



THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY

JULY | AUGUST 2018

MAGAZINE

Caught in the CROSSFIRE

Mental health concerns, mass
shootings thrust veterans into
nationwide debate

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MISSION complete

New law expands caregiver
benefits and services to
thousands of veterans

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RENO

DAV & AUXILIARY
NATIONAL CONVENTION
JULY 14 - 17, 2018

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino

For the first time since 2004, this year's national convention returns to the Biggest Little City in the World. The 97th DAV and Auxiliary National Convention will convene July 14-17, 2018, at the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno, Nev.

The convention is an opportunity to advocate for ill and injured veterans, enjoy the camaraderie of fellow members, and help shape the DAV and Auxiliary agenda for the coming year. It also allows for a hearty dose of fun in this premier vacation destination for attendees.

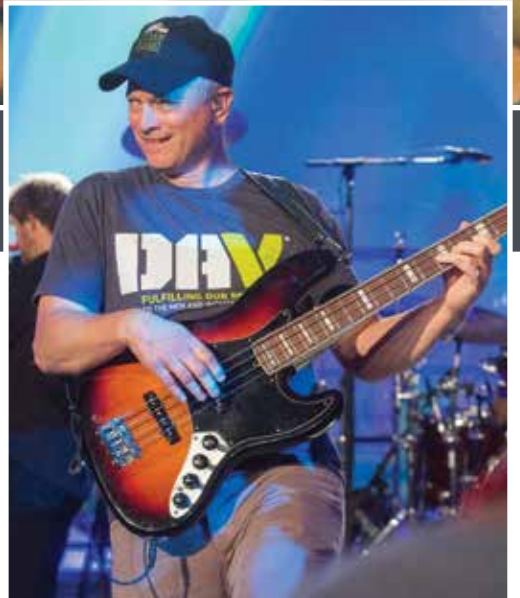
After spending time working alongside fellow veterans and members to help shape our organizations' futures, you can experience a multitude of one-of-a-kind experiences in the city. Reno offers something for everyone. Downtown's National Automobile Museum showcases more than 200 vintage cars; the Midtown District is lined with shops and restaurants; and north of downtown, the Animal Ark sanctuary is home to rescued bears, cheetahs and other wildlife. Also, Lake Tahoe is just 22 miles away. With seemingly endless shopping, dining and recreational activities, Reno has attractions for all to enjoy.

The convention is again on the traditional Saturday through Tuesday schedule. Additionally, mark your calendars, as Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band are slated to play Monday night.

As published previously, the cutoff date for receiving the DAV negotiated room rate was June 8. While rooms are likely still available at Grand Sierra Resort and Casino, the rates may vary and be above the DAV negotiated rate. For available room options, a listing of alternative hotels near the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino, or more information, please visit: dav.org/events/2018-national-convention. ■

 [Learn More Online](http://www.dav.org/events/2018-national-convention)

If you can't be there in person, visit www.dav.org/events/2018-national-convention to watch live or recorded business sessions.



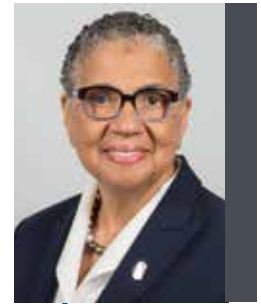
Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band are on tap to perform yet again during Fun Night.



TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

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

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER DELPHINE METCALF-FOSTER



Stronger together

It is hard to believe that this is my last commentary as commander of our wonderful organization. Serving at the helm of DAV this past year has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

While I, of course, need to thank Chapter 21 in Vallejo, the Department of California and the wonderful staff at headquarters for their unmatched support, there is another group of people I must recognize for making this past year possible. It is each and every one of you—the more than 1 million members who represent various ages, eras of service, types of illness or injury, and gender. DAV members come from all walks of life, and that diversity plays no small part in our success.

When I was elected to serve as your commander, I broke a glass ceiling as the first woman, as well as African-American female, to lead one of the three largest veterans service organizations. I was honored to hold a position that illustrates what DAV already knows: The ability to lead doesn't require a certain gender or race.

As I've said before, I joined the Army after I'd already started a family. My daughter protested my plans and told me I'd embarrass myself. I challenged her to join me at boot camp. She lasted two weeks, and I made it more than two decades!

One day in boot camp sticks out vividly. A drill sergeant called me into his office. I initially believed I had done

something wrong and braced myself for pushups. Imagine my surprise when I learned that I was being sought out for advice regarding our platoon.

Despite not yet being a full-fledged soldier, the drill sergeant wanted my guidance because of my age and life experience. Years later, I have seen this play out at DAV. I believe that I have been able to serve my fellow veterans by providing insight based upon my unique life journey. What is important to note, though, is that it isn't solely my background and experience that have made me a successful advocate for the men and women who served.

Everything that our beloved organization has accomplished in the past year would not be possible without each and every one of you and the unique perspectives you bring to our ranks.

Whether it was advocating for a strong VA or fighting for expanded caregiver benefits, over the past year, you never wavered in support of the men and women who served. That tenacious fighting spirit will continue to serve veterans long after we depart Reno, Nev., and a new leader takes the reins of our great organization. While my tenure may be coming to an end, I have no doubt DAV will continue to excel in serving veterans. After all, it isn't about me. It is about us working together to complete the mission, as we have for nearly 100 years and will for 100 more.

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DAV MAGAZINE • July/August 2018
Contact us: dav.org • Toll Free 877-426-2838 • 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076 • feedback@dav.org. Volume 60, Issue 4, *DAV Magazine* (ISSN 0885-6400). Editorial Office: DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. Telephone 859-441-7300 or toll free (877) I AM A VET. Published and circulated bimonthly bulletin by the Disabled American Veterans, a Congressionally chartered, nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. DAV Home Page is dav.org. Available on recording for the blind and those with physical handicaps that preclude reading printed material. The magazine is mailed free to DAV and Auxiliary members who are paid subscribers. Nonmembers may subscribe for \$15 per year. Periodical postage paid at office of publication, Newport, KY 41071, and at additional offices. Printed in U.S.A. Change of Address: When notifying a change of address, send former as well as new address, including ZIP code, to: DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550.



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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT J. MARC BURGESS



America's 242-year-old story

Every summer at this time, I pause and reflect on Independence Day and what it means for our country.

In 1776 in Philadelphia, after much debate, heated rhetoric and more than a few cases of begrudging compromise, a group of people representing 13 distinguished and separate colonies banded together and declared they would take on the strongest empire in the world. They were determined to carve out a new nation based on a seemingly anachronistic idea of self-government answerable to its citizens.

And 242 years later, the great experiment called the United States of America is still going strong.

The colonists knew then what the veteran community still knows today. It's not enough to merely declare a nation free and independent. It takes a special kind of courage to secure and defend that freedom.

No one understands this more than our country's disabled veterans. Men and women like us have left pieces of our physical well-being in faraway places as we went forth to conduct America's business. No one knows more than us about the cost associated with the freedoms that are sacred to our way of life.

I also can't help but think of another special group of people who are also heroes.

Caregivers.

When a military member is changed by his or her service, a caregiver's life is inevitably and instantly altered as well.

These men and women play a pivotal role in an ill, injured or wounded veteran's daily life. The caregivers' story goes hand in hand with the story of the American veteran, and both are weaved together in the fabric of our nation's history.

That's why I could not be prouder of all the hard work this past year that culminated in DAV's invitation to the White House, where President Trump signed the VA MISSION Act into law in June. This new law will extend support to thousands more deserving family caregivers on whom injured veterans rely, and it couldn't have happened without your advocacy efforts.

DAV celebrates this historic law, but there is still work to be done. While the law provides comprehensive VA caregiver benefits to injured veterans of all eras, it does not include veterans who were not hurt in combat, like Past National Commander Dave Riley.

While on active duty as a U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmer, Dave contracted a bacterial infection that resulted in all four of his limbs being amputated. His wife, Yvonne, has since been his primary caregiver for more than 30 years. Veterans like Dave—made seriously ill from their service—deserve this much-needed benefit as well, and DAV will continue to fight on their behalf.

This Independence Day, I ask you to join me in saluting caregivers—our nation's true unsung heroes. Visit unsungheroesinitiative.org to learn how you can honor them through action.



VA privatization

I am absolutely opposed to privatizing the VA system. The VA needs more doctors to take care of the overloads. My care in the VA has been excellent, and the doctors and their staffs have been the very best. I am a 96-year-old World War II veteran and use the VA quite often. **Herald Reid, Milton-Freewater, Ore.**

DAV thanked me

I was honorably discharged from the Army in September 1967. In December 1967, I received a certificate of appreciation from DAV before the VA granted me a 10 percent disability. DAV's certificate was the only recognition I received for my military service from the civilian world. It meant a great deal to me then and every day in the last 50 years. **Tom Britt, Bridgeville, Pa.**

Welcome home

I appreciate the article from the national adjutant about Vietnam veterans [in the March/April 2018 *DAV Magazine*]. However, I have a problem with the word "chided" in the article. Many of us returning home were not chided. We were spit on, thrown at with chicken blood and who knows what else by our fellow citizens when getting off the bus at the airports. It was horrible and remains one of my most awful memories. **Dr. R. Earnest Taylor, Athens, Ga.**

DAV, Boulder Crest helped me

Regarding "A Place of Healing" in the March/April 2018 issue of *DAV Magazine*, I can say that it was DAV that has been most instrumental in assisting me with my claim and bringing me to a state of wholeness. My family and I had the awesome opportunity to go to Boulder Crest Retreat, as well. We all went in 2017 over Labor Day weekend.

I couldn't agree more with this article that the retreat does so much good for disabled veterans like ourselves. Thank you DAV and Boulder Crest Retreat. **Kurt Petersen, Detroit, Mich.**

Women veterans

As a female veteran who served in both the Navy and then Marine Corps, I am very proud of my service, the glass ceilings I helped to get through, and to pave the way for others. The work you do is invaluable, especially the national service officers. **Janice Lascko, Cleveland, Ohio**

DAV Magazine

I just received my first issue of *DAV Magazine* and wanted to say how much I enjoyed reading it. With all that I'm going through, just reading the magazine really lifted my spirits. Thank you so much. I was really impressed with the inquiries section, where you have a chance to reconnect with some of the comrades you served with. **Jerry Jacobs, via email**

Compensation rates

I'd like to see DAV focus on lobbying Congress for significant increases in the veterans disability compensation rates, which were published in the March/April 2018 *DAV Magazine*. These rates are grossly inadequate, and it is high time DAV leadership engage congressional leadership to change them. **Bobby MacKeil, Boston, Mass.**

Editor's response: *We agree disability compensation rates are*

below what service-disabled veterans deserve. DAV Resolution No. 095 calls for a realistic increase in VA compensation rates. We have called on Congress to enact legislation to increase these rates, and we need you and all service-disabled veterans to push their elected officials to fix this problem. Help us at DAVCAN.org.

Veteran families

I would like to address this to all wives or husbands who take care of everything at home while we veterans are away doing our duty. I wish I had done this earlier so my wife would have seen it in writing. However, she is now deceased. I have never seen a thank you in any magazine to our mates. Yes, we had it rough in most cases, but so did my wife who, for 24 years of my military service, was maintaining a household of six children—feeding, clothing, proper training and taking care of all expenses—and keeping the home fires burning. **Albert Haats, Lumberton, N.C.**

Facebook

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I volunteer for DAV, transporting veterans to and from their appointments in either Prescott or Phoenix, and sometimes locally. The majority of them served during Vietnam, as I did, and fortunately, I came out unscathed. I/we owe these veterans recognition for their service, as well as to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Ah Ho. **Vern Cawker, Flagstaff, Ariz.**

WRITE TO US Please send feedback to DAV Magazine, 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076, or via email to feedback@dav.org. We also welcome feedback on our Facebook (facebook.com/DAV) and Twitter (twitter.com/davhq) pages. We regret we are unable to acknowledge every letter due to the volume received. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving claims are referred to DAV's Service Department.

NO QUIT

After more than 30 years in the military, benefits advocate continues to serve Colorado veterans as full-time volunteer



Scott Ryan (right) congratulates a fellow soldier after administering the oath of enlistment to him during a deployment to the Middle East in 2007. Ryan is a full-time benefits advocate for DAV, ensuring his fellow veterans get justice for their sacrifices.

By Charity Edgar

Scott Ryan recognizes his schedule does not look like most retirees', but he wouldn't have it any other way.

Ryan served in the military for 31 years, but retirement hasn't stopped the Army veteran from continuing to give back.

"Everyone said you did your part, so just take a knee," explained Ryan, who retired as a chief warrant officer 4 in 2013. "So like other veterans, I didn't listen."

Ryan was working as a consultant when someone asked if he had ever submitted a claim after retiring from the military.

"Someone told me they didn't think I was being fully taken care of and recommended I talk to DAV," recalled Ryan. He reached out to the Department of Colorado for claims assistance, and the cycle of service began.

After collecting documentation and submitting his claim through a DAV department service officer, Ryan received a favorable decision from the VA. He then drove 35 miles to say thank you in person.

The service officer's response: "That's what I do. I'm here to help veterans."

Ryan was shocked, but then he realized there was an opportunity for him to pay it forward.

He joined DAV, and, after completing benefits advocate training, began driving over an hour to volunteer each day. Ryan stopped consulting so he

could clock 40 hours a week as a volunteer. He realized he could better manage his time by eliminating the daily commute and creating a home office.

"Everyone in the Army knows the core values, and two of these still resonate," Ryan explained. "DAV's slogan is 'Fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.' That's [the Army core values of] selfless service and honor.

"So many veterans have been told so many things [by organizations or individuals]—we'll do this, you can do that, I'll take care of you—but then it doesn't happen. There are veterans who are jaded as a result, and rightfully so," he added. "When I take someone on as a client and say, 'I'll take care of you,' I won't quit until I am completely done with any subsequent claim or appeal, no matter how long it takes."

Vietnam veteran Mike Ramsey was one of the last Marines exposed to Agent Orange in the Saigon evacuation. Ramsey was wearing a U.S. Marine Corps pin when he met Ryan while bringing him a home delivery. Ryan saw the pin and asked about his service.

"I told him, 'I know where you're going with this, and I appreciate it, but I've already tried for 40 years [to access benefits earned through service]. And I just kept getting told no,'" said Ramsey, who had long given up hope on having a favorable claim. Ryan convinced Ramsey to give him a shot.

As with his other clients, Ryan had Ramsey provide

“When I take someone on as a client and say, ‘I’ll take care of you,’ **I won’t quit** until I am completely done with any subsequent claim or appeal, no matter how long it takes.”

—Scott Ryan,
DAV benefits advocate



After receiving benefits assistance from DAV, Army veteran Scott Ryan decided to pay it forward and volunteer as a claims specialist. (From left) Kevin Blair, Mike Ramsey and Brian Shanahan are just three of the many veterans Ryan has assisted since becoming a DAV volunteer benefits advocate four years ago.

a head-to-toe inventory of what was bothering him. “Then I have them get their medical record, and I read every word on every page,” said Ryan. “I see if we can directly tie something to their service. It isn’t always a straight line. Sometimes it’s a squiggly line, and that’s fine—as long as the two lines connect.”

Ryan submitted three claims for Ramsey, who finally received a favorable outcome and a rating that accurately reflected his service connection, and is still working on another, four years after first meeting the Vietnam veteran.

“I’m very tenacious, and I won’t give up,” said Ryan. “You have to be creative and resourceful [as a benefits advocate]. You can’t just quit when you hit a roadblock. We adapt and overcome, and we don’t accept failure.

“Just like in the Army, we will find a way. It is not always fast or easy—likely hard—and it will take time, but there’s always a way,” he added. “That’s what sets DAV apart.”

Kevin Blair had recently retired from the Army, where he served as a member of the special operations community. During an out-processing brief, he was given a standard 30 minutes to meet with a claims specialist. Blair had 1,400 pages of documents in his medical record. He knew his case was complicated and would take a lot longer than a half-hour. That is when he was referred to Ryan by another soldier in his community.

“Kevin’s claim took me an entire month, working seven hours every day. I read every page in his record,” said Ryan.

Ryan explained that he submits final claims with the same care and attention required for building a high-quality product for a military leader, as he did while in the Army.

“I set everything up like a table of contents so it reads like a book,” he said. “Kevin’s book was 800 pages.”

Ryan often visits his claimants and their families to foster a sense of trust, and Blair appreciated the house calls while he worked on the claim.

“Scott coming over and meeting my family, so my wife could ask questions—that was a very personal touch,” said Blair. “He knows the effect that a claim will have on all of us.”

“When I take care of a client, I take care of their whole family,” said Ryan, who added that filing claims can be difficult for veterans who served in the special operations community.

“Very often, an operator will have a limited medical record because they never go to the doctor or don’t have access to one on various missions,” he explained. “I actually went to the special forces clinic here and made an office call in order to explain that so many people they see won’t have the necessary documentation for injuries, like back problems, [gastrointestinal] issues or neck injuries.”

Brian Shanahan, who served in the Army special operations forces with Blair, was also referred to Ryan for assistance with a claim when he retired earlier this year.

“I read that the average [Special Operations Command] member goes 14 years before seeking treatment for traumatic injuries, and that’s about the same time for me. And in my case, it’s a lot of [traumatic brain injuries],” said Shanahan. “We don’t bring injuries to anyone’s attention, because then we might not be deployable.”

Shanahan is grateful he had Blair’s experience to reference following retirement.

“I had heard about Scott, and I knew [Blair] trusted him, so it was fine for me to open up to him,” explained Shanahan, who was frustrated with the retirement process. “When I retired, it felt like I was the first person that ever retired from the Army.”

DAV Colorado Springs transportation coordinator Steve Myer hears this discouraged sentiment all too often.

“Anytime I get a call for a special case, I always contact Scott,” said Myer, who first met Ryan when the volunteer started training as a service officer in 2014. “He has a heart of gold and takes on cases that are unbelievably difficult.”

Blair agreed that Ryan’s commitment to giving back is special—and life-changing for his family.

“If I had to deal with my injuries and go to work at the same time, it would be overwhelming. I don’t know how I could do a job if I could barely walk. My claim has changed not only my life but my kids,” said Blair. “It amazes me that there’s someone that works that hard out of the goodness of his heart. He does it because he enjoys seeing the benefits of helping us.”

“Scott cared when no one else did,” added Ramsey.

“Chapter service officers played a pivotal role in DAV’s ability to help military personnel, veterans and their families receive more than \$4.3 billion in retroactive and annual benefits last year,” said DAV National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “Scott epitomizes dedication and professionalism in each and every claim he submits, and DAV is grateful to have him as a volunteer serving his fellow veterans.”

Ryan insists it is his duty to give back.

“There’s a void, and I am the stopgap. It’s not a job. I don’t get paid. It’s a passion,” said Ryan. “I’m fulfilling the promise, and in order to do that, I have to go the extra mile.” ■

“Scott coming over and meeting my family, so my wife could ask questions—that was a very personal touch. **He knows the effect that a claim will have on all of us.**”

—Kevin Blair, Army veteran

After closely working with Army veteran Kevin Blair—and his wife—on his complicated claim, DAV benefits advocate Scott Ryan later nominated Blair to receive a trained companion dog through a DAV partnership with Brantley Gilbert and Custom Canine Unlimited. Blair (third from left) invited Ryan (second from left) along to the country music star’s concert where he received his family’s new companion dog.



Transforming adversity into a **LIFE** of **SERVICE**

2018 Outstanding Disabled
Veteran of the Year overcomes
invisible injuries to help fellow
veterans, community



Callie Rios (center) works closely with Midland College's VA coordinator, Kay Schipper (left), to help veterans on campus, including Jason Mac (right). Previously a student veteran, Rios understands firsthand the unique challenges facing former service members in higher education.

By Charity Edgar

When Callie Rios joined the military, she took an oath to defend her country and was prepared to face any enemy on behalf of the nation.

But she never expected to be attacked by a fellow soldier.

"I joined the military because I was a single parent, and I was looking for better job opportunities, a better life for my child," explained Rios of her decision to enlist at age 18. "I followed in my family's footsteps and became the first female in my family to join the military."

Rios' first duty station was in South Korea, and she thrived in the Army. But life was about to change drastically when she returned stateside.

"There was a turning point in my military career at Fort Knox when I was the victim of a sexual assault," recalled Rios. "It really changed my perspective. I did not really find much support in my unit; I didn't really find much support anywhere. It was a very lonely time for me.

"I came back out of it, and now I'm ready to help other women who were in the same situation as I was."

Rios is active in DAV Chapter 58 in Midland, Texas, serving as the junior vice commander.

"Callie brings heart. And brings kindness to the chapter," said Chris Molsbee, the chapter's senior vice commander. "[She] helps bring unity, helps bring some of the glue of the organization together."

Molsbee emphasized that having Rios onboard has been critical for engaging other women veterans. He also commended her volunteer efforts.

"As the junior vice commander of the chapter, she is an intricate part of all of the charity events that we do," said Molsbee.

In 2017, the chapter raised the most funds nationwide—more than \$40,000—during Golden Corral's Military Appreciation Night at the restaurant location in neighboring Odessa.

Rios is especially proud of her efforts to support fellow women veterans and military sexual trauma survivors. In 2017, Rios spearheaded a women veterans conference, Heroes in Heels, sponsored by the chapter. Incorporating mental health practitioners for former servicewomen with invisible wounds was an event priority.

Callie brings **heart**. And brings **kindness** to the chapter. [She] helps bring **unity**, helps bring some of the glue of the organization together.

—Senior Vice Commander Chris Molsbee, DAV Chapter 58, Midland, Texas

“During our last year’s conference we had clinicians here that could talk to first responders, that could talk to veterans and kind of give them some insight on where they can get help and how they can get help,” explained Rios, who previously served as a deputy sheriff, patrolman and public safety officer in her civilian career.

“They also got to see some of us female veterans out there just rocking it, making sure everybody is taken care of, working toward a better future for all of our veterans,” she added. “It shows them there’s good things, there’s still good people, there’s still good things in life to be had.”

Rios understands firsthand how difficult it can be to overcome injuries that are invisible to everyone else. She channels the trauma she sustained in the Army into supporting fellow veterans. This personal experience is what drives her commitment to ensuring others don’t hesitate to seek out mental health assistance.

Rios also invests a lot of time at Midland College. Previously a student veteran, Rios now holds a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, so she understands the unique challenges former service members face on campus.

“She reaches out to people. She doesn’t sit back and wait for them to call her,” said Kay Schipper, an Air Force veteran and the VA coordinator for Midland College. “She’s always been there when I’ve called her when I’ve had a need, or a student [veteran]’s having a need.”

Navy veteran Daniel Ortega agreed.

“Any program that DAV can touch to help the veterans lives improve, she’s all over it. It doesn’t take anything but a phone call to get her attention and to get her involved in that veteran’s life,” said Ortega, a graduate turned employee at the college.

Rios’ dedication to giving back extends beyond serving her fellow veterans. She also supports her community as a volunteer in the Texas State Guard, a military force



At 18, Callie Rios enlisted in the Army. The single mother was seeking a better life for her daughter.

that supports humanitarian missions throughout the state by augmenting the Texas Army National Guard and Texas Air National Guard.

After an honorable discharge from the Army, Rios found herself missing the sense of belonging she had found in the military.

“I was looking for something to help me transition to civilian life, and the Texas State Guard gave me a home,” she said.

“[Staff] Sgt. Rios has almost nine years in the Texas State Guard, which speaks to her volunteerism,” said Col. Jeremy Franklin, who commands the 39th Regiment. “Sgt. Rios actually

deployed in response to Hurricane Harvey. She worked in an American Red Cross shelter operation. She also served in a pod, which is where we dispense supplies to civilians impacted by the disaster.”

There is another group of people who benefit from Rios’ dedication to giving back: her kids.

“I think volunteering sets an example for them,” said Rios. “They see me do it, they want to do it, and it gives them more exposure to other people, and it also teaches them values.”

“I am proud to honor Callie for her commitment to veterans, her family, local community, Texas and the nation,” said DAV National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster. “Her resilience as a survivor of military sexual trauma and commitment to supporting men and women battling invisible injuries undoubtedly provides inspiration to our fellow injured veterans and their families. Her humble spirit and positive attitude are living testaments to DAV’s mission of empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.”

“I volunteer and I give back so much because I love people,” Rios stated. “If they can find a piece of my story that connects with them and helps them in any kind of way, it’s worth it for me.” ■

VA MISSION Act expands caregiver assistance to pre-9/11 veterans

Historic veterans legislation signed into law is a big win for veterans and their caregivers

By Mary Dever

On June 6, 2018, following years of debate, collaboration and finally compromise, President Donald Trump signed into law historic veterans legislation that will expand the eligibility for the VA comprehensive caregiver program to veterans catastrophically injured before Sept. 11, 2001. The John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018, referred to as the VA MISSION Act, will also strengthen VA health care and consolidate VA community care programs, provide supplemental funding to continue the current Choice Program for another year, give the VA new tools to hire and retain quality health care professionals, and develop a long-term plan to realign and modernize the VA's health care infrastructure.

The bill signing ceremony—held in the White House Rose Garden—was attended by representatives from a number of veterans service organizations, including DAV.

“No matter when you served or where you fought, if at some point you were in that uniform, then you deserve our absolute best,” Trump said at the ceremony.

“DAV has long advocated for extending comprehensive caregiver benefits to veterans injured and made ill prior to Sept. 11, 2001, and the VA MISSION Act takes major strides to close that gap and



Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine (second from right) represented DAV and the organization's advocacy efforts at the president's signing of the VA MISSION Act into law on June 6, 2018. (Photo by Michael Brochstein/Sipa USA via AP Images)

provide equity to thousands of family caregivers,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine. “This legislation also provides VA with the tools and road map to expand access, improve quality and sustain VA health care for millions of veterans. It was an honor to stand up on behalf of our organization as the president signed this monumental bill into law.”

The VA MISSION Act was introduced by Rep. Phil Roe, chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC), in agreement with Sens. Johnny Isakson and Jon Tester, the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, respectively. DAV and other major veterans service organizations worked closely with both committees in reaching the final compromise and submitted a joint letter of support signed by 38 veterans organizations and stakeholders.

The bill passed the HVAC May 8 by a vote of 20 to 2, was approved by the full House with a vote of 347 to 70 May 16, and was passed by the full Senate May 23 by a vote of 92 to 5.

DAV National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster, a former caregiver, applauded the new law: “With the signing of the VA MISSION Act, we are now one step closer to ensuring no veteran or caregiver will be left behind again.” ■



Groundbreaking clinical trial prepares for next phase

As seen in this X-ray, a POP implant essentially acts as an extension of the patient's limb. The titanium rod attaches to human bone and becomes stronger over time, eliminating many of the issues amputees endure. (Photo courtesy of Ed Salau)

VA trial aims to change veterans' prostheses forever

By Bryan G. Lett

“I’m continually getting stronger,” Bryant Jacobs said. “There is no limitation now—it’s whatever my body will let me do and not what my leg will allow me to do. I wake up, put it on, and it’s on all day.”

Roughly two and a half years ago, Jacobs and fellow Army veteran and amputee Ed Salau participated in a significant VA-funded clinical trial that sought to change the way we think about prostheses and the physical capabilities of the veterans wearing them.

More than a decade of initial research went into the technique, and in December 2015, Jacobs and Salau became the first Americans to receive percutaneous osseointegrated prostheses, or POP implants, at the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System.

For years, it has been a common practice for amputees to cap their truncated limbs with a latex sock and place it into the socket of a prosthesis. For many amputees, the socket attachment is difficult to wear for more than a few hours per day. Oftentimes the socket design causes swelling, pain and routine trips to the doctor’s office for refitting. It is, literally, a sensitive

topic for those who have lost a limb, since injuries or infections to the remaining “stump” can cause severe setbacks in a veteran’s recovery. It can limit mobility and may even lead to further amputations or other invasive procedures.

The POP implant removes the need for a socket by surgically inserting a titanium rod into the patient’s remaining femur before attaching a docking station for prosthetic limbs. This design offers more comfort, increases range of movement, simplifies switching between specialized devices, helps amputees adjust to substrates, and provides a range of improvements in their mobility and quality of life.

DAV caught up with Jacobs and Salau to ask how their new limbs have been performing and to see where the clinical trial stands today.

“I don’t think about it anymore,” said Salau, who lost his leg in 2004 in Iraq when a rocket-propelled grenade hit the vehicle he was riding in. “It is the closest thing to a leg regeneration as I can get.”

Salau spent the better part of eight years in a socket prosthesis, so he is well aware of the differences a POP implant provides to its patients.

“

Osseointegration is a game-changer in every way possible. **It makes being an amputee easy.**

—Bryant Jacobs



“There is no limitation now—it’s whatever my body will let me do and not what my leg will allow me to do,” said Bryant Jacobs, comparing his percutaneous osseointegrated prosthesis, or POP implant, to his previous socket prosthesis.

“It’s so different—it is apples to chain saws. It’s so hard to grasp if you haven’t experienced it,” Salau said. “My activities for daily life are rock-solid now. I even walked the Army Ten-Miler in a brand new pair of shoes. There is no way in a socket I walk 10 miles.”

Jacobs, an avid golfer, was previously forced to remove his socket prosthesis nearly every hole for comfort adjustments.

“Osseointegration is a game-changer in every way possible,” Jacobs said. “It makes being an amputee easy. And, oh yeah, you can ‘feel’ the ground now. You can feel if you’re on grass or if you step on a rock. You can tell if you’re on concrete or carpet—you can feel the difference. You’re skeletal again.”

Too often the lifestyles of amputees depend on their loved ones around them for assistance with daily activities. POP implants provide amputees the opportunity to be more self-sufficient and offer a sense of normalcy often lacking with older prostheses.

“One of my favorite things to do in life is walk on the beach,” said Dawn Salau, Ed’s wife. “He was previously unable to do that, as he couldn’t walk on the sand. Ed would come home from work and take his leg off and be done for the day.

“I did all the chores because he couldn’t. Not that he didn’t want to, but with the socket, when it came off, his day was over,” Dawn added. “Now, we can go for ice cream or a drink, and post-surgery, we can even walk on the beach. It changed his lifestyle and improved our marriage.”

“My wife gets a part of her life back,” said Salau. “Imagine going into a doctor’s office, and they are able to inject a two-way street back into your relationship.”

Jacobs and Salau were a part of an early feasibility study funded by the VA that included eight other veterans. Currently, the staff at Salt Lake City is compiling their findings for a report to be filed with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The FDA will have to ultimately approve the surgical technique before it can be covered by insurance and more broadly utilized.

“The things that the FDA will look at are, is it safe? Their No. 1 priority is the safety of the patient,” said Dr.



Sarina Sinclair, a part of the osseointegration clinical research team at the Salt Lake City VA. “They also look at things like, can the protocol be translated to other facilities and maintain the same capabilities and patient experience? The FDA will also determine how many patients we need to enroll in the next trial to show results for a larger study.”

In conjunction with the hospital filing its original 12-month post-operation data to the FDA, they will also apply for a larger study to take place in 2019.

“We are very pleased with the results from the early feasibility study,” said Sinclair. “This was truly a bench-to-bedside-driven design. The consistency we have seen, even in this small sample, is very encouraging. If we weren’t confident, we wouldn’t move forward.”

For amputee veterans like Bobby Body, DAV life member and 2016 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year, every inch of progress with the FDA is a step in the right direction. Body is a world champion weight lifter and still views this operation as a way to improve his life and the ease in which he lives it.

“I don’t want to deal with sleeves, sockets or skin irritation anymore,” Body said. “It’s bulky, it tears up clothes, it’s too heavy, and I need new straps all the time. I want the feeling of having a real leg again. I am hoping the new procedure gets approved and will

Toward the end of 2015, Ed Salau was part of a VA-funded clinical trial and received a percutaneous osseointegrated prosthesis, or POP implant, to replace his traditional socket prosthesis. The difference in his quality of life and ability to take on the daily activities his life requires has allowed him and his wife, Dawn, to not only recapture aspects of her life but also grow their marriage.

improve my walking and make it easier to get up and go without having to worry about a socket.”

Although progress continues to be made, there are still studies and trials to perform before the FDA can grant approval.

“Once this is an off-the-shelf type of thing, it’ll change what it means to be an amputee,” Jacobs said.

“This isn’t mainstream yet,” Salau said. “Funding and FDA research continue. Every American can call somebody they helped elect to push for this research and funding.”

DAV Resolution No. 236 has long called on Congress and the VA to adequately fund research so that clinicians are able to invent and adapt specialized prosthetic items and develop appropriate treatments. This includes using groundbreaking technologies to help severely disabled veterans regain mobility and achieve maximum independence in their daily activities and improve the overall quality of their lives. ■



VA adds new tools to national weight management initiative

By Steven Wilson

Disabled veterans, in particular, have myriad health concerns and issues that can impact the quality and duration of their lives. To improve the lives of veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs encourages them to MOVE!

Now in its second decade, the MOVE! Weight Management Program has helped 432,062 veterans with their health goals. Of those, 26 percent achieved 5 percent or greater weight loss, and almost all are maintaining the improvement two years after joining, according to the VA.

Joseph Nepi, a member of DAV Chapter 129 in Satellite Beach, Fla., added his success story to the MOVE! website.

"I felt I needed help in finding other ways to control my weight, since my medical conditions were preventing me from getting a lot of physical activity. So, I started the program [at] the Viera, Florida, VA outpatient clinic," said Nepi, who is one of 178

veterans sharing their experiences online.

In addition to losing 50 pounds, Nepi, a diabetic, also stopped taking insulin and five additional medications. He recommends the program to other veterans, saying, "The MOVE! program provided great support for me and offered so many ways to help control my weight."

"The primary goal of VA's MOVE! Weight Management [Program for Veterans] is to assist veterans who are overweight or obese to achieve meaningful weight loss goals," said Curt Cashour, VA press secretary. "Research has demonstrated that reducing weight by at least 5 percent can lead to improvements in health and reductions in risk for a wide range of diseases, from diabetes to hypertension to cancer. Regular physical activity lowers the risk of depression, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, colon cancer and breast cancer."

The program was developed by the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Every VA medical center has a MOVE! coordinator or dedicated provider to help interested veterans get started in the program.

"In 2015, about three of every four veterans receiving VA health care were classified as either overweight or obese," said DAV National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "We know that statistic is exacerbated by illnesses and injuries suffered while in service. Knowing the sacrifices many of us have made, MOVE! makes fitness accessible to veterans of all abilities."

“Research has demonstrated that reducing weight by at least 5 percent can lead to improvements in health and reductions in risk for a wide range of diseases, from diabetes to hypertension to cancer.”

—Curt Cashour, VA Press Secretary

And with a little initiative, veterans are seeing life-changing results.

Participating veterans begin the program with an 11-question survey regarding health background and fitness goals. The MOVE! coordinator can then provide various resources and counseling based on the results of the questionnaire. There are more than 125 resource sheets that can help veterans reach their health goals. The resources cover a wide variety of wellness topics, including smoking cessation, the benefits of strength training and eating well on a budget. There are also resources specifically for disabled veterans, such as instructions for installing a pedometer on a wheelchair and increasing physical activity for veterans with physical or medical limitations.

The patient-centered program is tailored to meet an individual veterans’ needs and includes regular follow-up and support systems. In-person group sessions, as well

as video conferencing at participating community-based outpatient facilities, are available for veterans seeking a structured and clinician-led group format.

MOVE! also has its own phone app, MOVE! Coach, that participants can download for free in iTunes or Apple’s app store. A Move! Coach for Android devices is scheduled to launch sometime in 2018.

MOVE! Coach “walks you through a series of self-management guides, for a total of 19 weeks of care,” according to the MOVE! Coach website. Daily diaries, calculators, educational videos and personalized progress graphs are all tools the app offers veterans.

Veterans who wish to participate in MOVE! are eligible if they are receiving care from the VA, have a body mass index of 25 or greater, and are motivated to make lifestyle changes. There is no cost to veterans. Spouses interested in the program should contact their local VA medical center to learn how they can participate. ■



Before and after photos of Joseph Nepi, DAV Chapter 129 in Satellite Beach, Fla., show his weight-loss accomplishment through the MOVE! program. Since starting the program, Nepi has lost 50 pounds and was able to stop taking six medications. In his 2013 success story on the VA Move! website, he said that one of the biggest challenges was changing his pasta and bread intake; he now eats low-carb pasta and multi-grain bread and eats smaller portions. Nepi’s success story can be found at dav.la/7m. (Photos courtesy of Department of Veterans Affairs)

Happy Campers

DAV joins forces with Golden Corral to help military and veteran children 'Just B Kids'

By Janice M. Hagar

It's that time of year for military kids to head out for summer fun at Camp Corral events across the nation, and many will be able to attend thanks to DAV's Just B Kids scholarship program.

Camp Corral, founded by Golden Corral in 2011, is a free, weeklong summer camp for children from military families. Priority for camp spaces is given to those with injured or fallen parents.

Funds for the camp are raised by Golden Corral, DAV, various corporate sponsors and individual donors. Last year, DAV departments and chapters and its Auxiliary units nationwide raised more than \$600,000 and helped send 1,000 military kids to Camp Corral.

Brenda Franks, of Houston, is the former spouse of an Army veteran who sustained a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a 2009 deployment in Afghanistan. Because of the Just B Kids program, children like her daughters Elizabeth, Rachel and Rebekah spent time having fun and meeting new friends at Camp Corral.

"We couldn't have afforded camp any other way," said Franks. "Even if we could afford [a summer camp], choosing to send them to camp with other kids who have injured warriors in their homes has made such a huge difference. They are encouraging and understanding toward each other."

Camp participants take part in traditional camping activities such as horseback riding, canoeing, archery and swimming, designed to ignite a child's spirit of adventure. But Camp Corral also creates an atmosphere of freedom for military and veteran children who deal with challenges their peers don't face. It offers campers an opportunity to relate and bond with other kids, creating a network of friendship that can last well beyond that special week in the great outdoors.

"Children of military members serve right along



(From left) Elizabeth, Rachel and Rebekah Franks are all smiles at Camp Corral. Their lives at home are not as carefree as their mom would hope, and Camp Corral gives them a place to play and relax with other military children with the same challenges.

with their parents, and that creates a different set of challenges for those kids," said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "We are proud to support Camp Corral while it provides children a chance to play, relax and talk with their peers facing the same challenges."

Thanks to the generosity of caring individuals across the country, this year more than 3,800 children of military and veteran families will attend camp at one of 22 camp locations in 19 states.

"Camp Corral values tremendously the partnership and commitment of DAV, both from a national level and local chapter level," said Leigh Longino, Camp Corral CEO. "DAV not only allows more deserving children to go to camp, they also provide resources and services to our camper families. All any parent wants is for their child to feel happiness and joy. Together, we are able to make that a reality. Thank you isn't enough."

Camp directors and volunteers also enjoy being a part of allowing military children to be happy campers.

"We love when the volunteers come out for our Heroes Day carnival," said Elizabeth Cochran, executive director of YMCA Camp Ernst in Burlington, Ky., which hosts Camp Corral in August. "The kids love ice cream, and you can tell by the volunteers' faces it's an honor to serve the kids. What makes it more special is the DAV volunteer outreach and knowing DAV cares for all parts of you." ■



Learn More Online

For more information about the DAV Just B Kids scholarship program, visit justbkids.org.



DRIVEN to help others

Mike Goodrich shows off his new Honda Ridgeline, a vehicle he will use to help facilitate his passions for art therapy and helping other veterans.

TrueCar provides retired soldier with new vehicle, supports DAV mission

DAV life member Mike Goodrich will be able to continue serving his fellow veterans thanks to the new Honda Ridgeline donated to him through TrueCar's DrivenToDrive program.

DrivenToDrive was created to help injured veterans regain the freedom they have fought for, by helping them get back behind the wheel of a vehicle.

"Driving is an expression of freedom and independence," said Lucas Donat, chief brand officer at TrueCar. "Helping injured veterans such as Mike, those that have sacrificed so much for our freedom, to drive again is a cause close to our heart. We're honored to be working with DAV and joining them in their mission to support more victories for veterans."

During one of his tours in Afghanistan in 2012, a rocket landed near Goodrich's base camp, ending his military career. He sustained a traumatic brain injury that affected his speech, motor skills and memory, as well as a leg injury that causes him pain while doing everyday activities such as driving.

The Army veteran's inpatient recovery was a long, drawn out process, which lasted four years. Goodrich tried several types of therapy to help with his post-traumatic stress; however, many traditional treatments and medications didn't work for him. Instead, he turned to art therapy and finally found relief.

After getting the help he needed, Goodrich and his wife decided to dedicate their lives to helping other veterans rehabilitate and recover through art therapy.

He now sets up art shows around the Washington, D.C., area that advocate for the use of art therapy for veterans and trauma victims. His military-themed art has garnered national acclaim. Goodrich will use his new vehicle to help transport his art and veterans to these shows.

"Having a new vehicle that I can rely on is a tremendous gift to me, but it's also going to make my work [with other veterans] easier as well," said Goodrich. "I would not be able to reach and help as many people without the help of this new vehicle."

TrueCar began working with DAV in 2017 and selected DAV as their exclusive veterans service organization partner in 2018, donating \$50,000 to support DAV's mission.

"DAV is grateful to partner with TrueCar and their DrivenToDrive program," said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "Awarding a vehicle is a special way to recognize the sacrifices a veteran made and dramatically improve their quality of life." ■



Learn More Online

Visit driventodrive.com to learn more.



VETERANS & GUNS

Shooting at California veteran treatment facility thrusts veterans into gun-control debate

By Steven Wilson

The issue surrounding veterans being treated for mental health illnesses and their access to firearms was once again thrust into the national spotlight when Albert Wong, a former soldier who deployed to Afghanistan in 2013, entered a California veterans treatment facility and killed three people before taking his own life.

National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster, who frequently volunteered at the facility, said the country has forever lost three professionals who dedicated their lives to serving veterans.

“My heart was very heavy when I learned of the tragedy at the Veterans Home of California,” she said. “The loss of Dr. Jennifer Golick, Dr. Jennifer Gonzales Shushereba and Executive Director Christine Loeber continues to be felt by DAV and the veteran community. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families as we mourn with them.”

“The gun control debate is certainly part of the national conversation, even if it is an issue that goes beyond DAV’s congressionally chartered purpose,” said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “And questions regarding mental health and veterans have inserted us into a nationwide topic that harbors strong feelings on both sides of the equation.”

Wong was being treated at the facility in a program called the Pathway Home, a nonprofit organization whose stated goal is to “help post-9/11 veterans

transition from military service to success.” According to reports from CBS, SFGATE and The Press Democrat, Wong was being treated for issues related to post-traumatic stress disorder but was dismissed from the program because he was violent.

The incident is still under investigation by law enforcement. But veterans—in particular those who have encountered traumatic experiences in service—offer a unique perspective on the gun control debate.

“It’s a complicated relationship,” said Dr. Casey Taft, principal investigator, National Center for PTSD, VA Boston Healthcare System. “I don’t know that anyone can definitively say why PTSD is correlated with violence, though we have some ideas about this based on research.”

Taft said most people with PTSD are not violent, but veterans who have experienced trauma may be at a higher risk to act violently.

“There are various populations exposed to constant trauma, which places them at higher risk for problems with anger and violence, similar as with veterans,” Taft said. “There isn’t great data for rates of violence in recent veterans. The last good data sets come from the Vietnam era.”

Tyrone Lampkin, Wong’s older adopted brother, told CBS that Wong was angry at the Pathway Home staff after being kicked out of the program. That mentally ill veterans might pose a safety risk to their fellow veterans and other service providers makes the subject hit even

closer to home for DAV advocates and volunteers who are helping veterans through difficult times.

Veteran gun owners and the law

Title 18 U.S.C. §§ 922(d) governs who, under federal firearms laws, is prohibited from possessing firearms, which includes felons, fugitives, persons addicted to controlled substances, undocumented immigrants, people dishonorably discharged from the armed forces, persons who have renounced their U.S. citizenship, subjects of a qualifying domestic protection order, persons convicted of domestic violence, and persons who have been adjudicated by a court of law as mentally defective or who have been involuntarily committed to a mental institution.

John I. Harris is a practicing attorney with more than three decades of judicial experience. He also volunteers as the executive director of the Tennessee Firearm Association.

“Basically, what [the law] says is that when someone is adjudicated as mentally incompetent, your gun owner rights can be taken away,” Harris said. “But the problem is, in some cases, obtaining Social Security or disability benefits for mental health issues can also take your rights away.”

The VA says that doesn’t happen.

“Patients are neither flagged for these or other mental health diagnoses, nor does a patient record flag directly affect the ability to purchase firearms,” said Curt Cashour, VA press secretary.

But, according to a 2017 study by the Congressional Research Service, it does occur and has already happened to nearly 200,000 veterans.

In 1998, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms adopted a new procedure that defined “mentally defective” to include someone who “lacks the mental capacity to contract or manage their own affairs due to injury or disease.”

For veterans, this means that if the VA decides a veteran is mentally incompetent and appoints a fiduciary, a prohibiting record is created and sent to the FBI. The FBI enters the veteran’s record in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which contains names of people who are flagged and their access to firearms restricted.

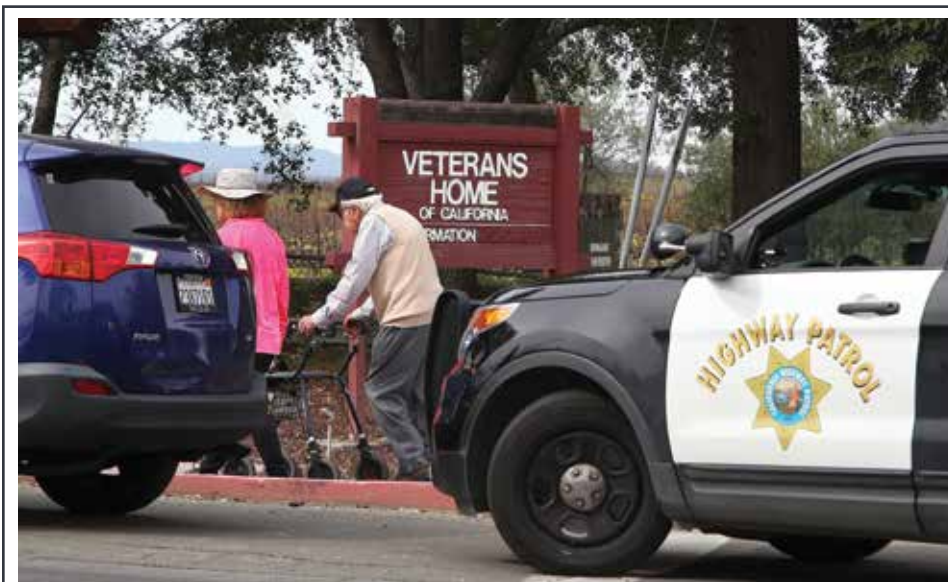
As of the start of 2017, federal agencies had contributed 171,083 records to the system’s index under the new provision enacted by the ATF.

The VA contributed 98.1 percent of those, or 167,815.

Cashour said the congressional study was not a VA study, and he could not vouch for it, and the Veterans Benefits Administration can declare someone mentally defective and thus have the person’s access to firearms restricted.

“Per federal law, the VA reports a veteran to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System if he or she is adjudicated as incompetent by the Veterans Benefits Administration for purposes of managing his or her monetary benefits,” he said.

The Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law



An armed veteran took at least three people hostage at the Pathway Home in Yountville, Calif., prompting the lockdown of the nearby Veterans Home of California on March 9. The standoff ended when the shooter, who had been treated at Pathway, killed the hostages and took his own life. This and other violent incidents have pulled veterans and mental health concerns into the national spotlight. (AP Photo/Ben Margot)

School defines “adjudication” as a “judicial ruling or decision” and “judicial proceeding.” The legal dictionary defines it as “the formal giving or pronouncing of a judgment or decree in a court proceeding.”

According to Harris, this means the VA can arbitrarily ban a veteran from possessing a firearm without being adjudicated by a court as specified by federal law.

“One of the problems I have seen is that there are veterans who feel they have to make a choice

yourself or others, no legal action is going to be taken for those seeking assistance.”

So who, if anyone, should be allowed to decide if a veteran’s access to firearms is restricted?

“My personal opinion, as a private citizen, is that the only authority to take a veteran’s access away is a court of law, based on the same requirements for the court to determine if you are mentally fit to take care of yourself,” said Danny Oliver, a retired



No veteran should ever go without health care

or avoid calling the crisis line because he or she is concerned the government will take their property if they do so.

—National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster

in pursuit of their earned benefits as to whether to seek, or accept, an award of benefits for psychiatric conditions at the risk of having their ability to hunt or defend themselves and have their firearms taken away from them,” said Harris.

Harris said it’s technically possible for veterans who have been determined by the VA as incompetent to fight back, but in reality, it’s a battle most people do not have the resources to win.

“The problem for many people is that these cases are very expensive to prosecute. If a private citizen wanted to keep pursuing a case, they must realize that they will be litigating against agencies and attorneys funded with taxpayer dollars,” said Harris. “The individual could anticipate legal expenses, unless assisted by third-party funding, which would easily range to \$100,000 or more.”

According to Metcalf-Foster, the thought that veterans would avoid seeking treatment out of concerns about their guns being taken away is a major concern.

“No veteran should ever go without health care or avoid calling the crisis line because he or she is concerned the government will take their property if they do so,” she said. “It doesn’t work that way. As a patient, you have legally protected confidentiality with your care provider. Unless you threaten violence to

Marine and law enforcement officer who serves as adjutant for the DAV Department of Oklahoma. “And I mean a state or federal court—not the VA, who already has the ability to require a fiduciary without adjudication by a court of law.

“And they don’t always get that right either,” said Oliver.

“Everyone wants and deserves to feel safe—particularly those who served. Sadly, there may be veterans whose injuries, trauma or mental health make their possession of firearms a public safety risk,” Metcalf-Foster said. “There are no easy answers, and opinions on nearly every aspect of these issues are as strong and personal as they are varied. All the while, we are facing an epidemic of veterans committing suicide, and we know that our familiarity and proficiency with firearms make desperate veterans more successful at ending their lives.”

Why did the VA ask if I owned a gun?

“The VA has asked me, and they’ve asked my wife, if we have any firearms in the house,” said Jason Pepper, a blind Iraq War veteran and life member. “I tell them ‘no’ because it’s none of their business.”

The VA says the question is a suicide prevention tool.

“Access to lethal means, such as medications or firearms, is a major risk factor for suicide,” Cashour said. “Veterans may be asked by their health care

providers, as part of risk assessment or safety planning, about access to lethal means in their homes.”

“I’d think that’s a viable question for the VA to ask,” Pepper said. “There are some veterans out there who shouldn’t have firearms, but the overwhelming majority of veterans are some of the most responsible gun owners in the country. I think it’s a gray area for the veteran, and we have to tread lightly.”

John Plahovinsak, also a life member, said he had no problem with a screening question related to gun ownership.

“I would answer it, primarily because the medical professional is there to help me, and if he needed that information, I’d reply to it,” said Plahovinsak. “I imagine if someone is being treated for mental health illness, the VA physician should be made aware of that, and they should be able to make a determination about the risk factor involving the veteran who is being screened.”

Another suicide prevention tool offered by the VA is free gun locks.

“VA suicide prevention coordinators frequently distribute gun locks at VA facilities and community outreach events,” said Cashour, directing veterans or family members to the Veterans Crisis Line website’s resource locator, where locks can be obtained.

Dr. David Carroll, executive director of the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, said in an email that the VA does not collect personal information on gun owners when distributing the locks.

If I am being treated for PTSD will I lose my guns?

“We would only need to break [doctor-patient] confidentiality if someone reported harm toward a child or elderly person, or reported a direct threat to themselves or another,” said Taft. “Fortunately, I have not had to make that decision and report anyone from the groups I’ve run.”

Harris said current firearm laws don’t make things easy for veterans who are gun owners and need help for mental illness.

“One of the problems I see is that lawmakers often view mental health as binary and don’t look beyond the binary,” said Harris. “In mental health, if you have a situation, it’s almost a lifelong sentence, even if you struggle back and overcome it. I think that’s a failure of our legal system. Once you’ve been diagnosed once, lawmakers may not care if you get treatment and have been OK for five years.”

DAV life member and Distinguished Service Cross recipient Stephen Sanford said the VA has asked him if he was a gun owner, and he had no problem telling them he was.

“I think it should be asked in the proper context,” the retired Army veteran said. “My family doctor knows me very well. If he thought I had a significant mental health issue or thought I was suicidal, then I’d feel comfortable discussing guns. At the VA, you don’t always work with the same provider, and when the VA asks, it’s like the federal government is asking. It’s an issue of trust and relationship. And relationships matter.”

He was also asked by a provider in a private hospital, but he wasn’t the one being treated.

“When my wife and I had our daughter last year, we had to take her to the children’s hospital,” Sanford said. “While we were doing the intake paperwork they had a social worker come out and start asking us all these questions and included whether I owned a gun. I was pretty furious. I was there checking my prematurely born daughter in for heart surgery, and they wanted to know if I owned a firearm.”

“I think people should understand that violence isn’t necessarily a consequence of PTSD,” said Taft. “Risk for violence is increased with PTSD, but most of those with PTSD are not violent. The notion that one can’t recover from PTSD and function at a high level has been shown to be false.”

“What we’re seeing at the federal level is courts are finding that a statutory prohibition as a result of mental health is, in some instances and under certain facts, too harsh,” Harris said. “As an ‘as applied’ constitutional challenge, which means applied to a specific set of facts, a court could say that a denial of access to guns, or a prosecution, based on a mental health history is unconstitutionally harsh.”

“Regardless of where veterans stand on gun control, one thing that’s certain is the issue has cast a spotlight on our community,” Metcalf-Foster said. “I think it’s safe to say there needs to be more discussion on the topic. We who have been changed in service are often more skeptical about government. Having seen the impact of violence at a place where I’ve spent so much time as a volunteer, my greatest hope is that veterans will not allow their concerns to impede access to the care and benefits they’ve earned.

“It takes a special courage to seek help, and getting care can eliminate the risk of a crisis.” ■

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR AGING VETERANS

With diverse, growing population seeking long-term care, DAV calls for sustained commitment

By Mary Dever

To continue to care for veterans who have lost the ability to function independently, DAV has called on the Department of Veterans Affairs to modernize its long-term supports and services programs for aging veterans.

As an appointed member of the VA's Geriatric and Gerontology Advisory Committee, DAV Assistant National Legislative Director Shurhonda Love said the VA will continue to be challenged in providing appropriate long-term care for veterans due to the

Historically, the VA's approach has been to provide patient-centered long-term care in the least restrictive setting honoring the veteran's preference as well as reserved nursing home care for those who can no longer be safely cared for at home. However, the number of veterans served and the amount of resources allocated does not yet support a balanced program within the system. For proper care, aging veterans require a wide array of easily accessible home- and community-based services, according to Love.

"The VA offers a spectrum of long-term services and support programs that permit many veterans to remain in their homes and avoid unnecessary or unwanted hospitalizations and nursing home admissions," said Dr. Richard M. Allman, acting executive director of the VA's Geriatrics and Extended Care program. "These

programs include home-based primary care and personal care services such as home maker/home health aides, respite and adult day health care. More than 300,000 veterans benefited from one or more of these programs in fiscal year 2017."

"The VA has so many wonderful programs to support aging veterans," said DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. "However, while looking toward the future, the VA needs to make a sustained commitment to rebalance its long-term

supports and services in order to appropriately care for the aging veteran population."

"The Geriatric Research Education Clinical Centers alone are worth their weight in gold," said Love. "These centers are placed alongside medical centers where clinicians work on research initiatives to help ensure aging veterans can remain independent as long as possible. My first site visit made me proud to know that the VA was thinking about me in ways that I had not even thought about for myself."

"We must ensure aging veterans are not overlooked, are provided high-quality care options, and treated with dignity and respect," said Ilem. ■



[Learn More Online](#)

Read DAV's issue brief at dav.la/7j.



"My first site visit made me proud to know that the VA was thinking about me in ways that I had not even thought about for myself."

*Shurhonda Love,
Assistant National Legislative Director*

diversity, increasing number and medical complexity of the veteran population who depend on these services.

Projections indicate that more than 1 million veterans age 85 or older will depend on the VA's long-term supports and services over the next decade. Vietnam-era veterans now make up the largest percentage of the veteran population, as well as the largest demographic of aging people in America.

"This means that more Americans than ever could need long-term care when, in general, the health care workforce receives very little geriatric training," said Love. "It means geriatricians—a specialty group that is underpaid and too few in number, according to a 2008 report by the National Academy of Medicine—will be needed more than ever. That's one of the many issues we've found with the current program."



USS Inchon (LPH-12) anchored in Haiphong Harbor, North Vietnam, on June 20, 1973, while participating in Operation End Sweep. New legislation may allow veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam to receive benefits for presumptive conditions without cutting benefits for others. (Photo by PHCS Virgil O. McColley/U.S. Navy/Naval History and Heritage Command Collection)

House committee revives stalled legislation

Blue Water Navy veterans could see extension of benefits

By Mary Dever

Lawmakers have revamped legislation introduced in 2017 that calls for extending benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans, those who served on ships in the seas surrounding Vietnam. H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017, would expand the definition of the Republic of Vietnam to include its waters offshore, for the purpose of presumption of service connection for diseases associated with herbicide agent exposure.

Approximately 90,000 Blue Water Navy veterans were potentially exposed to certain herbicide agents including Agent Orange, but they haven't been awarded the same disability and health care benefits as those who served on the ground in Vietnam. The legislation was stalled late last year after the House Veterans' Affairs Committee couldn't agree on how to pay for the expansion. Now, the proposal has been reintroduced by Committee Chairman Phil Roe with amended recommendations on how to pay for extended benefits.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that extending benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans for 10 years would cost \$1.1 billion. Rather than cutting

other veterans' benefits to pay for it, Roe's proposal increases fees for service members and non-service-connected veterans who use the Department of Veterans Affairs home loan program.

According to the law, fees associated with the program are waived for veterans with a service-connected disability. Roe stated that would not change under this proposal.

"Whereas we have consistently pushed for these men and women to receive the benefits they deserve, previous versions of this bill would have deprived disabled veterans or their dependents of existing benefits," said DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem.

DAV adamantly rejected the proposal—and any other—that would cut benefits to service-connected wartime veterans and their families to pay for other veterans programs.

"We appreciate this legislation is on track for a vote in the House with a plan that doesn't reduce benefits for disabled veterans and their families," added Ilem.

"Congress has the responsibility to provide funding for this long-overdue benefit, without negatively impacting service-disabled veterans," said DAV National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster. "We strongly support the revised bill and thank Chairman Roe for moving this important legislation forward."

The revised bill passed the committee unanimously at a markup hearing May 8 and was sent to the House for a vote. ■



Employer resource groups bridge military-civilian divide in workplace

By Steven Wilson

Ford Motor Co. launched their Veterans Network Group, or VET NG, to combat a growing problem among veterans and National Guard and Reserve members working in the company while the nation's wartime footing in the Middle East was at its peak.

"President Bush ordered the surge in Iraq in 2007," said Marine veteran Dan Fink, a Ford fuel economy planning analyst and recruiting lead for Ford VET NG. "The company was beginning to see a significant uptick in the number of employees being mobilized, and they realized the Guard and Reserve employees needed a group not only for veteran support, but also a group who could assist with all things unique to Ford [human resources] and other employee needs.

"VET NG became a resource to fill a gap that was not getting covered."

VET NG is an employee resource group (ERG), a "voluntary, employee-led group made up of individuals who join together based on common interests, backgrounds or demographic factors such as gender, race or ethnicity," according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Fink and others soon found getting an ERG off the starting line was a challenge.

"In a word, difficult," Fink acknowledged of creating the resource group. "In 2005, when we saw a clear need to help our fellow employees that were serving in the National Guard and reserves getting activated and struggling with reintegration issues, we knew we had to do something."

In addition to supporting members of the National Guard and Reserve components, the group has

helped the company build a veteran community and incorporate those who have served into its corporate culture. Though it took considerable effort to gain momentum in the company, the work has paid off.

"We have created strong ties with HR and the corporate recruiting team. So much so, we are requested to represent the company at veteran job fairs and major recruiting events," Fink said, adding that buy-in from Ford leadership has been critical for his group's success.

The group also contributes to Ford's mission of building communities.

Dr. Shelton Goode, director of diversity and inclusion for Oshkosh Corp. and author of "Diversity Managers: Angels of Mercy or Barbarians at the Gate," conducted his own research on ERGs and authored a 2016 SHRM article in which he said he considers ERGs good for business.

"Many companies also successfully use their ERGs to improve the organization's leadership development process, to drive results, to forge relationships, and to ensure alignment between their business and diversity strategies," Goode said in the article. "The data clearly suggest that employee resource groups are not only good for business—they are essential."

Chapter 3 of the DAV employer guide, *The Veteran Advantage: DAV Guide to Hiring and Retaining Veterans with Disabilities*, offers guidance and strategies for recruiting and hiring disabled veterans. Some of these include CEO and executive support for hiring disabled veterans, educating and training recruiting managers on veterans' unique skills, and using veterans in the recruiting process.

"Today, Ford employs nearly 6,000 veterans,

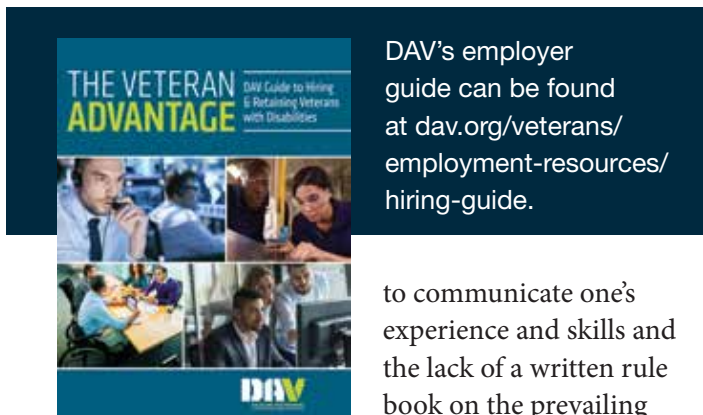
including hundreds of currently serving reservists and guardsmen,” Fink said. “Our records indicate we have 921 disabled veterans. If you include Ford Credit, that number goes up to 945.”

According to DAV National Employment Director Jeff Hall, efforts like Ford’s not only attract veterans but also help retain them as they adjust to civilian life.

“Ford is able to get the best talent in the world, and the company recognizes the skills and capabilities veterans bring. But as those folks were trading their branch insignias for blue ovals, some felt they weren’t being challenged enough,” Hall said.

“They were used to working with large budgets and making big decisions in a unique and fast-paced environment. Their employee group created a forum for veterans and kept them engaged. It paired many with mentors who could help them adjust and maximize their career potential.”

An April 2013 VA study, *Veterans in the Workplace: Recruitment and Retention*, surveyed 245 businesses in the country. They found it is common among veteran employees to feel the civilian employment world is complicated by factors such as “physical and psychological service-related injuries including [post-traumatic stress disorder], the lack of an easy way



DAV’s employer guide can be found at dav.org/veterans/employment-resources/hiring-guide.

to communicate one’s experience and skills and the lack of a written rule book on the prevailing unspoken corporate rules.

Some reported being misunderstood by coworkers due to differences in one’s manner, expectations and speech. Others were frustrated by the lack of a clear chain of command and a clear path for advancement.”

“Many civilians do not understand the military or what service members experience,” Fink said. “This can cause a newly hired veteran to feel alienated from the rest of the personnel they work with on a day-to-day basis. When someone joins a new organization, they want to feel like part of the team. A veteran corporate affinity group can accelerate that process by linking them with people who have shared the same experiences and understand the military lifestyle.” ■

Auxiliary Fall Conference dates set

The 2018 DAV Auxiliary Fall Conference is scheduled for Sept. 27–29 in Lexington, Ky.

The conference will be held at the Lexington Embassy Suites. Rooms are \$124 for a single or double, \$134 for a triple or quad.

All rates include parking, complimentary daily breakfast and evening manager’s reception. All rooms are mini-suites with a bedroom and living area.

Reservations can be made by calling 859-455-5000 or toll-free at 1-800-EMBASSY. Reservations may also be made online at dav.la/7c.

Reservations must be secured by Sept. 4.

The conference site is nine miles from Blue Grass Airport (LEX). Taxi and ride-sharing services are available.

Registration for the conference is \$60 and includes Friday evening hospitality and Saturday fun night.



The conference will open with a health and wellness fair Sept. 27 from 1 to 4 p.m.

The Auxiliary National Executive Committee meeting will begin at 4 p.m. The opening business session will begin at 7 p.m. Normal business sessions are scheduled Sept. 28 and Sept. 29. ■



1 career fair; 2 job offers

By Steven Wilson

Transitioning service members who are having challenges finding jobs might look to the advice of 10-year Army Signal Corps veteran Daisy Rivera.

According to Rivera—who attended a DAV/RecruitMilitary All Veterans Career Fair at Soldier Field in Chicago in 2017 and quickly landed two job offers—the job fair was a vital component in linking her with her present employer. But she did her research first.

“I think preparation is the key,” she said. “Research the different companies before you go to a job fair. DAV sends you an email when you register, with the [attending] companies in it. So you should already know who is there beforehand.”

Rivera said she navigated the fair by separating herself from the crowd and venturing out on her own.

“I always think strategically,” she said. “When they opened the doors, everyone was going to the booths at the entrance. I went to the back. The first booth I went to is where I work now.”

After the job fair, Rivera quickly received two job offers. The first involved telemarketing and sales and the second is her present employer, Merendino Cemetery Care.

Right away, Rivera was placed in a position of leadership, which she said is something her military experience had already accustomed her to.

“They were looking for someone who could manage the team,” she said. “So they made me a branch manager in the Midwest, and I oversee my crew that maintains 15 cemeteries.”

Rivera began her transition out of uniform by using a professional resume service before she left the Army.

“I spent the money, because I wanted [my resume] to look nice,” she said. “I knew I’d be out there competing against civilians.”

“A resume writing service can’t hurt,” said National Employment Director Jeff Hall. “An alternative also exists on jobs.dav.org for resume help and other related resources. There are free services for veterans who need it. But in her case, the investment she made paid off.”

Rivera advises fellow veterans seeking employment to carefully translate their skill sets but to not sell themselves short on their resumes and in interviews.

“Be creative,” she said. “Ask yourself, ‘What did I do in the military, and what can I offer to the civilian world?’”

Rivera’s career fair experience came full circle as her company asked her to work their information booth at another career fair held at Soldier Field.

“How amazing it will be to be able to stand on the other side of the booth one year later,” she said. ■

“When they opened the doors, everyone was going to the booths at the entrance. I went to the back. The first booth I went to is where I work now.”

—Army veteran Daisy Rivera, who received an offer from her current employer Merendino Cemetery Care at a DAV and RecruitMilitary All Veterans Career Fair last year

From the NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTOR JEFFREY C. HALL



Employment guide launch

DAV recently released *The Veteran Advantage: DAV Guide to Hiring and Retaining Veterans with Disabilities*.

The comprehensive guide is the result of more than four years of study regarding what the veteran community contributes to the workforce as well as how hiring veterans, especially disabled veterans, can positively impact a company's bottom line.

"The hiring guide has given us the tools to demonstrate to our leadership why we should be hiring veterans with disabilities, how easy it is to put them to work and how many incentives there are for doing so," said Tarra Reynolds, who oversees recruiting for Chevron Services Co. "In addition, the strategies section offered easy, practical options we can implement immediately in order to improve our recruiting programs around hiring veterans."

The resources in the guide are gleaned from several sources, including the departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, the Society for Human Resource Management and testimonials of fellow veterans seeking employment or who have already been hired.

It contains accounts from employers who already actively recruit, hire and retain disabled veterans.

The insights and examples from companies that have incorporated veteran hiring into their practices are invaluable. For instance, Rob Ells, manager of the Roush Enterprises

Veterans Initiative Program for NASCAR legend Jack Roush, discusses how veterans strengthen corporate culture.

"I think the education we have done with our new employees and new supervisors about our veteran hiring has given them a great appreciation for another aspect of the Roush culture—the effort and emphasis our executive leadership places on veteran hiring," Ells said.

I encourage fellow veterans to widely disseminate the guide to their personal and professional contacts in the business world, especially those who are interested in hiring disabled veterans but may be either unsure how to go about it or fearful of how disabled veterans may impact their business.

There are six chapters in all, each dedicated to a specific area related to veteran and disabled veteran employment. The publication also has a comprehensive hiring and retaining checklist to guide employers through each process, plus a suggested reading list at the end.

It's my hope that hiring managers, business owners and leaders in the business community will learn that the nearly 4 million veterans in our country who have service-connected disabilities are some of the most capable, driven and resilient employees that any organization would classify as desirable hires.



Learn More Online

The guide is available at dav.la/7b.

Membership has its PRIVILEGES

DAV Member Advantages recognize sacrifices, support charitable mission through special savings

By Steven Wilson

When I bought my last truck, I told the salesperson I was with DAV, and he said, ‘Well, you’re eligible to save a lot of money.’ And he was right,” said Past National Commander Jim Sursely.

Sursely is referring to one of the many lucrative advantages available to veterans who sign up for DAV membership. In his case, working with longtime DAV partner Ford Motor Co., he was able to achieve extensive savings toward the purchase of selected new vehicles through the company’s Ford X-Plan.

“I’ve used the Ford X-Plan toward the purchase of a new vehicle twice, once in 2006 and once in 2016,” said Sursely, a triple amputee. “Both times, I also took advantage of the \$1,000 credit Ford offers for adaptive equipment in the vehicle.

“I saved about \$4,000 through Ford. Not every salesperson knows about DAV’s affiliation with the X-Plan, but it doesn’t take long for them to look it up. Anybody who has the opportunity to use this would be crazy not to.”

Another perk available for members comes from USAA. Members receive immediate benefits by using the DAV USAA credit card, according to USAA’s website. In addition to USAA’s dynamic, industry-leading customer service, the company donates back to DAV each time a new DAV credit card is opened and when it’s used for purchases.



Jim Sursely (left) with two volunteers, attends a Wounded Warriors Outdoors event. A triple amputee, Sursely used the DAV Member Advantages program to purchase his Ford Super Duty F-250 Lariat and enjoyed X-Plan discounted pricing.

“Our partners genuinely support and care about veterans, and I hope members take advantage of the benefits they offer.”

—Douglas K. Wells,
National Membership Director

“USAA is proud to support DAV and its mission,” said Eric Engquist, USAA vice president for enterprise brand management. “Our goal is to create value for and through those who support our nation’s heroes for the critically important mission of DAV.”

DAV partner T-Mobile offers members savings on the company’s products and services as well as a \$50 Visa gift card and \$25 in additional benefits for each new activated line.

“Business Mobility Partners, a T-Mobile Premier Partner, is extremely proud to be part of DAV’s mission to support veterans,” said Steve Daneshgar, chief operating officer.

Another advantage comes from an organization that specializes in keeping members’ credit information

and identify safe—Identity Guard.

“We are honored to stand by DAV in their mission to support our veterans,” said Jerry Thompson, Identity Guard senior vice president and chief revenue officer. “As a way of showing our gratitude to the men and women who served our country, Identity Guard is offering theft protection services at a discount, along with a \$25 gift card from Restaurant.com to all DAV members [who sign up for Identity Guard services].”

Another value in joining DAV is staying apprised of

the critical and ongoing fight of protecting the benefits veterans earned through their service to our nation.

“DAV Magazine—to stay informed on current legislation and other issues affecting veterans—is a big benefit of membership,” said National 3rd Junior Vice Commander Andy Marshall. “I also enjoy the camaraderie and staying active in the veteran community.”

“Our partners genuinely support and care about veterans, and I hope members take advantage of the

benefits they offer,” said National Membership Director Douglas K. Wells. “I’m proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow members and corporate partners as DAV continues to advocate for disabled veterans, their families and survivors.” ■



Learn More Online

To join DAV or learn more about member advantages, visit dav.org/membership/member-advantages.

MEMBER ADVANTAGES PARTNERS

Company Overview	DAV Member Discounts & Savings
	<p>USAA is the exclusive credit card provider to DAV. The DAV USAA Rewards credit card allows members to give back to DAV through everyday purchases.</p>
	<p>DAV members receive savings on Ford and Lincoln vehicles as well as reimbursements toward the cost of installed adaptive equipment.</p>
	<p>T-Mobile offers exclusive savings on T-Mobile products and services. DAV members get the coverage they need through T-Mobile’s advanced nationwide network.</p>
	<p>Identity Guard monitors valuable credit and identity information, with alerts that can help DAV members respond quickly if certain changes indicating fraudulent activity are detected.</p>
	<p>DAV members get peace of mind through exclusive savings from Mobility Roadside Assistance on emergency and paratransit roadside assistance.</p>
	<p>PCSgrades helps DAV members solve their relocation problems through trusted reviews by and for veterans and service members on neighborhoods, Realtors, schools and more. Get significant discounts on Realtors and mortgage lenders.</p>
	<p>DAV members get exclusive discounts on North American’s professional interstate moving services, storage in transit, personal property protection coverage plans and moving supplies.</p>
	<p>1-800-Flowers helps DAV members celebrate all their yearly celebrations by offering special discounts on flowers and gifts across all the 1-800-Flowers sister brands.</p>



giving results

Have you considered making an appreciated stock gift to DAV? It may be better for you than giving cash, because you can save on capital gains. For every \$1 you give, \$40 in direct benefits are realized by your fellow disabled veterans. Your gift of stock can make a huge impact on the lives of your brothers and sisters who served. To learn more, you may want to talk with your certified public accountant and investment adviser.

3 simple steps to support DAV with a gift of stock

1. Contact our Personal Philanthropy Programs Department, and we will provide the stock gift instructions you will need to facilitate the transfer.
2. Contact your financial adviser or the stockholder to initiate the transfer process.
3. Provide us with the name and approximate value of the stock gift after the transfer so that we can track and acknowledge your gift accordingly.

TO LEARN MORE

- Call Stephanie Vorhees at **800-216-9802**, ext. 1.
- Email giftplanning@dav.org.
- Return the attached **postcard**.



Stock donations are best bet for tax purposes

Incredible gratitude stirs up decision to support disabled veterans through generous stock gift

Making a stock gift to DAV was an easy decision for Jay and Robyn Jaffin. They realized that giving a gift of appreciated stock is a win-win for themselves and DAV. By transferring the stock directly to DAV, they avoided paying capital gains taxes and took a charitable deduction for the full value of their gift.

Like many of DAV's donors, the Jaffins feel an unwavering obligation to support the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much. It's because of the generosity and compassion of people like the Jaffins that DAV has continued to serve ill and injured veterans throughout the United States for nearly a century.

"Robyn and I are incredibly grateful for all of the sacrifices our veterans have made ... for all of us. While we're not veterans ourselves, we have relatives who are and recognize that we don't do enough to support them. DAV puts our dollars to good use, and that's why we chose them specifically to support," said Jay.

Whether or not you are a veteran, please fill out the attached postcard or call DAV today if you would like to give a meaningful gift of appreciated stock to support the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much. Someone in the Personal Philanthropy Programs Department would love to help you make a difference, just like Jay and Robyn. ■



Donors Jay and Robyn Jaffin made a stock donation, so they don't have to pay on the associated capital gains.

THE BENEFIT OF GIVING A GIFT OF STOCK		
	Sell stock, donate proceeds to DAV	Donate stock directly to DAV
Current stock value	\$10,000	\$10,000
Capital gains tax paid by donor <i>15% of \$5,000</i>	\$750	\$0
Amount received by DAV	\$9,250	\$10,000 <i>DAV receives additional \$750</i>
Income tax savings to donor <i>35% bracket</i>	\$3,238	\$3,500
"Cost" of donation to donor	\$6,762	\$6,500 <i>You save \$262</i>

From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN MICHAEL P. DOVER



True tolerance

My engagements through DAV have generated many good discussions, which often lead to inspiration for a magazine commentary.

Some have expressed concern to me that we no longer request the removal of headgear prior to an invocation. At face value, this is a seemingly harmless gesture of protocol. However, it can actually be a breach of another's faith. Depending on members' religious affiliation, wearing headgear may be a part of the observance of their faith. That means we must accommodate that individual and their religion.

This is just one example of what it means to be inclusive and tolerant of the various faiths among our members. You may have heard some iteration of the phrase, "People are free to believe whatever they want about God." My interpretation of this statement is that people should not be coerced or forced to believe something or follow a certain religion. Religious liberty and freedom of conscience are extremely important principles to our members. As veterans, we personally took vows to defend our Constitution, which clearly protects this fundamental right in our First Amendment.

If you have the opportunity to visit the

hallowed ground of Arlington National Cemetery, you will notice there are more than 65 emblems that adorn the headstones of our fallen brothers and sisters. None of these mean "more" or "less" than the others. They represent

the diversity of thought throughout not only the military but also the veteran community.

Contrary to common belief, the height of intolerance is not disagreement, but rather removing the public space and opportunity for people to disagree. To continue to be an all-encompassing organization, we must

create an atmosphere of tolerance. This means we sometimes have to step out of our comfort zones in order to welcome a wide array of fellow veterans.

My charge to you is to reflect on the true meaning of tolerance. How can this be incorporated into your chapter meetings? What can you do to ensure our brothers and sisters feel comfortable among our ranks, regardless of their religious affiliation? Taking the time to consider these questions is not just a challenge I present to my fellow chaplains. Embracing true tolerance is something any member of DAV can do—and everyone can benefit from.

In His Service to You.

To continue to be an all-encompassing organization, we must **create an atmosphere of tolerance.**

Arlington National Cemetery seeks feedback from veteran community

■ Arlington National Cemetery continues to seek input from veterans, the public and various stakeholders about how to protect its future.


Established in the 1860s, the renowned cemetery now contains the remains of more than 400,000 members of the armed forces, including Medal of Honor recipients; high-ranking federal government officials; dependents; and many others. However, it is at a critical crossroads in its history. In approximately 23 years, Arlington will run out of space and no longer be an active cemetery if the current rate of service continues.

The cemetery's location, just outside Washington, D.C., limits the amount of expansion available to only a few small parcels of land. At the current rate of service,

the future of the national landmark is in peril.

To circumvent the problem, Congress has tasked the Army, under whose jurisdiction the cemetery falls, to consider what might be done to preserve it as an active military cemetery well into the future and for generations to come. In response, the Army reached out to the public seeking input.

In July 2017, a survey was conducted in which more than 28,000 respondents shared that keeping Arlington National Cemetery open well into the future is paramount. A second survey was released this past May, with hopes of refining a long-term solution and continuing the national dialogue.

 Contribute to the discussion at arlingtoncemetery.mil.

Veterans' medical imagery now available online

■ Veterans can now access their medical images and associated study reports online through the My HealtheVet portal, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.


The new online feature—VA Medical Images and Reports—allows veterans with a premium account to view, download and share copies of their radiology studies, such as X-rays, mammograms, MRIs and CT scans, from their electronic health records.

Veterans can view a list of accessible radiology studies three calendar days after the study report has been verified. When veterans complete a request for a specific study, they can view a lower resolution thumbnail copy of the images and associated radiology report online or download a zip file that contains the report and diagnostic-quality images, straight from the My HealtheVet portal.

For studies with large files, veterans can choose to receive an email notification when the download request is complete.



To view diagnostic images, which have the highest quality, veterans may install a free medical image viewer on their computer. The images and reports may be copied to a CD, DVD, USB flash drive or any portable drive of their choice to share with providers, both outside the VA and throughout the VA integrated health care system.

 Directions for viewing and downloading are available on the My HealtheVet portal, www.myhealth.va.gov.

From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER WILLIAM CRAIG JOHNIKEN



You've got a friend in the Auxiliary

As I close my year as your Auxiliary National Commander, I want to thank all of you who have made my journey possible. As the father and husband of disabled veterans, I've understood for decades the value of their service and sacrifices. For much of the time I was familiar with DAV, the Auxiliary was an exclusively female organization.

When it opened membership to men, I was honored to be among the first to join. I had no idea I would go on to help lead the Auxiliary or be the first to assume its highest post. But what I did know from my son and wife, is that there is a world of unmet needs for the Americans who sacrificed the most to protect our freedoms and ensure the prosperity of our country. Those needs extend to their survivors and families.

This year has been eye opening for me. I've learned so much from so many of you. I will cherish the memories and time spent with all of you.

I'm particularly proud to see the VA MISSION Act open up caregiver benefits to veterans wounded before 9/11. I was honored to represent the Auxiliary at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports

Clinic and the TEE (Training Exposure and Experience) Tournament.

I'm proud the Auxiliary will have greater involvement to help caregivers for the profoundly disabled veterans attending the TEE Tournament. That type of support, where DAV and the Auxiliary work hand-in-hand, is important to the health of both organizations. There are other ways we can work together to accomplish more. Auxiliary Junior membership is free and a great way to source help for DAV and Auxiliary events while teaching our youth valuable lessons about what service and sacrifice mean.

Nearly everyone is eligible for membership, and I'd encourage all DAV members to look into joining. That vote of confidence and your collaboration mean so much to those who, while they didn't serve, are passionate about supporting our nation's heroes.

I want to thank National Adjutant Pat Kemper for her support and leadership. I also want to thank my wife and family who have helped me along my journey. May God bless all of you, and may his light shine on all who share our valuable mission. You'll always have a friend in me.



A Mother's Day shower..

The VA New York Harbor Healthcare System hosted its first baby shower, held at the Brooklyn campus just before Mother's Day. The event was part of a Nationwide Baby Shower initiative sponsored by the VA Center for Women Veterans, Women's Health Services, VA Voluntary Service Program and the Office of Strategic Partnerships. DAV National 2nd Junior Vice Commander Donald Day (back row, center) attended to show support for the event on behalf of DAV, alongside Chapter 28 then-Commander Tom Ingram and DAV Auxiliary Unit 28 Adjutant Anita Ingram.

Staff announcements

DAV National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster and National Adjutant Marc Burgess announced the appointments of Ron Minter as assistant national voluntary services director and Janice Hagar as associate national communications director at DAV's National Headquarters in Cold Spring, Ky.

"I am proud of these individuals who have dedicated themselves to our organization's legacy of service to veterans," said Burgess. "I expect Ron and Janice will do well in their new leadership positions and will contribute significantly to DAV's mission of improving the lives of the men and women who served and their families."



Minter

Assistant National Voluntary Services Director

A Gulf War-era veteran, Ron Minter enlisted in the Navy in 1990. As a result of service-connected injuries, he was medically discharged in 1995. His career with DAV began in 1999, when he attended the

National Service Officer Training Academy in Denver. Upon graduation, he was assigned as a national service officer (NSO) apprentice at DAV's service office in his hometown of Waco, Texas. There he was subsequently promoted to associate and then senior associate NSO. He was transferred to the national service office in Baltimore in 2007, where he served as assistant supervisor before being promoted to supervisor in 2009.

In 2011, he was appointed the national voluntary services director, where he served until returning to the national service office in Waco in 2014.

In his new role, Minter is responsible for assisting the national voluntary services director with a corps of DAV volunteers who, along with DAV Auxiliary volunteers, donate millions of hours per year to volunteer work at Veterans Affairs medical

facilities. He also helps direct the nationwide DAV Transportation Network, in which DAV hospital service coordinators arrange transportation for veterans who have no way to get to and from VA medical facilities.

Additionally, Minter will help direct and coordinate activities involving the annual National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and the National Disabled Veterans TEE (Training Exposure Experience) Tournament, two adaptive sports events co-hosted by DAV with the VA.

Minter is a life member of Chapter 3 in Waco, Texas.

Associate National Communications Director

Janice Hagar enlisted in the Marine Corps in November 1984 after earning her bachelor's degree in broadcasting from Morehead State University in Kentucky. After serving as a logistics specialist, she entered the public affairs field and was trained to become a combat correspondent.

Hagar retired as a master sergeant in 2005, after 21 years in the Marine Corps. Her personal awards include the Meritorious Service Medal and Joint Service Achievement Medal.

After her retirement, Hagar became the civilian deputy director of public affairs for Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, where she served for 11 years while earning a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Southern California in 2013.

In her new capacity, Hagar's responsibilities include producing a wide variety of written and multimedia projects for DAV's internal and external communications. She writes news stories and features for DAV's website and magazine, and develops talking points, press releases, scripts and speeches.

A native of Ludlow, Ky., Hagar is a member of Chapter 19 in Cold Spring. ■



Hagar

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Memorial Day 2018 In remembrance



Left: National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster presented a wreath on behalf of DAV at the 150th Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. Since 1868, the cemetery has hosted the event to ensure the sacrifices of America's fallen heroes are never forgotten. **Above:** DAV National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster (center) greets Blue Star Mothers of America members following the Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. The organization provides support for mothers who have sons or daughters in active service in the U.S. armed forces.

REUNIONS

ARMY

1ST SIGNAL BRIGADE (VIETNAM & KOREA)

Sept. 5–9, San Antonio, TX, Contact: John Keenan, Ph: 915-633-2639, Email: cw4keenana@gmail.com

2ND SQUADRON, 1ST CAVALRY REGIMENT

Aug. 30–Sept. 2, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Tom Fey, Ph: 303-619-7571, Email: tomfey@gmail.com

3RD U.S. INFANTRY REGIMENT (THE OLD GUARD)

Sept. 26–30, Arlington, VA, Contact: Mike Winter, Ph: 619-571-7204, Email: michaelwinter1957@gmail.com, Web: oldguard.org

4TH BATTALION 9TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (MANCHUS)

Sept. 13–16, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Bob Lannon, Ph: 317-745-4287, Email: Bobl99@hotmail.com

13TH ENGINEER "C" BATTALION

Sept. 26–28, Branson, MO, Contact: Arlie Ellis, Ph: 817-500-6816, Email: 456arcyn@gmail.com

8TH BATTALION, 4TH ARTILLERY, VIETNAM

Sept. 12–16, Springfield, IL, Contact: Bob Mueninghoff, Ph: 309-287-2448, Email: Bob.Mueninghoff@yahoo.com

9TH INFANTRY DIVISION PIO

Oct. 7–10, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Jamie Patrick, Ph: 318-282-1216

24TH INFANTRY DIVISION ASSOCIATION

Sept. 20–23, Branson, MO, Contact: George Vlasic, Ph: 910-287-5618, Email: geonavlasic@atmc.net

86TH FIGHTER-BOMBER GROUP (WWII) ASSOCIATION

Oct. 10–14, Fort Walton Beach, FL, Contact: Dallas E. Lowe, Ph: 850-319-3047, Email: fighterbomberpilot@yahoo.com

104TH INFANTRY DIVISION – NATIONAL

TIMBERWOLF PUPS ASSOCIATION Sept. 5–10, Dayton, OH, Contact: Andrew Lane, Ph: 973-896-3521, Email: andrewben.lane@gmail.com, Web: timberwolf104inf.org

148TH INFANTRY AND 37TH DIVISION

Aug. 25–26, Port Clinton, OH, Contact: Steve Whitcraft, Web: 148infantryveterans.org

249TH ENGINEER BATTALION ASSOCIATION

Sept. 13–16, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Gerald McCarthy, Ph: 401-284-0933, Email: geraldmcCarthy@gmail.com

272ND MP COMPANY (VIETNAM)

Sept. 6–10, Washington, DC, Contact: Ron Raccioppi, Ph: 828-508-2724, Email: vietnam272nd@gmail.com, Web: vietnam272nd.com

335TH RADIO RESEARCH COMPANY, VIETNAM

Sept. 5–9, Grantville (Hershey), PA, Contact: Jim Mossman, Ph: 513-520-3915, Email: gghooperc@comcast.net

585TH ENGINEER COMPANY (DT)

Sept. 21–24, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Bill Kappes, Ph: 850-933-2107, Email: billkappes@yahoo.com

630TH ENGINEER (L.E.) COMPANY VIETNAM

Sept. 13–15, Branson, MO, Contact: Cecil Brown, Ph: 731-415-6460, Email: ceclibrown@charter.net

864TH ENGINEER BATTALION (PACEMAKERS) – ALL ERAS

Oct. 24–28, Cincinnati, OH, Contact: Rick Anderschat, Ph: 513-474-2831, Email: rvshot@msn.com

AMERICAN DIVISION VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Sept. 26–30, Oklahoma City, OK, Contact: Ron Ward, Ph: 417-785-0108, Email: rward307@yahoo.com, Web: American.org

D COMPANY, 1ST BATTALION, 6TH INFANTRY, 198TH LIB, AMERICAN DIVISION, VIETNAM

Sept. 13–17, Kansas City, KS, Contact: Lynn D. Baker, Ph: 870-253-1591, Email: ldbhistory@yahoo.com, Web: d-company1-6.org

MARINES

1ST BATTALION 3RD MARINES (VIETNAM AND ALL ERAS)

Sept. 11–16, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Don Bumgarner, Ph: 562-897-2437, Email: dbumc13usmc@verizon.net

1ST BATTALION 5TH MARINES 1985–1992

Sept. 7–9, Macomb, IL, Contact: Scott Hainline, Ph: 309-351-2050, Email: ptimfi@yahoo.com

1ST MARINE DIVISION ASSOCIATION

Aug. 4–12, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: J. Cormier, Ph: 760-763-3268, Email: june.oldbreed@fmda.us

3RD MARINES 3RD RECON BATTALION VIETNAM

Sept. 25–30, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Bob Hoover, Ph: 843-302-2151, Email: 2826rjh@gmail.com, Web: 3rdrecon.org

MARINE AIR GROUPS (WWII TO PRESENT) Oct. 17–20, Branson, MO, Contact: Jerry Gipe, Email: jgipe@hotmail.com or Joseph Mowry, Email: josephmowry@att.net

NAVY

ESCORT CARRIER SAILORS & AIRMEN ASSOCIATION (ECSAA)

Sept. 30–Oct. 3, Nashville, TN, Contact: Anthony Looney, Ph: 214-738-5949, Email: AnthonyLooney@sbcglobal.net,

Web: ecsaa.org/2018-Convention

THE AVIATION BOATSWAIN'S MATES ASSOCIATION (ABMA) REUNION/PROFESSIONAL

Aug. 6–10, San Diego, CA, Contact: Doug Thornton, Email: abma.secretary@gmail.com

USS ALFRED A. CUNNINGHAM (DD-752)

Sept. 12–16, Branson, MO, Contact: John Keith Johnstone, Ph: 414-762-7587, Email: Johnstone752@att.net

USS ALTAIR (AKS-32)

Oct. 10–14, Nashville, TN, Contact: Dick Stader, Ph: 262-654-9202, Email: dickanderry5@sbcglobal.com

USS ANTIETAM (CV-CVA-CVS-36)

Sept. 19–22, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Ray Young, Ph: 316-680-6252, Email: lonyelnyoung@outlook.com, Web: ussantieta.com

USS CARTER HALL (LSD-3)

Oct. 23–27, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Raylah Holm, Ph: 509-607-9021, Email: raylah@aol.com, Web: ussoakhillsd7.myevent.com

USS CHEVALIER (DD/DDR-805)

Aug. 29–Sept. 9, Kearney, NE, Contact: Dave Klein, Ph: 308-530-6300, Email: daveklein10@yahoo.com

USS HOLLAND (AS-32)

Sept. 9–14, Knoxville, TN, Contact: Gary Stowe, Ph: 573-769-3996, Email: ussholland@socket.net

USS HOLLISTER (DD-788)

Sept. 26–29, Portland, OR, Contact: Ed Gundersen, Ph: 518-842-7126, Email: gunder788@verizon.net, Web: usshollister.org

USS KAWISHIWI (AO-146)

Sept. 21–23, Omaha, NE, Contact: John Scholl, Ph: 402-806-7279, Email: Jsscholl01@charter.net

USS LA SALLE (LPD/AGF-3)

Oct. 23–28, Portland, ME, Contact: Arnet Hagen, Ph: 360-387-7710, Email: einer2@junco.com, Web: usslasallepd3.com

USS MADDOX (DD-622, DD-731)

Sept. 20–23, Boise, ID, Contact: Dennis Stokhaug, Ph: 414-339-6168, Email: maddox64@aol.com

USS MAUNA KEA (AE-22)

Oct. 3–7, San Diego, CA, Contact: Jerry Mouton, Ph: 337-783-8270, Email: mouton_jerry@yahoo.com

USS NAVARRO (APA-215)

Oct. 3–7, Philadelphia, PA, Contact: Patrick Kelley, Ph: 724-346-6016, Email: patgerikelley@outlook.com

USS OAK HILL (LSD-7)

Oct. 23–27, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Raylah Holm, Ph: 509-607-9021, Email: raylah@aol.com, Web: ussoakhillsd7.myevent.com

USS PERKINS (DD-26, DD-377, DDR-877)

Sept. 13–15, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Barry Buchanan, Ph: 816-792-3040, Email: baryinmo@aol.com

USS PIEDMONT (AD-17)

Sept. 11–15, Denver, CO, Contact: Kent Thomas, Ph: 913-381-8934, Email: kthomas82@kc.rr.com

USS REEVES (DLG-24/CG-24)

Oct. 4–7, Warwick, RI, Contact: Thomas Bailey, Ph: 719-647-2872, Email: tombailey@ussreeves.com, Web: ussreeves.net

USS RENDOVA (CVE-114)

Sept. 30–Oct. 3, Nashville, TN, Contact: Sue Foley, Ph: 313-758-9318, Email: Cfcaytour@aol.com, Web: ecsaa.org/2018-Convention

USS VOGE (DE/FF-1047)

Oct. 3–7, San Diego, CA, Contact: Tom Anderson, Ph: 501-259-1369, Email: ussvogegroup@gmail.com, Web: www.facebook.com/groups/USVVOGE

VP-6 BLUE SHARKS ASSOCIATION

Oct. 10–13, Cincinnati, OH, Contact: Jim Lamers, Ph: 703-727-7944, Email: JimVP6@comcast.net, Web: www.patronsix.com

AIR FORCE

AIR FORCE OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS REUNION

Sept. 5–9, Charleston, SC, Contact: John Perryman, Ph: 410-610-7591, Email: muffin@olg.com, Web: AFOSISA.org

B-47 STRATOJET ASSOCIATION

Sept. 18–20, Omaha, NE, Contact: Dick Purdum, Ph: 402-291-5247, Email: dickpurdum@cox.net

B-57 BUMMERS ASSOCIATION BLMF Oct. 2–4, Hershey, PA, Contact: Howard Taylor, Ph: 256-353-7269, Email: howard_taylor@att.net

COAST GUARD

US COAST GUARD REUNION

Sept. 15, Hopkins, MN, Contact: Mike Roberts, Ph: 320-654-9399, Email: mike.roberts41@gmail.com

ALL SERVICES

HCVVO—HOWARD COUNTY VIETNAM VETERANS ORGANIZATION

Sept. 12–16, Kokomo, IN, Contact: Rat Ireland, Ph: 765-434-2410, Web: hcvvo.net

INQUIRIES

- Searching for anyone who served with our son in Vietnam, Gerald (Jerry) L. Schwaab, HM1, from 1968–70. Looking for any and all information of where he was located during this time. Contact SMC Joseph A. Schwaab (USN Ret), 47561 Bear Road, Stanfield, MN 55080-5229.
- Searching for anyone who served with me in Cha Rhang Valley, Vietnam. I was medevaced out of country in 1970. I drove the RF/PF Intel Courier Jeep. Contact John W. Collins Jr. (JJ), Ph: 336-409-6120.
- Searching for any anyone who served with A.T. Tow Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, who remembers a jeep rollover on mountainside involving Staff Sgt. John Ayward and myself, Lance Cpl. Matthew Nichols, around Aug. or Sept. 1980 at Northern Training Area, Camp Schwab, Okinawa, Japan. Officer in charge 2nd Lt. Norvell. Contact Matthew D. Nichols, 10 Venus St., Alda, NE 68810, Ph: 308-370-0523.
- Searching for anyone who served with me at A.P.O. 858 NEAC 6611th Airborne, S. A. C. Blue West One Narsarsuaq, Greenland, June 1956–1957. Contact Earl Stout, Ph: 870-653-5037, Email: rollingranch@swat.coop.
- Searching for anyone that served in Company C, 14th Infantry, Fort Benning, GA, Feb. 1959–July 1961. Captain Howard P. Petty was the Company Commander, I was his jeep driver. Contact James Jackson, Ph: 706-464-1498, Email: jjack37@icloud.com.
- Searching for Tommie Lee Hines of Fort Gordon, GA. Worked in the dental lab, friend of Frank Ganzy, Glenn. Later seen in Germany. Contact Raymond C. Robinson, Ph: 423-531-2953.
- Searching for Maj. Raymond R. Rodriguez, 1964, Co. A Battery, 1st Battalion, 2nd Artillery, 8th Division, Baumholder, Germany. Anyone with knowledge of the Major, contact George Lewis at pinalbuck@gmail.com.
- Searching for any members of Communications Squadron, Clark AB Philippines, June 1963–July 1964. Contact Larry L. Smith from West Virginia, currently residing in Milner, GA. Ph: 770-358-4829.
- Searching for anyone who served on board the USS Stribling (DD-867) from May–Aug. 1965, Vietnam. Fired our 5" guns on Marines being overrun by Viet Cong, July 1965. Contact Clarence Pietrzak, Ph: 505-867-4493, Email: LouisePietrzak@yahoo.com.
- Searching for anyone who served with me in the 213th Aviation Unit in Pyongtaek, Korea, in 1973–1974, especially Kenneth Beach, Richard Reiver, Ernest Rebella, Warren Bonner, William Smith, Jerome Dawson, Michael Gilstrap, Lionel Matthews, Dorian George, Eugene Robinson, James Mackey, Bobby Grier, Willie Rhodes aka Roach or Sp4 Ingram aka Tree. Contact Jerry Jacobs aka J.J., Ph: 843-464-9659, Email: Lammarja54@gmail.com.
- Searching for Carlos Ramous who served in the 542 Military Police, Fort Buchanan, PR, 1960–61. Contact Bob Cresnik, P.O. Box 332, Roundup, MT 59072.
- Searching for anyone who was selected/drafted by C.I.D. Officer Cecil Mullins, or other C.I.D. officer(s), in Korea and sent to Vietnam to participate in undercover investigations of black market activities from February 1970 to April 1970. Activities included searching bodies/body bags in preparation of shipping back to the states. Contact Ricky Davis, P.O. Box 2201, Henderson, NC 27536.



**FOR THE MANY REASONS
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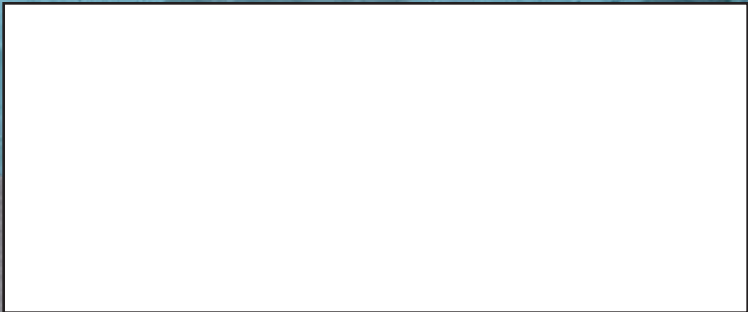
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