.

Stand alongside National Commander Dave Riley as he presents DAV's legislative agenda to Congress. This is your opportunity to meet directly with your lawmakers to make clear what we are fighting for: sensible and lasting fixes to the Veterans Affairs health care system, actionable reform of the VA appeals process, equitable services for women veterans, extension of caregiver support to veterans of all service eras and full funding of the VA's programs and services to ensure veterans receive all the care and benefits they have earned.

The Mid-Winter Conference agenda also includes a number of workshops and seminars to acquaint you with DAV's current efforts and key issues to help guide and support advocacy work within your local community. Join your fellow DAV leaders from around the country to bring the fight for veterans' rights and benefits to Washington. ■

**DAV Mid-Winter Conference, Feb. 26–March 1, 2017**

For more information, visit [dav.org/events/2017-mid-winter-conference](http://dav.org/events/2017-mid-winter-conference)



## From the NATIONAL COMMANDER

### DAVID W. RILEY



## Happy holidays; looking ahead to 2017

**W**e in the veteran community know all too well the impact of saying, “Send me; I will go,” when our nation asks its sons and daughters to deploy forward to protect the homeland and our way of life.

As we rapidly approach our country’s most festive and—for many—most sacred time of year, I ask you to remember the toll that’s paid by families and loved ones when called away during the holiday season. As such, let us surround ourselves with those we hold dear and cherish the freedom we have to assemble, worship and celebrate the coming holidays as we see fit. Veterans and their families, together, have earned it.

Not long ago, I attended our DAV Auxiliary’s Fall Conference. Auxiliary National Commander Fran Costa’s message was very clear: We’re a stronger organization when we “march in lockstep” with each other. She couldn’t be more correct. DAV and the Auxiliary should support each other like overlapping fields of fire.

She has my support, and I am very grateful for hers as well.

This year, we’re honoring veterans at the DAV 5K Walk, Roll, Run or Ride in Atlanta, Cincinnati and in expansion cities Boston; Tulsa, Okla.; and Newport News, Va.

It’s incredible to see the outpouring of support from fellow veterans and military members, friends and neighbors alike at these races.

It takes hundreds of staff and volunteers to put on these 5K events and they, as well as the participants, have my heartfelt gratitude. This is a true example of “marching in lockstep” and shows just a sliver of what we can achieve when we come together in local communities.

Though we know the divide in experience between civilians and veterans has been growing for decades, I believe things like the DAV 5K can be

instrumental in bridging that gap and bringing about a greater sense of mutual understanding and support.

DAV has a ton of momentum going into the new year. I hope you’ll help me keep the ball moving forward. If able, please join me at our 2017 Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D.C., in February, as I deliver my testimony to Congress about issues affecting veterans and their families. Keep an eye on [dav.org](http://dav.org) for further information about scheduling.

I’m looking forward to continuing the fight in 2017, and I’m very proud to have you with me as we continue this journey. It’s an absolute honor to serve as your National Commander.

DAV and the Auxiliary should support each other like **overlapping fields of fire.**

## CONTENTS

- 1** Reflecting on a year of service, National Commander Dave Riley looks ahead to DAV's efforts in 2017.
- 3** National Adjutant Marc Burgess urges members to share their kindness and compassion with fellow veterans in need this holiday season.
- 10** A call to action spurs generous giving, enabling DAV to expand disaster relief efforts to veterans displaced by massive flooding in Louisiana.
- 15** DAV members take to the studio of ABC's "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," supporting fellow veterans during a special episode saluting those who served.
- 17** The VA reaches a major milestone in building the Million Veteran Program with a little help from DAV members.
- 22** DAV sits down one-on-one with VA Secretary Bob McDonald to discuss the future of the department.
- 24** From sleeping in a bus stop to standing atop the Paralympic podium, DAV life member Angela Madsen was one of 34 U.S. military veterans to compete on the world stage this year in Rio.

## FEATURES

**5**



A family struggles to find relief for their son and finds hope in DAV's veteran-to-veteran service.

**12**



Ridiculed for his beliefs, conscientious objector and DAV life member Desmond Doss defied the odds during the Battle of Okinawa.

*Cover photo by Mark Rogers © Cross Creek Pictures Pty. Ltd.*

**20**



In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, DAV member Will Lehner reflects on his involvement in the earliest moments of the infamous attack.

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## From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT J. MARC BURGESS



### What better gift

**F**or many American families, the holiday season represents a time to celebrate with loved ones, to reflect on the past and to embrace change for the new year.

But for still far too many veterans and their families, this time of year will not be joy-filled. Homelessness, unemployment and underemployment, and struggles with both physical and emotional pain can leave many of our nation's finest in distress.

DAV will be there for these men and women. We will work tirelessly to secure the care and benefits earned by veterans, to connect them with meaningful employment opportunities and to ensure our volunteers are serving their needs. But while DAV as an organization will be there this holiday season, it's even more important that DAV as a community of caring, compassionate individuals be there.

We can do a great deal as a veterans charity, but we can't underestimate the power of personal interaction. For those struggling with depression or anxiety, those who are having a hard time putting food on the table, those who have nowhere to sleep at night, those who are lonely and ill and have no family to comfort them—your kind words and a few moments of your time could make all the difference in the world.

You may not be able to pull a family out of homelessness, but taking the time

to acknowledge their struggle and connect them with local resources can be a wonderful expression of compassion in a world that so desperately needs it.

Many of our chapters go to great lengths to involve members in sharing the spirit of the season with local veterans. In years past, Chapter 90 in Boone, N.C., has organized a toy and clothing drive for the children of local National Guard families; Chapter 31 in Detroit Lakes, Minn., and Chapter 21 in Greenbrier, Tenn., have helped supply meals and food baskets to veterans; Chapter 44 in Shelby Township, Mich., brought gifts and good cheer to veterans at a nearby nursing home; Chapter 39 in Coon Rapids, Minn., has worked for the past decade supplying gift and fuel cards to veterans. And each year, dozens of chapters host community holiday parties as a way to invite local veterans into the DAV family and recognize their sacrifices.

There are countless ways you can help reach your fellow veterans at this time of year, right in your own communities. If your chapter doesn't have a plan, make one—it's never too late and no initiative too small when it comes from the heart.

I hope you all enjoy a wonderful holiday season and that you keep each other in mind. After all, what better gift can we give to our fellow veterans this time of year than our kindness and our compassion.



## LETTERS

### Thank you

I would like to thank Mr. Gary Sinise for his work in helping American veterans. My father was a DAV member, a valorous World War II veteran, former prisoner of war and, above all, a family man. He passed almost 57 years to the date of his capture and initial missing-in-action declaration. A friend sent me a video link regarding Mr. Sinise's work with WWII veterans via Soaring Valor and the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, and I encourage everyone to view it and to familiarize themselves with his exemplary work. Thank you, Mr. Sinise and all those who help the military and their families.

**Janice Goldman, Chicago, Ill.**

### Gulf War Illness is real

I read with great interest the well-written article "Gulf War Illness is real," by Steven Wilson [in the July/August 2016 edition]. The article touched on the subject of pyridostigmine bromide (PB) as one of the culprits. I was one of many in our unit that was directed to take the PB pills from blister packs and can vividly recall the wicked headaches, flushed faces and short tempers that followed. I look forward to the day that they are able to detect these cytokine chemical messenger markers in Gulf War vets and come up with a treatment—hopefully in our lifetime. **Douglas Drummond, Beaufort, S.C.**

Regarding the July/August 2016 DAV article concerning Gulf War Illnesses (GWI), there seems to be little doubt that members of the armed forces were exposed to dangerous chemicals, of many forms, during that action. While cursory reports to date have either denied or avoided the issue of GWI and low-level ionizing radiation related to the Gulf War, many years

of studies in Japan and of veterans exposed during development and testing of nuclear weapons in the 1940s and 1950s have revealed a link. All Gulf War veterans who were in a position to be affected by depleted uranium whether or not symptoms have yet surfaced, should be put on the VA's Ionizing Radiation Registry and periodically monitored for the remainder of their lives. **Terry Brady, National Association of Atomic Veterans and DAV life member, Anchorage, Alaska**

### Disabled Veteran of the Year

Kudos to DAV for choosing Bobby Body as your Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year. What a wonderful choice! After reading of his tough childhood, I thought to myself, "Wow, he's not supposed to get here from there. Just that in itself is an inspiring story." As for the rest—his life as a husband and father, his courage and commitment after he was so severely wounded, his concern and compassion for his fellow vets—all of it speaks of a true hero. I say again, what a wonderful choice! Bravo! **Jim O'Neill, U.S. Navy, SEAL Team 2**

### DAV van service

I have been a member of DAV since 1983. I hold two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star with Valor, three Purple Heart Medals and a Combat Infantry Badge. I strongly recommend the DAV Chapter 44 located in Del Haven, N.J., receive recognition for their outstanding service. The closest VA hospitals to where I live are hours away. I have macular degeneration

and must go to Delaware for treatment and to Philadelphia for low-vision assistance. I could not get there if the chapter was not running a van service. **Edward D. Williams, Cape May Court House, N.J.**

### Toxic training grounds

Raymond Richmond had more than a few great points in his [July/August 2016 edition] letter to your magazine. I was also at Fort McClellan in 1978, and I have filed for VA benefits and health care as a result of what I experienced while stationed there. I've been denied twice, and some of my medical records from my time at Fort McClellan have disappeared. I will be contacting my new DAV service officer as soon as possible. Thank you for everything you do for all veterans! **Monica Murgatroyd, Charleston, S.C.**

### DAV on social media [facebook.com/DAV](https://facebook.com/DAV)

I saw a DAV van the last time my family and I went up to the VA. I couldn't stop grinning. I pointed to the van and told Dad that I donate to DAV. Helps me feel free to donate when I actually see the people I donate to are helping the vets. So awesome! **Sheila Razlaff-Chute**

Went to the Glendale office, the folks there were top notch. Gave them a power of attorney and they handled the rest! From beginning to end the process only took four months. I never had to deal with VA, because DAV handled everything! I can't thank them enough! **Tommy Hicks**

**WRITE TO US** We welcome letters from our readers. Please mail them to **DAV Magazine, 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076**, or submit them via email to [feedback@dav.org](mailto:feedback@dav.org). We regret we are unable to acknowledge every letter due to the volume received. We also welcome feedback on our Facebook ([facebook.com/DAV](https://facebook.com/DAV)) and Twitter ([twitter.com/davhq](https://twitter.com/davhq)) pages. Letters used are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Messages involving individual claims are referred to the DAV Service Department.

# One veteran to another

By M. Todd Hunter

## Service officer steps up to save fellow veteran's life, family

Josh Grant was still in high school when he signed his enlistment papers. Two years later, in 2013, the Army engineer turned 20 on a plane headed for Afghanistan. Specifics of the deployment aren't known, but his family says he returned home a different person.

"He's never spoken to me about it," said his father, Curt Grant, "but we found out what happened six months after he got home."

The young soldier had survived two improvised explosive device attacks during his time overseas. The experiences left him suffering from a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and severe panic attacks. But because he was not considered a threat to himself or others, doctors at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., would not immediately treat him.

"He called me during the last couple months of his enlistment, and I could tell he was stressed medically," Curt explained. "But I couldn't get a straight answer to what was going on because his providers couldn't talk to me."

With little to go on, and fearing for his son's well-being, Curt paid for his son to receive private care out of his own pocket.

A few months later, Josh was honorably discharged and returned home to Illinois. He tried to adapt to civilian life, but according to his father, his life fell apart around him. He lost his fiancée, whom he had been with for six years, and his struggle with PTSD left him unable to function at his heating and air conditioning job. Even his friends distanced themselves, saying his medication made him paranoid and unable to communicate without slurred and nonsensical speech.

"It was just mind-boggling, all the different medications he was on," Curt said. "You couldn't have a coherent conversation with him. He was whacked out of his mind."

His son became paralyzed by depression, spending most days in bed and only retreating to the garage to draw, write or smoke—a habit he became financially reliant upon his parents to support since he no longer had a job.



Josh Grant (right) during his deployment to Afghanistan in 2013.





**“I’m ecstatic every time I hear one of my veterans gets a positive decision because that financial support frees up the veteran’s mind to focus on other things like themselves or their families.”**

*Chapter service officer Josh Sanders  
Chapter 17, Decatur, Ill.*

Even more distressing was the fact that Josh was aware of all the changes he was going through. During one incident, he walked inside the house, sat down, stared blankly at the TV and asked, “I’m going to be OK, right?”

“Here my son is basically asking for help, and I don’t even know how to help him,” said Curt. “We weren’t getting any support from the local VA clinic either.”

The situation became even more alarming when Curt found a loaded gun in his son’s bed, which he took and hid. Josh’s parents then begged him to allow them to take him to a different VA hospital to re-evaluate his medications.

“Once we finally convinced him and got him over there, they told us the local VA had been prescribing him the wrong stuff this whole time,” Curt explained.

He then began writing and calling any organization that would listen to what his son and family were going through.

“I begged anyone who would listen, and the only organization that stepped up with real answers and personal attention was DAV,” Curt said.

It was early 2015 when Curt placed a call to DAV Chapter 17 in Decatur, Ill.

“I heard the stress in his voice,” said chapter service officer Josh Sanders. “He was really worried about his son.”

A former Army infantryman, Sanders spent 10 months at Walter Reed Army Medical Center when he returned home from Iraq in 2004. He knew what it was like to be in that position, and he knew the benefit of veterans service organizations like DAV, which helped him secure his own VA disability rating and Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits.

“I heard disbelief in his voice as far as how difficult things were for him with the VA,” Sanders remembered of the first time he spoke to Josh Grant. “You hear a lot of yourself in veterans’ voices, and I heard me in Josh.”

A volunteer chapter service officer since 2006, Sanders secured educational benefits for Josh and initiated a VA disability claim on his behalf. The two communicated regularly throughout the process.

“Josh [Sanders] has a really good demeanor when dealing with veterans that really helps him connect with them,” said John Rodriguez, National Service Officer Assistant Supervisor in DAV’s Chicago office. “That results in more willingness from the veterans and a better claim, which usually results in a more effective decision.”

“You could hear the relief in his voice,” Sanders said of the conversation he and Josh had after receiving Josh’s disability rating. “I’m ecstatic every time I hear one of my veterans gets a positive decision because that financial support frees up the veteran’s mind to focus on other things like themselves or their families.”

The impact was no different for Josh. According to his father, he’s regained his independence and is ready to put the dark episode of his life behind him. He no longer has to rely on his parents for financial support and has since weaned himself off his medication. He hopes to open a small retreat for other veterans on his parents’ pumpkin patch.

Curt credits Sanders for making it happen.

“He’d be a statistic right now if it wasn’t for Josh [Sanders]. He was ready to put a gun to his head,” Curt said. “It wasn’t doctors or a prescription; it was another soldier that got him through it.”

For Sanders, though, it’s all part of his personal process of paying it back.

“I want to give people the help I received when I got out,” he explained. “I want to give back to an organization that did me such a solid. It felt like an obligation at one point, but I don’t feel obliged anymore. I just want to help my fellow veterans.”

“Josh Sanders exemplifies the next generation of DAV service officers who are going to be ready to provide the needed services to veterans of future generations,” Rodriguez said. “He’s a fighter, and he likes to fight for justice for veterans. That’s what keeps him going.”

“Josh Sanders helped my son,” Curt added, fighting back tears. “That young man doesn’t think he did a thing, but he saved my son’s life. He saved my entire family.” ■

## From the NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR DOUGLAS K. WELLS JR.



### Working smarter, not harder

**Y**ou've probably heard it said before that membership is the lifeblood of DAV, and our wide network of advocates stand together to ensure our nation keeps its promises to the men and women who served. It's your unwavering commitment to our cause that has made DAV what it is today—a leading organization comprised of veterans serving veterans.

But as is the case for any business or organization, maximizing our potential is as challenging, if not harder, than reaching it in the first place. In order for us to continue advancing our cause and promoting policies that ensure veterans and their families can live with respect and dignity, DAV and its members must evolve with the times and use every available resource at their disposal.

One example of this evolution is the use of smartphone technology to reach out to potential members. Leveraging this platform, we can educate veterans about DAV's programs and services and even sign them up as members.

DAV is evolving and will continue to emphasize the importance of moving toward the online membership application. Nearly everyone has a smartphone, so nearly everyone has a membership application nearby.

In fact, I'd like to ask you to take these simple steps right now to ensure the DAV online application is just a touch away on your iPhone or Android. For our iPhone users out there, simply go to [dav.org/memberapp](http://dav.org/memberapp) in your Safari

web browser. Once the web page opens you'll see a short list of icons along the bottom of the screen. Select the middle icon (Figure 1).

This will bring up the option to "Add to Home Screen." Simply select this option and now you have a DAV membership application a touch away on your iPhone's home screen.

For Android users, launch Chrome and type in [dav.org/memberapp](http://dav.org/memberapp) to open the web page. A pop-up will open with instructions on how to pin the shortcut to your home screen (Figure 2). You'll be able to enter a name for the shortcut, and then it will be added to your home screen.

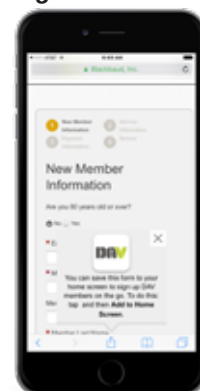
Furthermore, this shortcut and the DAV online application tool are also available on iPads and Android-based tablets. This provides us the mobility and flexibility to introduce anyone at any time to DAV and the value of being a member.

This is also important because, as of Oct. 1, 2016, DAV will reward up to three recruiter points for a new full-life member signed up online instead of the two points rewarded for paper applications.

To brush up on eligibility requirements for possible new members, be sure to watch our new video, "The Value of DAV Membership," at [facebook.com/DAV/videos](https://facebook.com/DAV/videos) or [youtube.com/watch?v=1LA6fOG4Fmw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=1LA6fOG4Fmw).

Let's work smarter and not harder as an organization, developing good habits and utilizing the tools available to us to continue growing a strong and vibrant member base.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**





# Legislative goals

## The way forward in veterans advocacy

**A**t DAV's annual National Convention, members are able to target the organization's legislative and public policy goals for the upcoming year. In August, at the 2016 convention in Atlanta, DAV members adopted 143 resolutions to support and direct advocacy efforts on behalf of injured and ill veterans as well as their families and survivors.

"This is the voice of our membership speaking out on the issues that matter most," said National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. "They collectively give voice to crucial policies that veterans want addressed by Congress and the VA, but also allow our strong grassroots network to play an active role in shaping the work our national legislative staff does representing DAV in Washington every day."

The following is a partial list of key resolutions adopted this year. To see the full list of resolutions, visit [dav.org/learn-more/legislation/resolutions](http://dav.org/learn-more/legislation/resolutions).

### **Disability compensation and other benefits**

- Support meaningful claims and appeals processing reform.
- Oppose any recommendations by any commission

to reduce or eliminate benefits for disabled veterans.

- Oppose any proposal that would reduce payments of VA disability compensation by receipt of Social Security Disability Insurance benefits or any other federal benefit.
- Support legislation to provide realistic cost-of-living allowances.
- Support legislation to repeal the offset between military longevity retired pay and VA disability compensation.
- Support legislation to remove the offset of Survivor Benefit Plan payments and VA dependency and indemnity compensation.
- Support legislation to remove the prohibition against concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability compensation.
- Support legislation for presumptive service connection for diseases related to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, N.C.
- Oppose all attempts to change the basis of the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities from the "average impairments of earnings capacity" standard.





- Oppose any change that would redefine service-connected disability or restrict the conditions or circumstances under which it may be established.
- Support legislation to provide service connection to atomic veterans for all recognized radiogenic diseases.
- Seek legislation to exclude veterans disability compensation from countable income for government programs.
- Oppose any scheme to means test disability and death compensation.

#### **Medical and health care services**

- Strengthen, reform and sustain the VA health care system.
- Support legislation to provide comprehensive support services for caregivers of all severely injured and ill veterans.
- Support enhanced medical services and benefits for women veterans.
- Ensure priority access and timely, quality health care service are provided to service-connected disabled veterans.
- Support enhancement of medical services through modernization of the VA health care infrastructure.
- Support legislation to eliminate or reduce VA and Department of Defense health care copayments for service-connected disabled veterans.
- Improve the care and benefits for veterans exposed to military toxic and environmental hazards.
- Ensure proper screening and treatment for traumatic brain injury and post-deployment mental health issues.
- Support sustained and sufficient funding to improve services for homeless veterans.

#### **General issues**

- Support meaningful accountability measures with due process for VA employees.
- Support former prisoner-of-war slave labor claims against Japanese firms.
- Support a national dialogue with federal and state governments, employers and unions to establish processes for military training to meet civilian licensure and certification requirements.
- Seek the immediate release of any American prisoners of war and seek immediate return of the remains of any American who died during any conflict.
- Extend military commissary and exchange privileges to service-connected disabled veterans.
- Support legislation to provide families of veterans who are service-disabled business owners, either rated less than 100-percent disabled or who do not die of service-connected conditions, a reasonable transition period to restructure the business.
- Support legislation to reduce the premiums for Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance to be consistent with current life expectancy.
- Extend eligibility for Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance to service-connected veterans rated totally and permanently disabled.
- Support veterans' preference in public employment.
- Extend space-available air travel on military aircraft to veterans entitled to receive compensation at the 100-percent disability rate.
- Transfer the Veterans' Employment and Training Service to the VA.
- Support outreach and employment of women veterans.
- Support the continued growth of the Veterans Treatment Courts throughout our nation. ■



on the  
**GROUND**

and in  
**ACTION**

## DAV supports Louisiana veterans, families with emergency assistance

By Charity Edgar

**Z**elina Palmer was looking forward to her first day of college at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La. The Army veteran, who served from 2006 to 2015 as a mechanic and human resource specialist, wanted to continue a life of service by pursuing a degree in social work.

Then devastating floods ravaged her apartment and shattered her plans. Palmer lost everything.

“My whole apartment was submerged in water. I tried to salvage some things but was told I couldn’t due to contamination,” she said.

Initially, Palmer stayed in a hotel as she planned how to rebuild her life, but she eventually found herself living in her car as the lodging costs continued to mount and her apartment remained uninhabitable.

Due to the vast number of people impacted by the Louisiana floods, financial support from government

entities was delayed. The clock continued to tick; Palmer was running out of time.

Through its Disaster Relief Program, DAV is able to provide financial support to veterans in their time of need. National service officers (NSOs) travel throughout the nation to areas impacted by natural disasters to support their brothers and sisters in arms.

New Orleans NSO Assistant Supervisor Belinda Hill provided Palmer emergency funding on behalf of DAV to offer interim assistance as the young veteran struggles to get back on her feet.

“Everyone is waiting for support—there is a long waiting list for everything. And on top of school, I start my internship next Monday,” said Palmer. “It means everything to get help when you literally see all your belongings submerged in water.”

Hill, who served 30 years in the Army, has supported three different disaster relief efforts in Louisiana since she began working for DAV in 2011.



"I started working at DAV because I wanted to help fellow veterans. It feels good to provide disaster relief assistance because these are veterans in great need," said Hill. "I'm a veteran, and that's what we do. We have each other's backs."

Hill and her team traveled to Baton Rouge to provide financial assistance and emergency-relief kits—backpacks stuffed with blankets and hygiene items—to impacted veterans. The need was overwhelming.

The Disaster Relief Program fund was dwindling due to the large number of efforts supported in 2016, but there were still many Louisiana veterans in need. DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess put out a call asking for support for the program, which is funded completely through donations.

DAV supporters answered, donating more than \$125,000, which allowed Hill and her team to return to Baton Rouge four times. They were able to provide more than \$72,900 worth of vouchers, as well as 250 emergency-relief kits, to veterans.

DAV has provided more than 700 grants totaling \$270,800 across the nation in 2016. Disabled veterans in Louisiana alone have received \$173,000 in vouchers since January. Additionally, at time of publication DAV has directed more than \$69,000 in emergency relief assistance to veterans in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida in the wake of Hurricane Matthew.

Among those helped were Army veteran Van Johnson and his wife, who had to be rescued from their home by boat. The Vietnam veteran lost everything.

"DAV's support means so much," said Johnson. "A little bit can make a whole lot of difference when you don't have anything."

This message was echoed by many of the veterans DAV was able to support.

"I'm completely starting over," said Erma Williams, an Air Force veteran. "This support is everything. To have someone come and give assistance, it makes you feel like someone cares. To have someone say, 'It's OK,



*DAV National Commander Dave Riley speaks with a veteran receiving disaster relief support in Baton Rouge, La.*

I've got your back—To me, this means you don't have to suffer by yourself."

Army veterans Wishedell Ridley, Felix Hatch and Cartier Brown grew up in the same neighborhood and went to boot camp together at Fort Polk in 1969. All three also received aid from DAV when their homes flooded.

"This support makes me feel appreciated for what I did for my country," said Ridley, a DAV life member.

DAV National Commander Dave Riley also traveled to Baton Rouge to provide his support and assistance on the ground during one of DAV's return trips.

"Being able to show that DAV is here for moral support, and that we will be here after the disaster, is important," said Riley. "It's so good to see the smiles on faces when we are able to help so these veterans can get the essentials they need right now."

"Going to a location ravaged by a natural disaster to support our brothers and sisters in greatest need certainly isn't easy, but DAV will make every attempt to reach out and get them help. DAV means veterans helping veterans, and providing some interim relief is a small way we can say thank you for your service and we're here for you." ■





# HACKSAW RIDGE

Film focuses on Medal of Honor recipient,  
DAV member's actions, effects of war

By M. Todd Hunter

**A**cademy Award-winning director Mel Gibson's newly released film, "Hacksaw Ridge," will undoubtedly earn millions of dollars at the box office and get plenty of award buzz during its opening weekend, but its impact has the potential to extend well beyond Hollywood.

The film is based on the extraordinary true story of late DAV life member Desmond Doss, an Army medic who became the first conscientious objector to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Doss is credited for single-handedly saving and evacuating 75 wounded men from behind enemy lines, without firing or even carrying a weapon, during World War II's Battle of Okinawa.

"I did a lot of research prior to principal photography because the responsibility I immediately felt taking on the role was palpable," said Andrew Garfield, who portrayed Doss in the film. "It's difficult to even attempt to understand who he was and how he was able to do the things that he did with such conviction and bravery

and love in his heart through such a horribly violent, traumatizing situation."

While speaking at the 2016 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in August, Gibson said he intentionally made the battle scenes of the film graphic in order to give viewers a better understanding of the horrors of combat. He also included Doss' upbringing with a father afflicted with wartime post-traumatic stress disorder to articulate an often-overlooked aspect of war: the effects it has on service members and families at home.

"When I was a kid, I was talking to the World War I guys and getting their stories as research, and it took me on this journey of discovery about the experience of men and women who have to go into these conflicts, and the families of the men and women who have to go into these conflicts," said Gibson, who starred in "We Were Soldiers," a film about the Battle of Ia Drang in Vietnam. "I was struck by every generation that I've spoke to about the indelible mark left on their hearts



*Andrew Garfield (far right) portrays conscientious objector and Medal of Honor recipient Desmond Doss, credited with carrying 75 injured soldiers one at a time down a cliff face to safety during the Battle of Okinawa. The young medic went on to rescue and render aid to several others in the days that followed, before being seriously wounded himself. (Photo by Mark Rogers © Cross Creek Pictures Pty. Ltd.)*

and minds and souls by the experiences they went through, and how underserved they are in being helped to deal with these issues.”

Gibson, who attended the convention with Vince Vaughn, one of the film’s stars, went on to say the plights of veterans need more national attention, and he hopes the film will bring more awareness to veterans’ issues—something Doss quietly dedicated himself to in his later years.

“He’s obviously an incredibly inspiring figure,” Garfield remarked of Doss, who passed away in 2006, “someone who lived by his inner convictions and someone who wanted to be of service to his fellow man.”

“It was a tremendous honor for many of us who had the chance to meet Mr. Doss before he passed,” said Rick Freeman, Commander of Chapter 21 in Piedmont, Ala, where Doss spent his last years. “He participated in various chapter activities after he and his wife had moved to the area. He was involved. He was active and wanted to help as much as he could.

“We would invite him to speak at events and,

whenever he had a chance, he put his fellow veterans on a pedestal. He just wanted to be a rank-and-file member and continue standing up for his fellow veterans as long as he could. He wanted to support and be there for the rest of us.”

Freeman participated in Doss’ memorial service and, as a line officer for the DAV Department of Alabama, helped lead efforts to rename Alabama Highway 9, which stretches from Piedmont to Centre, Ala., the Desmond T. Doss Sr. Memorial Highway.

“It was incredibly humbling to represent Mr. Doss’ fellow DAV members as the community celebrated his life. We didn’t know there was going to be some blockbuster movie coming out about him, but it wasn’t lost on us that there should be,” Freeman said. “People like Desmond Doss are so rare. He was a man of strong convictions, and we should all be proud that he was part of our cause.”

DAV Department of Alabama Adjutant Chad Richmond also remembered Doss’ dedication and humility.



**“People like Desmond Doss are so rare. He was a man of strong convictions, and we should all be proud that he was part of our cause.”**

—Rick Freeman,  
DAV Chapter 21 Commander, Piedmont, Ala.

“When you read his citation, you know he may have been one of the greatest heroes in military history, but he didn’t feel that way,” Richmond said. “He just did what a medic was supposed to do. He did his job. He didn’t think of himself as someone special. He was just a veteran, a humble country boy.

“Having seen the film, I hope he rests in peace knowing his tremendous bravery and sacrifices are inspiring new generations and are shining a spotlight on the military experience in a way that will help his fellow veterans.”

Part of the film’s outreach mission, led by Lionsgate Grassroots Marketing head Debora Galloway and former DAV National Chaplain Ron Ringo, has been to bring more public awareness to the lessons of Doss’ life. In addition to a screening and feedback session at DAV’s convention, Ringo and Galloway have spent the months

leading up to the premiere hosting events that raise greater awareness of the film’s messages. This included building awareness for DAV’s free services.

“A very small percentage of the American public has served in uniform, and an even smaller number has served in combat,” said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “So anyone who wants to know the real cost of freedom should go see this movie to give them some comprehension of the sacrifice and the service of those who have made our country free.” ■



**Learn More Online**

Learn more about the film at [hacksawridgeresources.com](http://hacksawridgeresources.com).



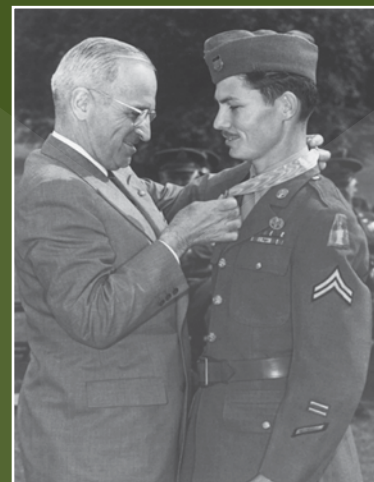
## MEDAL OF HONOR

### PRIVATE FIRST CLASS DESMOND DOSS

On Nov. 1, 1945, President Harry S. Truman presented Pfc. Desmond Doss the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions serving with the 77th Infantry Division at Urasoe Mura, Okinawa. Per the citation, Doss:

- Refused to seek cover as his unit fell upon heavy artillery, mortar and machine gun fire, instead carrying each of the 75 wounded down a cliff face one by one to safety.
- Repeatedly exposed himself to heavy rifle and mortar fire to rescue wounded men, advanced through a shower of enemy grenades to render aid to casualties before evacuating them to safety, and braved small-arms fire to assist an artillery officer.
- Refused extraction after being seriously wounded in the legs by a grenade explosion, choosing instead to treat his own wounds rather than risk the safety of a fellow soldier.
- After sustaining a compound fracture to the arm, bound his wound and crawled 30 yards over rough terrain to an aid station for treatment.

“Through his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination in the face of desperately dangerous conditions Pfc. Doss saved the lives of many soldiers,” Truman read from the citation. “His name became a symbol throughout the 77th Infantry Division for outstanding gallantry far above and beyond the call of duty.”





# ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire’

## ABC partners with DAV to honor veterans

By Steven Wilson

Leading up to Veterans Day, ABC partnered with DAV to feature a Victory for Veterans theme week for its quiz show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,” as a way to honor those who served.

“This partnership helps highlight DAV’s message of service to veterans and their families on a national scale,” said DAV National Commander Dave Riley. “Our organization is synonymous with Veterans Day, and our friends at ABC recognize and appreciate DAV’s continuing mission of advocacy in the veteran community.”

DAV Department of Nevada Commander Ramiro “Ram” Parocua was one of several DAV members who joined the studio audience in Las Vegas for the filming of the show. The audience was mostly comprised of fellow veterans.

Parocua said members in Nevada attended the taping to support fellow veterans who were contestants and support the program’s military theme.

“We all enjoyed the experience of being part of this program and the exciting moments,” he said.

“Millionaire” Executive Producer James Rowley said he couldn’t think of a more compelling cause than the welfare of the nation’s heroes.

“Partnering with DAV on this special week of shows was great,” Rowley said after the taping. “It was a fantastic opportunity for the show to give back to our veterans. What could be a better cause than that?”

The tapings featured five veterans competing for the \$1 million prize. The questions included topics ranging from military history to general trivia.

Three Nevada DAV chapters—Chapter 12, Henderson; Chapter 13, Las Vegas; and Chapter 15, Pahrump—sent representatives to the taping of the show.

“If I could give a million dollars to any contestant, I’d be thrilled if it were someone who served our country in the armed forces,” said show host Chris Harrison. “There’s no better cause than supporting our nation’s



*National Adjutant Marc Burgess (2nd row, 2nd from left) along with several members from the Department of Nevada attends a special veterans-themed taping of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire in Las Vegas.*

vets, and the Victory for Veterans shows are fantastic.”

The show will air during the week leading up to and on Veterans Day as well as in future syndication. Through the program, ABC will be presenting a \$25,000 donation to DAV.

To raise more awareness of DAV’s free services, ABC will also highlight the charity through social media and digital channels, and DAV will be recognized in a series of thank-you videos, leading up to Veterans Day, by celebrities thanking veterans for their service and sacrifice. DAV messages will air across ABC’s full television network this fall, on ABC News Radio and Armed Forces Radio. Further, a veteran-themed story will be featured on ABC’s “Good Morning America” on Veterans Day.

“We’re all very excited about our partnership with ABC and ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,’” said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “ABC’s leadership cares about veterans and DAV’s mission, and we feel fortunate to work with them so we can ensure promises are kept to those who’ve sacrificed for our freedom.” ■



**Learn More Online**

Visit [millionairetv.dadt.com](http://millionairetv.dadt.com) to find local air times and highlights from the show.



## From the NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR JAMES T. MARZSALEK

### Bookmark your spot

Last March, the Department of Veterans Affairs began requiring that all claims to the agency be filed on standardized VA forms, ending the VA's longtime practice of informally initiating veterans' disability claims. This new process has helped the VA make significant progress in reducing its backlog, but more progress can be made with the improved use of one of the most underutilized documents the VA provides: VA Form 21-0966, Intent to File a Claim for Compensation and/or Pension, or Survivors Pension and/or DIC.

Though not required to formally start the claims process, an Intent to File allows veterans to informally establish a forthcoming claim. Once the Intent to File is received by the VA, veterans have 12 months to gather evidence and formally file, essentially bookmarking their intentions and the effective date for the subsequent formal claim. Submitting the form simply advises the VA of forthcoming actions.

Securing an effective date for a benefits claim should be top priority, even before assembling the evidence needed to support the claim. Establishing this official starting point with VA Form 21-0966 ensures veterans will receive the compensation they earned retroactively if their claim is granted, regardless of how long it takes to adjudicate the claim.

The form takes roughly 15 minutes to complete, though often less, and

VA Form 21-0966

requires information necessary to identify and support compensation, pension and other benefit claims. Additionally, a standardized Notice of Disagreement form (VA Form 21-0958) is required if a claimant wishes to initiate an appeal of a VA decision. These forms can be submitted electronically through eBenefits, over the phone by contacting a DAV national service officer or by mailing a paper copy to a DAV national service office.



### Learn More Online

Contact information for those offices can be found online at [DAV.org/find-your-local-office/](http://DAV.org/find-your-local-office/) and standardized VA forms can be found at [dav.org/veterans/standard-claim-appeal-forms](http://dav.org/veterans/standard-claim-appeal-forms).

# Million Veteran Program

## DAV member brings VA halfway to research initiative goal

By Mary Dever

**D**AV life member Michael Owen Smith didn't know that, when he enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Million Veteran Program (MVP) at the DAV National Convention in Atlanta in August, he was ushering in an important milestone for the research database program. Smith—an Army veteran from Montgomery, Ala.—became the 500,000th veteran to enroll, helping the VA create the largest genomic archive in the world.

The MVP was started in 2011 as part of the White House Precision Medicine Initiative. The goal was for participants to donate blood for DNA extraction and analysis. A baseline and periodic follow-up surveys would track veterans' military experiences, health and current lifestyles. With enough DNA available for study, researchers proposed the information gained for the MVP could help prevent and treat certain types of diseases.

"Our veterans continue to demonstrate their selfless sacrifice, and the nation has yet another reason to owe them a debt of gratitude," said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. "Many of our veterans have saved lives on the battlefield, and ... their participation [in the MVP] has the potential to save countless lives—now and for generations to come."

But joining the program is not just about gathering research; many veterans said they enrolled as a way to continue their service to the country.

"I'm participating in the Million Veteran Program so that I can do my part to help future generations of not just veterans, but everyone who can benefit from this research," said Army veteran and MVP enrollee Alexander Megallanez.

MVP Program Manager Jennifer Deen, who was in attendance when they hit the 500,000 milestone, said being among a group of veterans who care so deeply



Army veteran Michael Owen Smith (center), from Montgomery, Ala., was the 500,000th enrollee in the Million Veteran Program. Pictured with MVP principal investigators Dr. John Concato (left) and Dr. J. Michael Gaziano. (Photo by Derrick Morin, MVP)

for each other is why they started the program in the first place.

"It was such an amazing, humbling and inspiring experience being at the DAV Convention, and reaching the halfway point was just icing on the cake," said Deen. "The veterans that we met were so welcoming and enthusiastic about the program, and once again reaffirmed how generous and altruistic they are. We really valued the opportunity to speak with so many individuals at the convention and hope to be back next year." ■



### Learn More Online

For more information about MVP, including how to participate, visit [www.research.va.gov/MVP](http://www.research.va.gov/MVP). For a list of the 52 VA sites currently enrolled in the program, log on to [www.research.va.gov/MVP/all-clinics.cfm](http://www.research.va.gov/MVP/all-clinics.cfm).



# Congressionally approved study lauds VA mental health care

## VA surpasses private sector in 7 of 9 quality measures

By Steven Wilson

**L**ike so many of his fellow veterans, retired Marine Staff Sgt. Troy Stump found his life forever changed after serving his country. While deployed to Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012, his armored personnel carrier was struck by an improvised explosive device, resulting in a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Not all of Stump's fellow Marines made it home, and he credits the mental health care treatment he received at the VA for helping him learn to open up and begin coping with the effects of the trauma.

"It took a month of biweekly meetings before I could talk about what happened," he said. "But my counselor, even though she was a little frustrated that I wouldn't open up, stayed with me and was patient."

A recent congressionally approved RAND Corp. study determined that the Department of Veterans Affairs had higher levels of performance in providing mental health care than private providers in seven out of nine quality measures.

The VA surpassed private-sector care in medication lab and laboratory screening assessments, prescribing antipsychotics, long-term antipsychotics, long-term mood stabilizers, antidepressants and continuation-phase antidepressants.

Private-sector care edged out the VA in the category of treating substance-abuse disorder, specifically in treatment initiation and treatment engagement.

The study compared more than 830,000 veterans receiving mental health care from the VA with over 545,000 nonveterans receiving similar care in the private sector.

"It is likely that the superior performance observed in the VA system is in part the result of the additional structures that the VA has put in place to support and encourage high-quality care," said RAND Corp. Senior



*Marine Staff Sgt. Troy Stump deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in his military career. While in Afghanistan, his armored personnel carrier struck an IED, resulting in life-changing injuries. Stump attributes the care he has received at the VA with his recovery. "I have ways and techniques to overcome the challenges with a brain injury like mine, and I am a lot more effective as a father [than] before I went for help," he said.*

Natural Scientist Dr. Katherine Watkins. "For example, the co-location of pharmacy and laboratory services near specialty and primary-care clinics facilitates patient access to these services, and the integrated electronic medical record means that all providers can instantly review and address patient laboratory results."

Watkins explained that the availability of an entire network of experienced health care providers working in an integrated system is one of the reasons Stump's counselor was able to help him.

“Findings demonstrate the **significant advantages** that accrue from an **organized, nationwide system of care**. The much higher performance of the VA has important clinical and policy implications.”

—RAND Corp. study

“The VA has really thought about their care in terms of a delivery system, not just a system of individual providers,” Watkins said. “VA providers also have access to decision support tools, and the electronic medical record supports best practices through automated clinical reminders.

“For example, if I’m in private care in [Los Angeles], I won’t know about a new best practice unless I happen to find it, but in the VA system it’s distributed to all providers in their network,” said Watkins.

“DAV and the veterans we represent are pleased VA surpassed the private sector in seven areas in the Rand Corp. study. Treating substance-use disorder is an important component in veteran-related health care,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine. “However, if some veterans can’t access the quality care they’ve earned, they may feel like they’ve been forgotten. This is something DAV will continue to address as their advocate.”

In addition to the RAND study, Psychiatric Services, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Psychiatric Association, published a report in April 2016 comparing the quality of mental health care provided by the VA with a comparable population in the private sector. According to the study, “In every case, VA performance was superior to that of the private sector

by more than 30 percent. Compared with individuals in private plans, veterans with schizophrenia or major depression were more than twice as likely to receive appropriate initial medication treatment, and veterans with depression were more than twice as likely to receive appropriate long-term treatment.”

These findings were based on review of VA administrative data on more than 836,500 veterans and more than 545,400 patients seeking mental health care in the private sector. Patients in the study suffered from one or more serious mental health diagnoses including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD, major depression and substance-use disorder. The authors conclude that “findings demonstrate the significant advantages that accrue from an organized, nationwide system of care. The much higher performance of the VA has important clinical and policy implications.”

Stump said he is grateful for the care he received within the VA system.

“I’m still a little jumpy at times. I startle easily, and I don’t do well in large crowds,” he said. “But, I can talk about and honor my Marines now, and I’m not keeping that bottled up. My VA counselor not giving up on me was an important part of my recovery.

“I don’t know where I’d be without her.” ■



#### **Veterans helping veterans...**

For the past seven years, Temple Beth Israel of Longboat Key, Fla., and DAV Chapter 97 have partnered in raising funds to purchase durable goods for the disabled veterans receiving medical services at the two local VA hospitals. This year, they were able to raise more than \$13,000 and fulfill patient “wish lists”—totaling more than \$20,000—from both area hospitals.



# Righting history

## DAV marks 75th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor attack

By Steven Wilson

**F**or more than 60 years, DAV life member Will Lehner knew his ship, the USS Ward, fired the nation's initial rounds in World War II, sinking an enemy submarine a full hour before the first Japanese bombs hit Pearl Harbor, but it took six decades before the ship and its crew received the recognition they deserved.

At 6:30 a.m. during the sleepy Sunday of Dec. 7, 1941, the Ward's crew sighted a submarine periscope operating in restricted waters.

"So we looked around, and all of a sudden we see the conning tower come up out of the water," Lehner said. "But we didn't know it was a Japanese sub; we didn't know what it was. Then finally the whole thing was up, and we were only about 50 yards from it."

The Ward's captain, Lt. Cmdr. William Outerbridge, gave the order to fire.

"They fired the No. 1 gun, which was up on the bow, and I watched the sub. [The shot] went right over the conning tower and splashed right behind it."

Then the second shot was fired.

"I saw it when it hit the conning tower at the lower part of it," said Lehner. "The shell hit, and when it hit the sub rolled over and came back again and started going down."

"Well, that was an hour and fifteen minutes before the [Japanese] planes ever came over."

The Ward's captain made radio reports to higher headquarters, but the reports were largely dismissed; the enemy vessel was never accounted for.

"When I went to school after I got out of the service, I told different guys that we had sunk a submarine," Lehner said of the fateful encounter.



*DAV life member Will Lehner shows his Adapt, Improve and Overcome Award presented by the VA in 2016 for being an "inspirational model for other patients and for healthcare providers." Lehner was a sailor on the USS Ward, which fired the opening salvos of the United States entering World War II.*

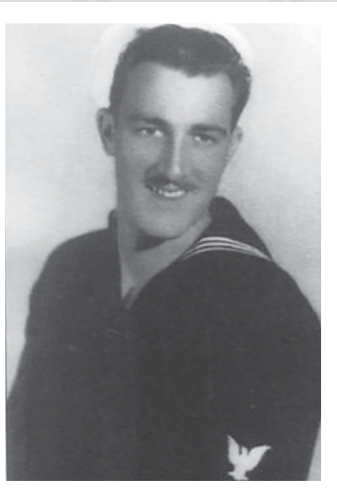
At the time, his story was discounted. But in August 2002, Lehner and fellow sailors of the USS Ward were vindicated, all beginning with a phone call from a researcher with the Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory (HURL).

"I talked to Terry Kerby [from HURL]," said Lehner. "He called me and says, 'I think I found that one that you sunk. It's got a hole just where you said. I'm pretty sure it's that one. It's laying on a little sand dune down there. You can get a good shot of it.'"

Kerby asked if the former sailor would like to join him at 1,200 feet below sea level to get a look at the submarine. Lehner jumped at the chance and was soon with Kerby in a small research submersible on the ocean floor, about five miles from the mouth of Pearl Harbor, face to face with his old foe after more than six decades.

For more than three hours, Lehner snapped pictures of the Type A Ko-hyoteki submarine that began World War II for the United States, remembering how he heard doubters remark that there was no proof his





**Far left:** The USS Ward (DD-139)—photographed Feb. 26, 1919, shortly after its commission as a destroyer—fired the first American shots at Pearl Harbor. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Naval Historical Center)

**Left:** Will Lehner while he was still in the Navy.

## The VA estimates there will be as few as **257,000 World War II veterans** by 2020.

—DAV National Commander Dave Riley

ship engaged an enemy vessel.

“Everyone said we didn’t sink it, but we did,” he said.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Ward was retrofitted as a high-speed transport. Lehner and the crew of the Ward became part of the task force responsible for troop landings in the South Pacific, where kamikaze attacks by Japanese planes were common.

“What they liked to do is come in on the fantail on the stern, and they’d skid along the top of the ships if they could and kill as many people on deck as they could first and then slam into the ship and then that would explode the gasoline,” Lehner said.

It was such a kamikaze attack that eventually led to the scuttling of the Ward on Dec. 7, 1944, three years to the day after it first engaged the enemy at the mouth of Pearl Harbor.

“Three of them came down on us,” Lehner said. “I was first loader on No. 4 gun, which was on the aft part of the ship. We were firing and we knocked down two of them, but the third one got through.”

Lehner and his shipmates abandoned ship and made their way to other friendly vessels before the destroyer USS O’Brien—coincidentally commanded by the Ward’s former captain, William Outerbridge—scuttled the damaged Ward.

Lehner was discharged and treated for the psychological wounds of war. After returning home from his military service, he experienced some of the

same issues that have always affected some veterans.

“I didn’t talk about any of my experiences to my kids or to my wife for about 20 years,” Lehner said. “I had [post-traumatic stress disorder]. To me, I was just holding it in and just wanted to forget about it.”

But then a unique opportunity presented itself when he discovered his own children didn’t know anything about Pearl Harbor. He began speaking at schools and museums.

“Will, sharing his story for over 60 years, has helped correct the historical record,” said Department of Wisconsin Commander John Polk. “He was present at a critical juncture in our nation’s history, and his perspective on the Pearl Harbor attack is nothing short of a national treasure.”

“The VA estimates there will be as few as 257,000 World War II veterans by 2020,” said DAV National Commander Dave Riley. “DAV will never forget Will and his fellow veterans of what we rightly call our nation’s ‘Greatest Generation.’”

Lehner will never again have to convince doubters, or history, of how the Pearl Harbor attack actually unfolded.

“I’ve got pictures,” he said. “I’ve got proof now.” ■



**Learn More Online**

To see and hear Will Lehner discuss Pearl Harbor, visit [dav.org/learn-more/news/2016/pearl-harbor-75-years](http://dav.org/learn-more/news/2016/pearl-harbor-75-years).

ONE-ON-ONE WITH

# Bob McDonald

VA Secretary discusses the future as the nation ushers in a new presidential administration



Robert A. McDonald was appointed Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs in July 2014. Over the last two and a half years, the West Point graduate has led a transformation of the VA from the top down. The first to remark that there is still a long way to go to ensure veterans get the care they've earned, McDonald says he believes they're on the right track. In an interview with DAV, McDonald discussed top legislative priorities and the future of the VA as we move closer to a new presidential administration.

**DAV:** *You took the reins at one of the most difficult and controversial times in the VA's history. What progress have you made over the last two years, and what have you found most challenging?*

**McDonald:** I think the overall evidence of the transformation underway is the improvement in veteran trust. We've gone from basically 40 percent of veterans trusting the VA to 59 percent. That's really the most challenging thing. How do you gain the trust of veterans while you're doing things like improving access to health care, reducing the backlog of claims, and trying to end veterans' homelessness? Particularly at a time when many people have tried the VA already and had a bad experience so they're not going to go back. Getting, in a sense, a retrial is a big challenge.

I would measure [our progress] on the improvement of access. We've

made more medical appointments this year versus last year. We've added over 1,200 doctors and 2,300 nurses. We've expanded clinical hours, added over 2 million square feet of new space and clinics, all designed to improve access to care.

We've brought the VA claims backlog down by about 90 percent, which is a big accomplishment. We've been able to reduce veteran homelessness by about half since 2010, with a 17-percent reduction last year alone. But there's obviously more work to do.

**DAV:** *MyVA is a hallmark of your time in this office. How will you ensure the transformation continues into the next administration?*

**McDonald:** We've been working really hard to create irreversible momentum. Meaning, no matter what happens in the future, this

trend of transformation and better veteran outcomes will continue. We've tried to change the culture, to put the veteran in the center of everything we do and also improve the experience of employees. All of these things are designed to make sure our progress is irreversible. We're putting together a very thorough transition plan, so the next administration will know what we're doing and why we're doing it.

**DAV:** *What improvements have you seen in the past two years in regard to women veterans?*

**McDonald:** I think the initiative to improve care for the increasing number of veterans who are women is one of the most important things we can do during my time. We're going from roughly 11 to 12 percent of veterans who are women to as many as 20 percent. What

we've been trying to do is put in place individual clinics for women veterans, hire more providers trained in providing care for females and we've identified female providers at each one of our facilities. These are top priorities for us. We're making progress, but we're obviously going to need to make more.

**DAV:** *How essential is it for the VA to be granted a sufficient budget?*

**McDonald:** If you look at the *Independent Budget* that you all come up with, I think you would argue that we have been underfunded for construction and infrastructure by about \$9 billion, if I'm not mistaken. Sixty percent of our buildings are over 50 years old. We've got to fund the infrastructure that the VA has. One of the things we've tried to do is put in budgets that have been reflective of our needs. Under President Obama, our budget has gone up 86 percent since


he became president, but we still have work to do.

One of the lunacies of all this is we, right now, have 24 leases of clinical space that have been appropriated by Congress, but have not been authorized by our committee. So we can't move on them. Here's an example where Congress has already appropriated a budget but not authorized it. We can't do anything about it. Congress passes the laws that say what benefits we give, and Congress funds that, but when the funding doesn't match the demand, we have problems.

I think my job is to tell the American people what the truth is, and to hold Congress responsible for what only they can do. I'm going to continue to call out the appropriate parties. I'm also glad to be held accountable myself, but if I can't do something without the help of someone else, I'm going to call them out.

**DAV:** *Fixing the VA has certainly been a hot topic in the presidential debates. No matter the outcome of the election, what do you feel is most important for the next administration to remember in shaping the future of the department for the coming generations of veterans?*

**McDonald:** We can't let political ideology get in the way of transformation. The veterans in this country have spoken with one voice and gotten a lot done over the years, so I would encourage veterans and all veterans service organizations to continue to do that. Do not settle. Veterans should not be political pawns. Veterans have served their country, and they are owed what we've committed to them since the very beginning, before they were sworn in. ■

 To read additional responses from Bob McDonald, visit [dav.org/learn-more/news/2016/one-one-bob-mcdonald](http://dav.org/learn-more/news/2016/one-one-bob-mcdonald).

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS: The status of pending legislative priorities

| Legislative Priority     | Background & Explanation   | Current Status in Congress (as of 11/1/16)   |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Appeals Modernization    | In order to address a rising backlog of over 450,000 appeals, VA, the Board of Veterans Appeals and VSOs reached agreement on a new framework to streamline and modernize the appeals process. | H.R. 5620 (VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act) passed the House 9/14/16; Similar bills, 3170 & S. 3328, are currently pending in the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC). |
| Budget Flexibility       | Current budget rules restrict VA's ability to allocate funding to best meet veterans' demand for care, including for care in the community.  | Approved by SVAC as part of S. 2921, the Veterans First Act, on 5/12/16; awaiting full Senate approval. Draft legislation pending in the House.  |
| Construction & Leasing   | VA has requested authorization to lease, build, expand and rehabilitate needed medical facilities.   | Approved by SVAC as part of S. 2921, awaiting Senate approval. Included in H.R. 5286, pending in House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC).  |
| Family Caregiver Support | Legislation is required to allow family caregivers of pre-9/11 veterans to fully participate in the Comprehensive Family Caregiver Support program.  | Approved by SVAC as part of S. 2921, awaiting full Senate approval. Similar legislation introduced in the House, HVAC hearing held, but still pending.   |
| Women Veterans           | As women veterans increasingly look to VA for earned services and benefits, Congress must pass new legislation to access and remove barriers.  | Legislation was introduced but remains pending in both the Senate (S. 471) and the House (H.R. 1356, H.R. 1575, H.R. 1948, H.R. 2054).   |





# RESILIENCY DEFINED

## DAV member overcomes obstacles, achieves lifelong dream

By Bryan Lett



*Angela Madsen completes a 2,500-mile row, entering her in the record books as the first paraplegic to row the Pacific from the mainland U.S. to Hawaii.*

**I**t took three months to lose everything—three months to zero,” Angela Madsen said of the surgery that left her paralyzed in 1993.

Once a promising athlete, the Marine Corps veteran was no stranger to hardships. However, after being injured in service and undergoing a debilitating operation, she found herself starting from square one—homeless, jobless and in a desperate struggle to regain meaning in her life.

Through strength and determination, Madsen fought her way out of darkness and went on to discover a new purpose and way to once again proudly represent her country—this time as a Paralympian.

“I have been athletic all of my life,” Madsen said. “I was raised with four athletic brothers, so I never sat on the sidelines. I was always the first pick for teams—not the first girl picked, the first picked—because nobody wanted the other team to pick me.”

Madsen dreamed of competing in the Olympics. However, life interrupted when she became a mother at 17. She came up with a new plan and joined the Marine Corps.

“The Marines were supposed to be the toughest branch,” Madsen said. “Somebody told me that I would never make it, and I thought, ‘Well, that’s it. I have to go now.’”

During the second year of her enlistment, Madsen found the door to competitive athletics once again



*Madsen, 1979*

opened to her as she was recruited to play for the All-Marine basketball team. But an injury during practice soon dashed her dreams again. Madsen fell and another player landed on her lower back, rupturing two disks and ending her military career.

“When I was selected to play ball for the USMC, my Olympic dream was back on,” Madsen said. “I could be a Marine, a single parent and play sports at an elite level. But when I got injured, I was devastated.”

By 1993, Madsen had a promising job lined up as an engineer and competed in recreational sports. However, her physical condition was deteriorating.

The two ruptured disks from her back injury were collapsing on her nerve root, causing the beginning of paralysis. She was forced to take time off work to get much-needed back surgery. In another unexpected turn, doctors accidentally drilled through Madsen’s spinal cord, leaving her paralyzed and in a wheelchair.

“Life as I knew it was over,” Madsen said. Not only was she adapting to new physical limitations, she lost her job and her personal relationships began to crumble. Adding insult to injury, she found herself evicted from her home upon her discharge from the hospital.

“I was now a homeless veteran receiving 10-percent disability from the VA, which was \$78 a month at the time,” Madsen recalled. Ineligible for public assistance and with her savings depleted, Madsen sent her daughter to stay with relatives while, for nearly three

“We are never truly powerless as long as we can  
choose to move forward in a positive manner.”

—Angela Madsen, Marine veteran and Paralympian

weeks, she lived in the Disneyland parking lot. She stored her valuables in the theme park’s public lockers and slept in her wheelchair under a bus stop.

“Everything that I had worked for or hoped for was gone, and I was alone,” said Madsen. “I was fighting a battle I was not trained for. I was not thinking about sports. I was just trying to survive on the streets being newly post-op and new to wheelchair life.”

Madsen had been trying to file for her veterans benefits when she became a DAV life member of Chapter 19 in Lakewood, Calif.

It was roughly two years after her surgery that a national service officer found some medical documentation that increased her disability rating and allowed her to move into more accessible housing. DAV later appealed the claim, and Madsen received an appropriate rating for her level of disability after a hearing with the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

“I was finally done fighting and had won the war,” Madsen said.

With her VA benefits settled, Madsen decided to return to sports. Her hope was to regain confidence by attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games put on by the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1995.

“Before that I had been considering suicide,” Madsen said. “I was ready to end it, but that was the first time I

had returned to any type of sports, and it made all the difference.”

“The power of getting an injured or ill veteran back into sports and testing their limits can be crucial in the recovery process,” said DAV National Commander Dave Riley. “I can speak from experience, as that’s what saved me. I got that adrenaline back and realized I could still do things.”

In 1998, with the rowing team in need of participants, Madsen’s height and strength seemed like the perfect fit. Despite never rowing before, she got in and took off. By 2000, Madsen had qualified for the U.S. national adaptive rowing team. In what seemed like no time, she was on top of her game, winning gold medals in four consecutive world championships from 2003 to 2006. In 2008, she earned a spot on Team USA to participate in the inaugural adaptive rowing event at the Beijing Paralympics, making her teenage dream of participating in the Olympics a reality.


“I have gone through so much and worked so hard to get here,” Madsen said. “Putting on the uniform and representing our country at the highest level of sports is like gaining redemption of my birthright and fulfilling my destiny.”

In 2012, she competed at the London Paralympic Games and won the bronze medal in shot put. She now coaches and helps at military and Paralympic sports camps and clinics in both rowing and track and field. And this year, Madsen—now 57 and a grandmother of five—was one of 34 military veterans who participated in the Paralympic Games in Rio, placing seventh in women’s javelin and eighth in women’s shot put.

“Getting blown off course in rowing is like life,” said Madsen. “You can remain adrift and lost or you can decide where you want to go and plot a new course.” ■



Madsen launches the shot put during the 2012 World Championships in Indianapolis, qualifying her for that year’s Paralympic Games in London where she would win bronze in the event.



# TAKE PART IN YOUR OWN ‘MIRACLE ON A MOUNTAIN SIDE’

## Winter Sports Clinic opens registration

The participant application process for the 31st National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is now open. The event, co-hosted by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs, will be held March 26–31, 2017, in Snowmass Village, Colo. It is the largest adaptive rehabilitative sporting event of its kind in the world. The registration deadline is Nov. 30.

This program has changed the lives of more than 10,000 of America’s most severely injured and ill veterans since its inception. Often referred to as “Miracles on a Mountainside,” it helps injured veterans rebuild confidence and regain balance in their lives.

One veteran who credits the Winter Sports Clinic with turning around his life is DAV’s own National Commander, quadruple amputee Dave Riley.

“This is an event that has the power to change a person’s life. That’s exactly what it did for me,” said Riley, who found an affinity for the sit-ski at the 2010 clinic. “After losing my limbs, I felt most opportunities had been closed to me. When I first got to ski, I got that adrenaline back and realized I could still do things.”

The clinic is open to U.S. military veterans with traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputations, visual impairments, certain neurological problems and other disabilities who receive care at a VA medical facility or military treatment center. Some active military members are also eligible to participate.

“We at the VA and DAV share a goal of making this a world-class opportunity,” said Teresa Parks, Director, National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. “We are so proud of the impact we are having together on the lives of our nation’s heroes, and we want to extend the opportunity to as many qualified veterans as possible.”

The life-altering weeklong clinic helps injured and ill veterans experience the freedom, exhilaration and physical and mental benefits of adaptive winter sports.

Studies show adaptive sports alleviate stress, reduce reliance on pain and depression medication and result in higher achievement in education and employment while also leading to greater independence.

“Our prime focus is and will always be ensuring our nation’s veterans and their families are empowered to lead fulfilled lives with respect and dignity,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “The Winter Sports Clinic is a phenomenal example of how we do this, as we’ll show nearly 350 ill or injured veterans they can push their boundaries and thrive in this environment.”

“This is a great place for veterans to push their limits, learn new things and find independence,” said Riley. “It’s a chance to regain that feeling they had back before they were injured—a feeling that I can tell you from experience you think you might not get again after being hurt.” ■



### Learn More Online

To apply for the clinic, find eligibility requirements and additional information, visit [wintersportsclinic.org](http://wintersportsclinic.org).

*DAV National Commander Dave Riley at the 2011 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.*





## From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

### FRANCES J. COSTA



## Holiday spirit in our hometowns

It's that time of year again—the holidays are upon us, as are the long cold days of winter. It is a busy time of year, but I challenge all of our departments, units and individual members to use the passion we have for our veterans and their families to not let the business of the season deter us from our mission of service.

Reaching out to veterans at the local level is particularly meaningful this time of year. If you are able, please consider contacting your local VA voluntary service coordinator

at the nearest VA hospital and see what is needed for the veteran patients.

A simple visit to a veteran who might otherwise spend the holidays alone can mean so much and cost only a little time. This will

undoubtedly make their day or their holidays a little brighter.

Something I will be doing in my own backyard is reaching out to our local veterans and their families in the surrounding communities—which can easily be done by contacting the local town or city veterans services office or churches—to determine if there is a local veteran family in need of things like food baskets, gifts, clothing and other necessary items. DAV Auxiliary members are also powerful envoys in combatting

veteran homelessness. I encourage units at the local level to visit the nearest homeless shelter and investigate whether they're housing any veterans. Sometimes it only takes one individual to make a permanent difference in a veteran's life.

Make your efforts personal and do it with passion in your heart because you, too, will be better for having made a difference. Each day is an opportunity for what I refer to as “heart work,” but perhaps even more so during the holidays. And don't forget our unit and

chapter members who are alone or can no longer be active. They are still a part of our family and community in need of our support.

Writer Erma Bombeck once said, “Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's

A simple visit to a veteran who might otherwise spend the holidays alone can mean so much and cost only a little time.

compassion, unselfish caring, patience and just plain love for one another.”

I know firsthand that DAV Auxiliary members are the hardest working individuals in service, with all the above attributes, because it shows on the end-of-year reports, and that's only a percentage of what is actually done.

I wish all of our DAV and DAV Auxiliary members best wishes for a blessed holiday season full of happiness. I'm looking forward to continuing our “heart” work in 2017!



## The DAV Auxiliary 2016 Fall conference

Story by Bryan Lett | Photos by Jim Hall

**D**AV Auxiliary emphasized the importance of continuing to evolve and strengthening its partnership with DAV during its 68th annual Fall Conference, held Sept. 29 – Oct. 1 in Cincinnati.

Each year, the Fall Conference focuses on educating Auxiliary members on the organization's various programs and discussing activities for the upcoming year.

"The Fall Conference is an event that I am always excited to attend," said Darlene Spence, a member of Unit 17 in Universal City, Texas. "Every year, there is something new, and it is such an educational experience for anyone curious about making a difference in the lives of veterans and their families."

"Fall Conference brings so many members together, and it is great to see so many working for such an honorable cause. The Auxiliary is rich in history and holds the ability to paint a very productive future."

Auxiliary leaders spoke in-depth about each of their respective programs. The Auxiliary's national campaigns include Americanism, community service, legislative initiatives and voluntary service initiatives.

A memorial service was held in honor of Past Auxiliary Commander Linda Stake who passed away in July. In addition a new health program initiative that was implemented at last year's conference also returned this year.

"The second-annual health and wellness fair served again as a wonderful complement to our Fall Conference and provided precious and potentially

life-saving information to our members," said DAV Auxiliary National Adjutant Pat Kemper. "I was proud to see the productive interaction as the members visited each station and spoke with a truly concerned and passionate representative."

This was the first Fall Conference as DAV Auxiliary National Commander for Frances J. Costa, who was elected at the 95th DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in Atlanta.

"The image of DAV and the Auxiliary needs to remain unified, whether it is through membership, legislation or other programs," she said. "We have to continue working closely together to ensure the integrity of both organizations. It's all about membership, as without membership we cannot accomplish our efforts in veterans advocacy. We are thankful for each and every member that we have."

"The DAV Auxiliary Fall Conference is vital on so many levels, and for many different reasons," said DAV National Commander Dave Riley, who spoke at the event. "But I think among the most important is that DAV and the Auxiliary can truly show how we are in lockstep regarding our mission of service to veterans and their families." ■



**Learn More Online**

For the latest Auxiliary news and updates, follow the newsletter at [auxiliary.dav.org/news/News.aspx](http://auxiliary.dav.org/news/News.aspx).



*Auxiliary National Adjutant Pat Kemper (left) and National Commander Frances J. Costa*



# Columbia Trust

## Veterans serving veterans through dedicated funds

By Mary Dever

**D**AV is rooted in the idea of veterans helping veterans, not only on a one-to-one basis, but also as an organization. For example, when chapter and department leaders find they have excess funds, they are able to contribute to the DAV National Service Foundation's Columbia Trust—a common trust that enables other chapters and departments in need to support veterans service programs within their own local areas.

That idea became the DAV National Service Foundation's Columbia Trust, which has since expanded to ensure DAV's services and special programs are available nationwide.

"The Columbia Trust is about creative generosity and providing the means to help others," said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "It targets our funds where the need is greatest—to support the services DAV chapters and departments provide for disabled veterans and their families."

Chapters and departments are encouraged to apply for grants for service projects that will fulfill the unmet needs of local ill and injured veterans.

In 2015, the Trust provided more than \$1.3 million to DAV chapters and departments to support

projects and programs in four main areas of service: the Transportation Network, Hospital Service Coordinators, Department Service Officers and Homeless Veterans programs. It also supports various other state and local service initiatives.

What makes the Trust unique is that its funds are limited for use only in support of veterans and their families at the state and local levels.

Applications are reviewed by members of an advisory committee that includes one member from each of DAV's national districts, providing equal representation in deciding how to employ the Trust's funds. The committee reviews grant requests and provides specific spending recommendations. The National Service Foundation's board of directors then decides to affirm, reject or modify the advisory committee's recommendations.

"The Columbia Trust allows veterans across the nation the ability to support each other through collective means," said National Service Foundation President Arthur H. Wilson. "It's a way to share the wealth, so to speak, and to sustain meaningful programs that have a critical impact on veterans and their families."

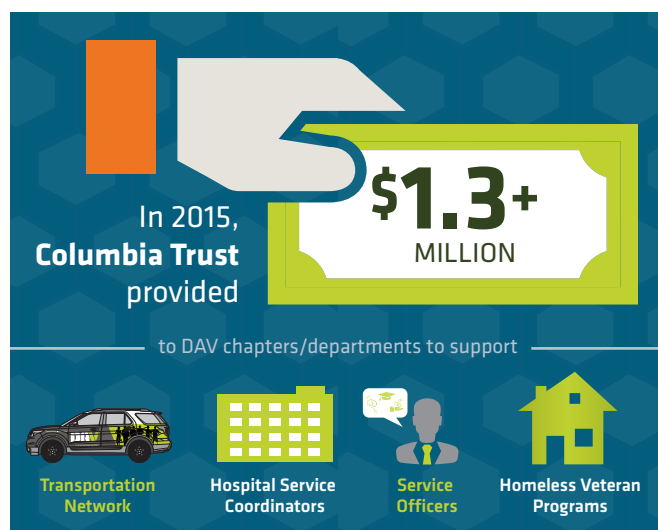
A chapter or department does not receive a grant when it is consistently able to meet the costs of its budgeted service programs. These chapters or departments are encouraged to participate in the Trust by making a contribution, ensuring funds are available when they are most needed by other chapters and departments.

"The DAV national organization matches each dollar that every person, chapter or department donates to the foundation's Columbia Trust fund," added Wilson. "This effectively doubles the value of the gifts." ■



**Learn More Online**

More information about the Trust, a grant application and steps to contribute are available online at [nsf.dav.org/trust](http://nsf.dav.org/trust).







## It's easy to leave a legacy gift to the DAV Charitable Service Trust

Charitable Gift Annuity donors receive generous fixed payments for life that are largely tax-free, a charitable income tax deduction and DAV Guardian Society recognition for their generosity.

### CGA Requirements

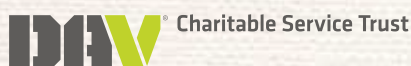
- \$10,000 is the minimum contribution amount to the Trust to establish a CGA.
- Minimum age is 60.
- Up to two annuitants (both must be over the age of 60).
- No maximum age required.
- Rates are based on age.
- The older you are, the higher the rate.

### Single-Life Rates

| Age | Rate | Age | Rate |
|-----|------|-----|------|
| 60  | 4.4% | 80  | 6.8% |
| 65  | 4.7% | 85  | 7.8% |
| 70  | 5.1% | 90+ | 9.0% |
| 75  | 5.8% |     |      |

### TO LEARN MORE

- Call Stephanie Vorhees at **1-800-216-9802**, ext. 1,
- Email [giftplanning@dav.org](mailto:giftplanning@dav.org), or
- Return the attached **postcard**.



# Looking after a spouse while helping fellow veterans in need

## Gift annuities provide a way to do both

**H**omer Middaugh is a 21-year Navy veteran who went on to work 23 more years as a civilian for the Navy. You might say he had already given enough to his country, considering he took part in three World War II invasions and a blockade during the Korean War, spent several years in Vietnam as a civilian and made many a move between. But for Middaugh, less-fortunate veterans were always in his thoughts, so he was on the lookout for something he could do to make their lives a little easier.

"I wanted to make sure my wife was well taken care of, but I also wanted to help my fellow vets," Middaugh said. "I picked up the *DAV Magazine* one day and read about gift annuities [offered by the DAV Charitable Service Trust] and decided that was a good way to do both. Everyone knows the government is mighty slow coming to veterans' aid, so I decided this was a way I could help."

Middaugh and his wife Masae liked the program enough that they decided to take out a second gift annuity soon after their first. They received a substantial charitable deduction with each annuity and immediately began to receive generous fixed payments—largely tax-free for a number of years—for as long as Middaugh lives, then for as long as his wife lives as a survivor. At the end, what remains of what they gave to fund their gift annuities will help less-fortunate veterans, which is exactly what Middaugh had in mind.

If, like the Middaughs, you would like to help less-fortunate veterans while also looking after yourself and a loved one over the age of 60, contact us today about taking out your own Charitable Gift Annuity through the Trust. A member of our staff would be happy to send you an illustration and discuss your personal options. With a gift of \$10,000 or more, you can receive generous fixed payments for life while also leaving a legacy of hope and compassion for the deserving men and women who have sacrificed so much for us. ■



Homer (left) and Masae Middaugh




## VA pilot program proposes service dog veterinary benefits

■ Veterans with limited mobility associated with mental health disorders may soon receive veterinary health benefits for service dogs through a Department of Veterans Affairs pilot program.

“We take our responsibility for the care and safety of veterans very seriously,” said VA Undersecretary for Health Dr. David Shulkin. “[We] are committed to providing appropriate, safe and effective, compassionate care to all veterans. Implementing the veterinary health benefit for mobility service dogs, approved for veterans with a chronic impairment that substantially limits mobility associated with mental health disorders, may prove to be significantly beneficial for some veterans.”

According to the VA, veterinary benefits have been provided to veterans diagnosed as having visual, hearing or substantial mobility impairments and whose rehabilitation and restorative care is clinically determined to be optimized with guide dog or service dog assistance. Under the pilot program, the same benefit is being provided to veterans with mental health disorders that cause the same type of debilitating challenges. If the pilot program becomes standard, more veterans would be able to live independently.

 More information can be found at [www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp](http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp).

## VA, DoD, NCI create nation's first targeted screening program for cancer patients

■ The VA, Department of Defense and National Cancer Institute (NCI) are partnering to find new ways to tailor cancer care for patients based on the genes and proteins associated with their tumors. According to the VA, the

tri-agency program will create the nation's first system in which cancer patients' tumors are routinely screened for gene and protein information, with the goal of finding targeted therapies for each individual patient.

The new program, Applied Proteogenomics Organizational Learning and Outcomes (APOLLO), is part of the wider national Cancer Moonshot initiative. APOLLO will initially focus on lung cancer in patients at VA and DoD medical centers, with plans to eventually include other forms of cancer. The focus on lung cancer comes from the approximately 8,000 patients being diagnosed with that particular cancer at the VA each year alone.

“APOLLO will create a pipeline to move genetic discoveries from the lab to VA clinics where veterans receive cutting-edge cancer care,” said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. “This is an example of how we are striving to be an exemplary learning health care system. We are proud to join our federal partners in this exciting initiative, and we expect it will lead to real improvements in the lives of those affected by cancer.”

The plan is for APOLLO researchers and clinicians to classify veterans' lung tumors based on changes in genes in the tumors and in the levels of proteins. Based on the individual patient, clinicians will use the findings to recommend targeted therapies or appropriate clinical trials.

## Veteran homelessness dropped by nearly half

■ Veteran homelessness is down 47 percent since 2010, according to research conducted by the VA, Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). The data also revealed a 17-percent decrease in veteran homelessness between 2015 and 2016.

“Although this achievement is noteworthy, said VA Secretary Robert McDonald, “we will not rest until every veteran in need is permanently housed.”

For veterans and their families, the VA has a wide range of programs that prevent and end homelessness, including health care, housing solutions, job training and education. Last year, some of these programs—in coordination with HUD—helped more than 157,000 people secure or retain permanent housing.

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless should contact their local VA medical center and ask to speak to a homeless coordinator, or call 877-4AID-VET.



## From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN MICHAEL P. DOVER

### Holiday anxiety



**G**reetings, everyone. We've entered the holiday season, a time for family gatherings and presents. As the head of my home, my family will ask me to bless the Thanksgiving meal which, in a rather tongue-in-cheek fashion, usually goes a little something like this:

Dear Lord, I've been asked—no, commanded—to thank you for the turkey, which is made of meat. This turkey was no doubt a lively, intelligent bird capable of actual affection, nuzzling its young with almost humanlike compassion. Anyway, it's dead, and we're going to eat it. Please give our respects to its family. Amen.

Though I try to keep this lighthearted and humorous perspective on life in general, we should keep in mind some things about the holidays that aren't so humorous.

Dr. Ken Duckworth, an assistant professor at Harvard University Medical School, says the holidays can make people feel out of control. We feel at the mercy of our relatives or can be easily steamrolled by the sheer force of family tradition. However, you do have a say; the key is to take some control over the holidays instead of letting them control you.

For many people, holiday stress can be triggered by lingering things, such as bad childhood memories or perhaps toxic relatives. (You know the type—the ones you typically avoid the rest of the year to maintain your sanity.) Other triggers can include newer issues, such as divorce, death or a deployed family member's return. You can be stressed by the normal

duties, obligations and errands of the holidays, like making the rum balls with exact precision according to your family's recipe (even though you personally find them inedible) or placing a poinsettia on a family member's grave (even though it's three hours and two states away).

Regardless of how simple or complex the problems may be, to mitigate the stress you must challenge some of your assumptions. If the old holiday traditions aren't working—if they're not making you happy and are causing undue holiday stress—perhaps it's time to do something different.

Therefore, here are four key don'ts to help you through the holidays:

1. Don't robotically do things the same way just because that's how you have always done them.
2. Don't expect miracles. You're not likely to resolve any underlying conflicts quickly when they took years to develop.
3. Don't overdo it. Pace yourself, decide on some limits and stick to them.
4. Don't worry about how things should be. Remember that there's nothing wrong, shameful or unusual about feeling down during the holidays.

While holiday stress may be seasonal, depression can be year-round. If your holiday anxiety seems severe, extends far beyond the season or interferes with your ability to cope day to day, speak with a professional doctor or counselor. You do not have to go it alone.

In His service for You.





# 'INTREPID' MISSION

## empowering veterans with brain injuries

### Thousands will benefit from charitable fund's new rehabilitative center in Washington state

By Charity Edgar

**M**arine Maj. Steve Taylor didn't realize anything had changed when he returned from Afghanistan, but his family did. They noticed a significant difference in the demeanor of the man who'd come back from war. In time, he came to see what they already knew.

Taylor was referred to the National Intrepid Center of Excellence and it was there he began to reclaim his life after a traumatic brain injury (TBI) diagnosis.

"After drudging through a depressive year of fatigue, compounded by constant migraines, insomnia and a failing memory, I gradually accepted the fact that my capabilities were deteriorating both physically and mentally," said Taylor at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Camp Lejeune Intrepid Spirit Center.

"More importantly, my abilities as a father and husband were being adversely affected," he added.

According to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, 352,619 service members have been diagnosed with a TBI since 2000. However, David A. Winters, president of the Intrepid Fallen Heroes

Fund, emphasized that the statistic only includes those diagnosed; some estimates put the total number of TBIs closer to 600,000.

"If TBIs are not diagnosed, then they are not treated," said Winters. "The brain is the most complex organ in the body. If you break your arm, you get a splint for six weeks and you're good. The brain isn't that easy."

The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, founded in 2000, empowers veterans on the road to recovery by using private donations to construct state-of-the-art health care centers and rehabilitation.

"We build the centers and then turn them over to the Department of Defense," said Winters. "We can build them twice as fast and for a quarter of the cost. We are able to provide military medicine with the tools that they otherwise would not have."

In 2007, in conjunction with the DoD, the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund constructed the Center for the Intrepid, a physical rehabilitation center at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. A few years later, the organization took on another critical issue facing ill and injured service members with the creation of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence, adjacent to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. The facility specializes in research, diagnosis and treatment of TBI. Its success spurred the creation of nine additional centers that will provide the

same life-changing care to service members and veterans with brain injuries and other psychological conditions as the National Intrepid Center of Excellence.

“Our centers are designed around a successful method of treatment, including both traditional and nontraditional therapy such as yoga and art,” Winters explained. “The patients go to the center and their spouse can come too, as family involvement is very important.”

Winters said their centers’ interdisciplinary health care approach is 90- to 92-percent effective in treating TBI, noting success is measured by a patient’s ability to continue serving in the military.

“The centralized focus of care encompassed a wide range of state-of-the-art treatment uniquely tailored to each individual,” Taylor said of his time as a patient at the center. “Within the first week, the recuperation was evident. The staff made you their priority. And at the end of four weeks, I was back—invigorated and recharged.

“The National Intrepid Center of Excellence will never fully heal the wounds of war, but what it did was provide me with the tools to overcome the barriers that have impeded me as a Marine, a father and a husband. It is a struggle but one I am prepared to take on,” he added.

The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, along with its affiliated entities, has received \$3.7 million from the DAV

Charitable Service Trust (Trust) since it first applied for funds in 2006. The most recent grant will support the development of the rehabilitative Intrepid Spirit Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state.

“The grants from the DAV Charitable Service Trust

mean a great deal.

Each [Intrepid Spirit] center costs around \$11 million. In particular, the latest grant was critical for pushing us to the top for funding of the Joint Base Lewis-McCord project and

eliminated concerns of a delay due to funding down the line,” said Winters. “On a larger scale, the Trust is helping thousands at this center. Between 1,000 and 1,500 patients will be treated per year, and these men and women will avoid the terrible problems that too many veterans who haven’t been treated, unfortunately, face.”

The Trust, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, supports physical and psychological rehabilitation programs that provide direct services to ill and injured veterans.

“For 30 years, the Trust has been giving back to the men and women who served and sacrificed through the support of programs that promote their mental, physical and emotional well-being,” said Trust President Richard Marbes. “Through the support of our generous donors, the Trust is able to help veterans, caregivers and their families when they need it most.”

The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund is just one of the grantees supported through the Trust in 2016.

“The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund and their cutting-edge medical facilities and interdisciplinary approach have resulted in unmatched progress and dedication in treating both physical and invisible wounds,” said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “The Intrepid Spirit Centers are playing an integral role for veterans on the road to recovery, and DAV is honored to support them in these life-changing efforts.” ■

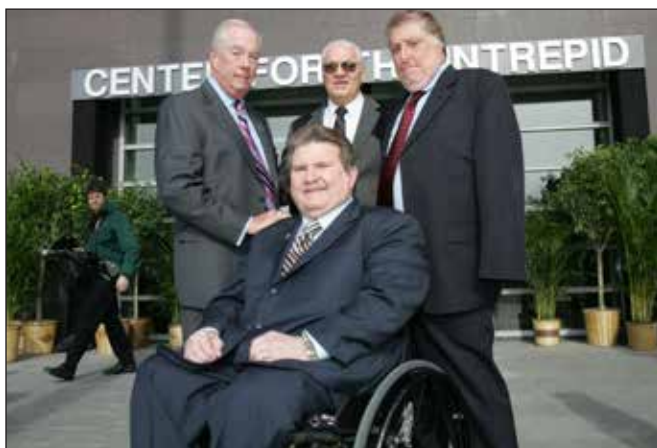


**Learn More Online**

To learn more about the DAV Charitable Service Trust and its programs, visit [cst.dav.org](http://cst.dav.org). To learn about the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund and the Intrepid Centers for Excellence, visit [fallenheroesfund.org](http://fallenheroesfund.org).

**“Through the support of our generous donors, the Trust is able to help veterans, caregivers and their families when they need it most.”**

—Richard Marbes  
Charitable Service Trust President



Charitable Service Trust President Richard Marbes (back center) attended the opening of the Center for the Intrepid at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas in 2007, along with Past DAV National Adjutant Art Wilson (left) and Past National Commanders Bradley Barton (front center) and Bobby Barrera (right).





### **A Big Ten thank you...**

Members of the DAV Department of Illinois received special recognition at the 45th Annual Big Ten Football Kickoff Luncheon in Chicago. DAV has been invited to the 2016 Big Ten Championship football game for similar recognition in December.

### **Commander visits nation's oldest VA facility...**

DAV National Commander Dave Riley meets with Air Force veteran and DAV life member George Hertlain. Riley met the Vietnam-era veteran while visiting the Togus VA Medical Center in Maine, a facility which has been serving veterans for 138 years.



### **Volunteer logs 200,000 miles for veterans...**

A volunteer van driver for Polk County, Ark., veterans, Nina Tibbs (second from left) reached a milestone when she recently logged in over 200,000 miles driving local veterans to and from their VA appointments in Little Rock. DAV Chapter 46 of Mena, Ark., presented Tibbs with a cake and a plaque as a thank you for her dedication to veterans. Presenting the award are (left to right) Donald Martin, Myron Green and James Scott, all officers of Chapter 46.



## REUNIONS

### ARMY

**1ST TRANSPORTATION COMPANY, 106TH TRANSPORTATION BATTALION** October 6-9, 2017, Fort Eustis, VA, Contact: Alfred K. Austin, Ph: 910-564-3259, Email: alfred.austin59@yahoo.com.  
**ANNUAL HAWKER REUNION (US ARMY AIR DEFENSE ARTILLERY "HAWK MISSILE SYSTEMS)** April 27-30, 2017, Huntsville, AL, Contact: Premier Reunion Service LLC, Ph: 828-256-6008, Web: mrsinc.com/hawkers/default.html.

### MARINES

**USMC BULK FUEL ASSOCIATION** April 27-30, 2017, Columbus, OH, Contact: Marvin Peck, Ph: 609-432-4027, Email: hhust61@aol.com.

### NAVY

**USS WALDRON (DD-699)** April 27-May 1, 2017, Houston, TX, Contact: Ron Wells, Ph: 512-282-4507, Email: hughronwells@yahoo.com, Web: www.usswaldron.org.  
**TEN TIN SAILORS MIDWEST BULL SESSION** April 7-8, 2017, Kearney, NE, Contact: Gregg Jensen, Ph: 308-234-1581, Email: gwjensen@frontier.net.

### AIR FORCE

**45TH/813TH MISSILE SECURITY SQUADRON** June 13-15, 2017, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Steve Sehi, Ph: 402-310-4326, Email: hsolo44@hotmail.com.  
**FLYING TIGERS SYMPOSIUM REUNION** November 10-13, 2016, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Jeff Greene, Ph: 818-670-5596, Email: burmajeff@yahoo.com.

## INQUIRIES

- Searching for two members of USMC, 1964 C Co. 1st BN 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division, Lt. Brunner or Capt. Kent. Contact Cpl. Jim Dickson at 352-687-2535.
- Searching for an airman stationed during 1956-58 at a Disbursing/Finance Office, newly reopened Seymour Johnson AFB, Goldsboro, NC. Last name, Mulholland. Contact Raymond Mattes, 125 W. Princess Anne Road, Norfolk, VA 23517, Ph: 757-961-7670, Email: RnJM64@cox.net.
- Searching for anyone who knew Gerald Glen Mahon, Hickam AFB, HI, July 1962 - February 1964, Field Maintenance Crew, APO 953 San Francisco, CA in 1963. While in Hawaii Mr. Mahon went TDY into Vietnam to repair planes and then back to Hawaii. Contact Mrs. Gerald Mahon at janiewmahon@yahoo.com.
- Searching for anyone who served with me in the USAF AACS/AFCS (name was changed) during 1953-55, 1956-58, 1960-62 or 1965-68, please contact Reinhold Gassman, 164 Wagon Ford Road, Easley, SC 29640, Ph: 864-836-8438.
- Searching for anyone who served with me as a Boiler Technician on board the USS Hemitage (LSD-34) during her complete overhaul at Newport News shipyard in 1972-73. Contact Kevin Casey, Ph: 336-707-0977, Email: kcasey145@hotmail.com.
- Searching for Dainon Rhodes and Jack H. Love, who served with me in Lock Lacad Route 1 Vietnam, 25 miles Saigon Base in 1968-69. 1 Big Red, 8th Infantry, 6th Battalion Medium Artillery on 155 Houser split trail. Contact George L. Jones, P.O. Box 113, Pittsburg, IL 62974, 618-694-3030 or 618-889-4731.
- Searching for anyone who served with me, 67th Med Detachment, 2nd Armored Division, Mainz, Germany 1954-1957, Commander Officers, Capt. Wolfe and Capt. C. R. Williams. Contact Arthur B. Barnes at 919-688-4775.
- Searching for anyone who served with me in Greeley, CO, from September 1974 to July 1975 and mid-1980s to 1990 (Yugoslavia stand-by) in Evans and Greeley, CO, plus those in the 5 a.m. drills on the field of University of Northern Colorado, 1974-75. Also searching for information on lost records from Denver VAMC 1990-2005. Contact Sr. Rae Marie David, General Delivery, Sacramento, CA 95814. Searching for any Air Force personnel who were stationed at Don Muang RTAFB, Thailand, during the Vietnam War. Please contact Tommie Byford at 214-471-3671, Email: tommiebyford@hotmail.com.
- Searching for any information on the Battle of Little Gibraltar. I am trying to locate the 1st Lt. with Easy Company 1st or 2nd Platoon, 2nd Division. Please contact Dean Fatland at 701-532-020, Email: dsfatland@gmail.com.
- Searching for anyone who served with me at Fort Bragg, NC, 92nd Engineers Battalion, 159th Engineers Group "Black Diamonds" who was TYD'd to Seymour Johnson AFB in 1961 for a plane cleanup. Please contact T. Turano, Email: inferno.orange1943@gmail.com.
- Searching for anyone who served with me on VFP 63 DET 43 Cruise of 69-70 (USS America). After incident of the #2 elevator dropping, a detachment deployed to Da Nang to service an RF8-G. Please contact Alfred Gokey, 2953 Chandler St., Abrams, WI 54101, Ph: 920-785-1993 or 920-826-5888, Email: tookkay58@aol.com.
- Searching for Brian Byrnes who served with A Co., 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry, 1st Air Cavalry Division, August 1970, Phuoc Long, Vietnam. Please contact Wayne Laresse at 413-568-8724, Email: wino19501@msn.com.
- Searching for anyone who served in the Marine Corps, 1st Marine Division, Echo 27; Weapons Platoon 1969, during Oklahoma Hills operation. Please contact John L. Hinton, 2953 Medina Ave., Columbus, OH 43224, Ph: 614-263-0677.

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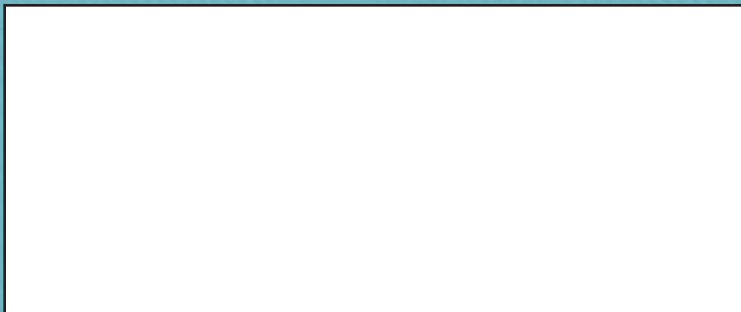


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