



THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY

JULY | AUGUST 2021

MAGAZINE

DAV STRONG

**Twin Cities Green
Beret named
2021 Outstanding
Disabled Veteran
of the Year**

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**A Century of
Service to Veterans**

DAV.ORG DAV @DAVHQ DAVHQ COMPANY/DAVHQ DISABLEDVETERANS

Back to business: DAV members to reunite for national convention

July 31–August 3, 2021

JW Marriott Tampa Water Street, Florida



Due to COVID-19 restrictions in the previously scheduled location of Reno, Nevada, the 2021 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention will now take place July 31–Aug. 3 in Tampa, Florida.

DAV understands any frustration this change of venue may cause regarding travel plans that have already been made. Fortunately, the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino has canceled reservations and provided refunds for deposits.

With vaccines being administered nationwide and restrictions easing in Florida, DAV will carry on its important business of recognizing volunteers and charting our course of advocacy and support of our nation's heroes, their families and survivors. The event will empower veterans and Auxiliary members to advocate for ill and injured veterans, enjoy the camaraderie of fellow members, and take ownership of the organization by choosing our leadership and setting our legislative agenda—all while allowing for a hearty dose of fun in the heart of Florida's Gulf Coast.

Whether you have a few hours or an entire day to explore, there are plenty of attractions in the Tampa Bay area, which hosts a sparkling waterfront, world-class chefs, family fun and a century of Cuban culture.

The 2021 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention will be held at the JW Marriott Tampa Water Street, located at 510 Water St., and the Tampa Marriott Water Street, located at 505 Water St. Please be sure to check DAV's convention webpage frequently for the most

up-to-date lodging and event information.

In advance of our traditional convention events, DAV invites members and veterans in the local community to participate in a free Day of Inspiration on Thursday, July 29, an uplifting and informative event to raise awareness of DAV's services. Registration is required at the webpage below. ■



Learn More Online

www.dav.org/events/2021-national-convention



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. A representative will either provide screening information relevant to the veteran's disability or refer the veteran to experts at TSA for help through the screening process.

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER STEPHEN “BUTCH” WHITEHEAD



Farewell, friends

Adequately describing the pride I have in standing alongside all of you who have worn our nation's uniform is a nearly impossible task. But I can say with absolute certainty that leading this outstanding organization full of tireless veteran advocates through the past two years has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

As I prepare to step aside as national commander, I'd like to share some thoughts—and, most of all, my gratitude—with you all.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my beautiful wife, Kim, for her unwavering support through this incredible journey. When I returned from Iraq in 2007 with a traumatic brain injury, she's the one who encouraged me to go to the VA to help deal with the physical, psychological and emotional toll of wartime service and get involved with an organization that would keep me connected to my fellow veterans. That is how I found DAV.

Like many of you, the support I have received from my family played a pivotal role as I recovered from my injury. Kim has been my bedrock throughout this process, and I'm forever grateful for the role she has played, the sacrifices she has made and the support she has given me from day one. Thank you, Kim. I wouldn't be where I am today without you.

I'd also like to thank YOU, the million-plus DAV members I'm grateful to call my brothers and sisters.

Without your tireless advocacy efforts, it's likely the plights of Blue Water Navy veterans and veterans exposed to toxic

burn pits would not have received their deserved attention from lawmakers. In spite of the pandemic, we have continued to make great strides, and I'm grateful for the work you've done and will continue to do, ensuring your fellow veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned.

Additionally, many of you know that in November 2019, I reentered the military and accepted the responsibility to serve as the command sergeant major of the Army National Guard's 34th Infantry Division. Your support and understanding in making that decision was appreciated beyond measure, and I am so proud to have been able to continue to lead this fine organization while continuing my service.

Finally, I'd like to extend special appreciation to the leadership and members of the Department of Minnesota, as well as the staff at our national and Washington headquarters. Your tireless support behind the scenes made this incredible year possible. Thank you for all that you do for our nation's veterans.

You have made these the most memorable and satisfying years of my life, and I look forward to staying involved with DAV for many years to come.

For now, it's time to step aside and pass the reins of DAV to the capable hands of our next national commander. I do so with a full heart, knowing the long and storied tradition of DAV will continue to flourish in its next 100 years of service and support for veterans forever changed in service and their families.

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Through The Veterans Consortium, veterans whose service-connected disabilities negatively affected their service are able to obtain discharge upgrades and put their lives back on track.

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DAV MAGAZINE • July/August 2021

Contact us: dav.org • Toll-Free 877-426-2838 • 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger KY 41018 • feedback@dav.org. Volume 63, Issue 4, *DAV Magazine* (ISSN 0885-6400). Editorial Office: DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. Telephone 859-441-7300 or toll-free (877) I AM A VET. Published and circulated bimonthly bulletin by the Disabled American Veterans, a congressionally chartered, nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. DAV homepage is dav.org. Available on recording for 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.

From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT J. MARC BURGESS



Being a holistic veterans advocate

By simply joining DAV or the Auxiliary, we contribute to the cause. But many choose to go even further and make DAV a part of their lives. Some support in-hospital volunteerism and thank veterans in person for their service. Others donate their time to the DAV Transportation Network to ensure our heroes get the care they've earned.

For others, DAV's legislative efforts are the way to go. They love the thrill of advancing policy and influencing an agenda that affects the lives of veterans and their families in their communities and nationwide.

At any given point, thousands in our ranks are advocating as service officers for their fellow veterans to get the benefits they earned. And many are filling important roles as leaders at the local, state and national levels to ensure the mission succeeds.

Regardless of how active you are in our cause, the more you know about the services DAV offers, the more of an impact you can make.

After all, veterans who need help with their benefits have a vested interest in the policies we advance to protect and expand those benefits. They may also need a ride and could benefit from the

camaraderie that comes with being a member of DAV.

Veterans attending a Homeless Veteran Stand Down could have their lives forever changed by learning about a DAV career fair. By knowing about our Disaster Relief Program or the DAV Emergency Financial Assistance Program partnership with

PenFed, anyone can be the source of a referral that could help deserving veterans and their families in their most dire time of need.

Whether it's helping a fellow veteran get assistance through VolunteerforVeterans.org or making a veteran or caregiver aware of Member Advantages, the more you know, the more you can help.

Knowledge alone is not power, but the sharing of knowledge is extremely powerful. By reading *DAV Magazine*, being aware of available resources and events, and showing a willingness to reach out, you become one of the most valuable specialists in our charity—a holistic veteran advocate.

Your DAV IQ and willingness to refer veterans as a holistic advocate can be incredibly rewarding. Thanks for supporting our cause at whatever level you can. Keep up the great work and stay sharp.

Regardless of how active you are in our cause, **the more you know** about the services DAV offers, **the more of an impact you can make.**



LETTERS

Toxic exposure

The toxic exposure issue is a “long-present” problem, with the posture of the Veterans Benefits Administration in addressing the problem as well as the Department of Defense not being forthcoming in making known locations where toxic chemicals existed in the drinking water sources of installations. In 2017, Camp Lejeune became the only place where service connection was granted on a presumptive basis. It should be that the same status be granted to all locations with similar contaminants. The TEAM Act appears to be the most efficient manner to address the issue of contaminated water sources. **David M. Little, Loudon, New Hampshire**

Atomic veterans

I'm an Atomic veteran and was reading in the latest *DAV Magazine* about Agent Orange delays. I've had both thyroid and liver cancer as a result of my radiation exposure. After months of waiting for the VA to make a decision, I heard nothing. The Department of Justice has a program that gives each Atomic veteran \$75,000; however, that program ends in 2022. I have seen none of this compensation. It feels as though Atomic veterans have been left out in the cold. **John N. Coleman, Alexandria, Louisiana**

Please Note: “By statute, the RECA Trust Fund terminates 22 years after July 10, 2000. Section 8 of RECA states that claims not filed within 22 years after July 10, 2000, shall be barred.” —*Radiation Exposure Compensation Act*

Diagnosing brain injury

The VA needs immediate help and attention. They need oversight

on how they decide what will be considered a traumatic brain injury or PTSD. They need help on deciding based on clinical documentation and physical proof. This issue is really out of control. **Suzanne Knight, Middletown, New Jersey**

Agent Orange compensation delays

Even with Congress approving the three additional presumptive issues [bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson's Disease-like symptoms], the VA seems to always stall on these issues. [My fight to receive benefits] unfortunately has gone on for years and years now. Why should it take this long to appeal? I have a board-certified orthopedic surgeon who has submitted a letter covering all bases of my diagnoses. Both my military records and work history should be sufficient, yet someone I do not know is able to delay or deny my claims.

Ray Lorence, Cibolo, Texas

DAV food pantry is crushing community hunger [March/April 2021]

I have heard some concerns about the food pantry [operated by DAV Chapter 39 in Bristol, Tennessee] and want to reiterate that no funds go to anyone outside our mission statement. All food is provided by a local grant through Second Harvest Food Bank. The pantry allows us to interact with everyone who needs the assistance. A family last year came through, and

the spouse inquired about her veteran husband's benefits. He didn't know he was eligible under the Blue Water Navy legislation. They went from needing a food pantry to getting about \$40,000 in back pay right before Christmas. **Chapter 39 Commander Mike Harman, Bristol, Tennessee**

Honoring a hero: Alwyn Cashe

I was thrilled to see that Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe may finally be recognized for his heroics in pulling his fellow soldiers from a burning vehicle. His sacrifice may not have saved all; however, he risked his life doing all he could. I have followed his story since this incident was reported and believed his actions warranted the Medal of Honor. I'm disgusted that it has taken 16 years for this hero to be recognized for his efforts. **Paul Wandrie Sr., St. Ignace, Michigan**

The future of America's veterans and toxic exposure

I cannot believe the military would allow burn pits after the Vietnam War. All incinerations should be done using a hospital-grade incinerator with a tall smokestack or buried with bulldozers or something similar. Human waste should be buried using latrines until a septic system can be implemented. Exposure to open-air burning is a needless cost of war that can and should be entirely avoided as soon as a landing strip is built. **LaVerna VanDan, Valparaiso, Indiana**

WRITE TO US Please send feedback to DAV Magazine, 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018, or via email to feedback@dav.org. We also welcome feedback on our 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.

Proposed legislation would expand survivors benefits

PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. RYAN CALLAGHAN/AIR FORCE

At the beginning of the 117th Congress, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester and Sen. John Boozman introduced the Caring for Survivors Act of 2021 (S. 976) to adjust benefits awarded to survivors and family members of veterans who died as a result of their military service. The bipartisan legislation would ease the eligibility criteria for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to allow additional survivors to receive the benefit and increase the monthly benefit amount to match benefits provided by other federal survivor programs. Specifically, the measure would:

- Expand eligibility for DIC by replacing the “10-year” rule with a graduated scale of benefits that begins at five years for initial eligibility at 50% and gradually reaches the full benefit 10 years after determination of disability. For example, if a veteran is rated totally disabled for five years and dies of a non-service-connected cause, a survivor would be entitled to 50% of the DIC benefit.
- Increase the amount of DIC to 55% of the rate of monthly compensation received by a totally disabled veteran.

benefits they need in the future.”

“DAV has long advocated for enhancing survivors benefits, including the provisions in this bill,” said National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “While there was some progress during the 116th Congress—including reduction of the remarriage age for surviving spouses—there is still much work to do to ensure survivor benefits continue to provide for the financial stability of veterans’ loved ones.”

The rate of compensation paid to survivors of service members who die in the line of duty or veterans who die from service-related injuries or diseases was established in 1993. It has only been minimally adjusted since that time.

Additionally, benefits are currently restricted for survivors if the veteran was disabled for less than 10 years before death. The Caring for Survivors Act of 2021 would reduce the 10-year time frame a veteran needs to be rated totally disabled to five years, broadening eligibility to more survivors and alleviating additional burdens on family members during their time of loss.

“Ensuring veterans’ survivors are adequately cared for is a deeply personal issue for many of our members,” said Ilem. “We believe the Caring for Survivors Act would ease burdens placed on both veterans and the family members they leave behind.” ■



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

A paratrooper's PAIN

Army Airborne veteran receives VA benefits,
compensation more than 60 years after injury

By Matt Saintsing

As a young paratrooper in the 1950s, Matt Cimini was no stranger to relatively safe, controlled falls from great heights, but it was an unexpected drop in West Germany that would lead to a lifetime of pain.

Even before his enlistment, Cimini had been drawn to a specific military occupation by a civilian boss who'd served with the famed 82nd Airborne Division.

"He directly ordered me to go airborne," said Cimini. "I said OK."

Cimini completed 17 jumps between jump school and his time with the 11th Airborne Division. Together with the men in his unit, he made the trek from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to train in Europe.

"The jumping was OK," he said, "but the worst injury I got was sustained from leading a patrol at night."

The soldiers guided off the road during the training mission in the woods around Munich, flanked left and were about to simulate open fire on their target when Cimini unexpectedly disappeared.

"I went down this hole, and I swore I broke the ankle—I swore it," Cimini said. He was right, as doctors would—much later in life—confirm the bone fracture.

After the fall, he remained in a small medical pup tent for three days and was placed on limited duty. After being honorably discharged in 1957, Cimini returned to civilian life and his old job driving a truck for a meatpacking company in Providence, Rhode Island.

Matt Cimini takes a break from training at Warner Kaserne, a U.S. Army training facility in Munich, West Germany, in 1956.



A year later, he attempted to get his ankle treated through the Department of Veterans Affairs but was turned away.

"More or less, they said, 'Forget about it,'" Cimini said. "If I knew what DAV was at the time, it probably would have gone a hell of a lot different."

The injured ankle only worsened over time, and his years running, jumping and navigating field problems in the Army caught up with him as the pain radiated up both of his legs through his knees, hips and lower back.

DAV National Service Officer Kenny Andrade, who met Cimini in 2013, instantly recognized the toll service had wrought on him.

"You can tell what this guy's been through," said Andrade. "His gait, the way he favors one side over the other. His body looked like it's crooked; he leans to one side all the time."

“ DAV ... is the absolute answer. ”
—Matt Cimini, Army veteran

Cimini also told Andrade about the stiffness around both of his ankles and the throbbing pain every time he walked.

The years of gnawing aches motivated Cimini—after some persuasion—to submit a claim to the Department of Veterans Affairs with DAV’s assistance. Andrade filed the claim in early January 2020 but was quickly denied due to the dearth of medical evidence in Cimini’s military records.



National Service Officer Kenny Andrade (right) sits with Matt Cimini in the DAV office in Providence, Rhode Island. Andrade was instrumental in unlocking benefits for Cimini decades after his service as an airborne soldier.



**SUPPORT
VETERANS WITH
EVERY SWIPE**



DAV’s new Spare Change program lets you round up your credit or debit card charges to the nearest dollar and donate the difference directly to DAV. Anywhere and everywhere you use your card, you will give hope to disabled veterans.

Learn more: [DAV.ORG/CHANGE](https://www.dav.org/change)

Armed with the knowledge imparted by Andrade and Mike Zibrida, who supervises the DAV office in Providence, Cimini was examined by a private doctor, who unveiled just how serious that pivotal fall was more than six decades ago.

With a new medical opinion, supported by recent evidence and documentation, Andrade refiled the claim last year. In July 2020, Cimini’s claim was approved by the VA, significantly increasing his benefits and disability compensation.

“It’s been a long road, but we finally have gotten to where he gets the medical treatment and recognition he deserves for his lower extremities,” said Andrade.

“I’ve lived with a lot of pain—a lot of pain,” Cimini said. But now that he is able to get the care he needs, he was fitted with a brace for his injured ankle, which he said helps with that pain immensely.

The 84-year-old Army veteran lauds the work Andrade and Zibrida did on his behalf.

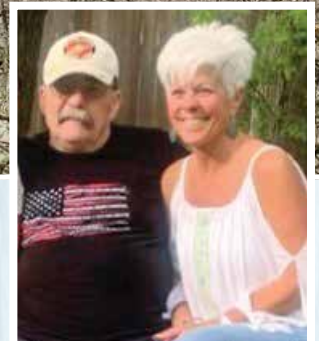
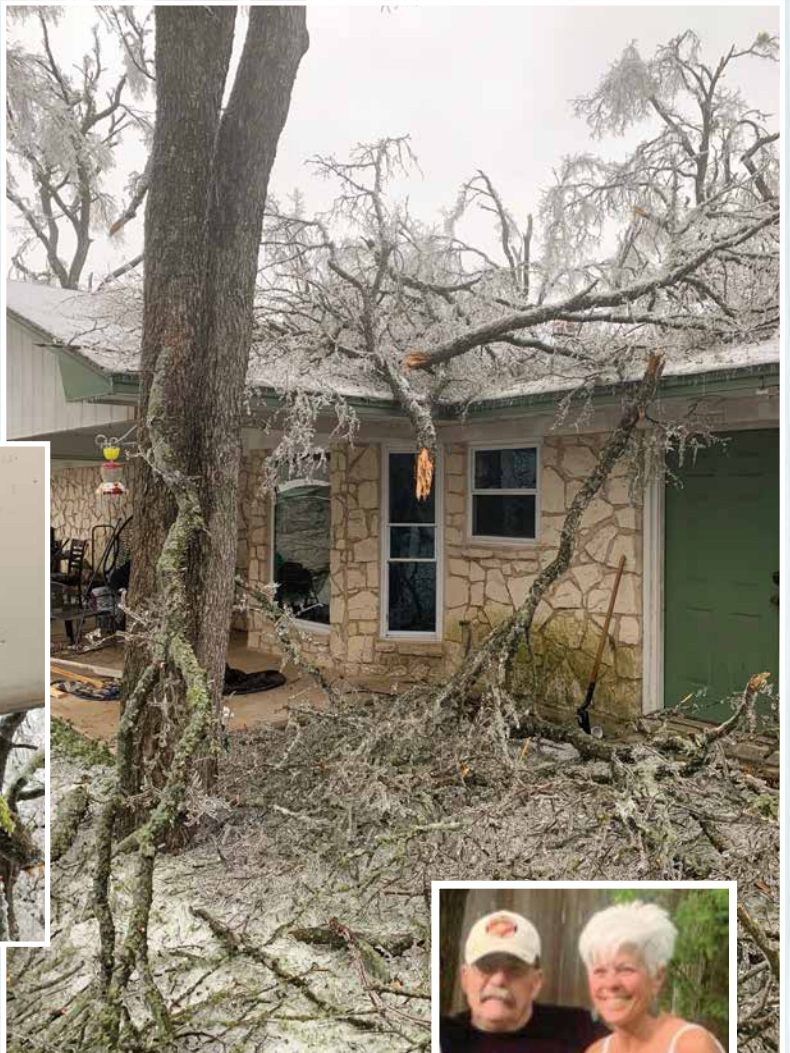
“DAV, for any veteran, particularly if you have a problem, is the absolute answer,” he said. “The VA is good, but they’re limited—they’re not going to go to hearings for you. They’re not putting in claims like the DAV would.” ■

A Texas-sized whirlwind

DAV disaster relief efforts kick into gear as a massive winter storm grips the state



A broken tree penetrates a DAV national service officer's roof (left). Historic winter storms rocked Texas, causing home damage from frozen debris (right).



Marine Corps veteran Michael Stevenson and his wife, Joni, endured near-zero temperatures during the winter storms felt throughout Texas. Like many, power outages caused their food to spoil, prompting the Stevensons to seek refuge with family close by.

By Matt Saintsing

Joni and Michael Stevenson had lived in their Texas home for just six months when a wave of heavy snow and ice covered the state, taxing energy grids beyond capacity and creating a deadly power shortage that left millions without electricity or heat for days.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, at least 125 people died in a series of intense, abnormal and dangerous winter weather events that rocked the Lone Star State in mid-February. Temperatures plunged into single digits, wreaking havoc on homes, and the snowstorm left many of the roads impassable.

For Joni and Michael, a disabled Marine Corps veteran, going several days without electricity tested their mettle and forced tough decisions.

"We're pretty strong—we're a strong unit," said Joni,

who works full time as Michael's caregiver. "But of course, being our first few months in the house, we were thinking, 'Oh my gosh, how are we going to get through this?'"

Their home in Belton—a central Texas city between Waco and Austin—lost power at 2 a.m. Joni started a fire right away, but by the following morning, it was clear they were in a losing battle against frigid conditions. As hail and sleet fell from the gray sky, she knew she had to make a move.

No power meant their food was spoiling, and with temperatures dipping below 40 degrees inside the house,

Joni made the call to join her brother-in-law, who had already taken in a family with four children, across town.

Joni had heard of DAV, and its Disaster Relief Program, from another local veteran.

“People impacted by disasters are often faced with overwhelming loss,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek.

“DAV remains steadfast by fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served during isolated events or large-scale disasters like the one in Texas.”

DAV has provided relief in the event of natural disasters, like wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes, but also following specific, isolated incidents, such as flooding or electrical fires.

In 2020, DAV provided more than \$900,000 in disaster relief funds to veterans and their families, bringing the total amount dispersed to victims to \$16 million since the program began in 1968. Since this past January, DAV has provided \$374,500 in disaster relief grants, with an overwhelming majority directed to aid those affected by the Texas winter storms.

“Obviously, the numbers speak for themselves,” added Marszalek.

“There are areas in Austin and Killeen where people were without power for upwards of a week,” said Ryan Burgos, who supervises the Waco DAV office. “Some places lost water for about a week as well.”

Unexpectedly losing hundreds of dollars’ worth of fresh and frozen food due to spoilage, as the Stevensons did, was common for Texans affected by the storm—making the DAV grants an important way to keep families fed.

“A lot of the impact we’ve had on the veterans here was just being able to put food on the table,” Burgos added.

Joni said the application process was seamless and that it only required a phone call to a DAV benefits advocate. She was roaming the aisles of a local dollar store for limited supplies when Jennifer Kellogg, a DAV benefits advocate from the Waco office, called notifying Joni she’d be receiving some much-needed cash assistance.

“I was reduced to tears in the store,” recalled Joni. “I’m not usually on the receiving end of anything like this.”



“A lot of the impact we’ve had on the veterans here was just being able to put food on the table.”

—Ryan Burgos,
DAV national service office supervisor

Joni and Michael used the funds from DAV to replenish their food supply after catching word of a restocked store nearby.

Burgos added that disasters of any sort can have a dangerously adverse effect on veterans’ service-connected ailments, making DAV’s disaster relief efforts more vital than ever.

“Take a veteran who has PTSD, anxiety or depression,” he said. “Veterans’ anxiety can go through the roof when there’s, understandably, a panic, but they should know, help can be just a phone call away.” ■

A graphic with a blue and white American flag background. The DAV logo is in the top right. Below it, the text "YOUR VEHICLE DONATION SUPPORTS VETERANS" is written in white and yellow. In the center, a white tow truck is towing a red SUV. Below the image, there is a white box with black text: "Help the brave men and women who served by donating any car, truck, RV or boat, and you could qualify for a tax deduction." At the bottom, a red box contains the text "Offering free, no-contact pickup" in white. Below that, a white box contains the text "1-855-510-5437 | dav.org/car" in black.

DAV

**YOUR VEHICLE DONATION
SUPPORTS VETERANS**

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

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'My

KIDS

have a future'

Securing survivor and dependent educational benefits
can change the trajectory of a family's recovery

By Bryan Lett



“Education is the vehicle that helps veterans and their families to drive over life’s land mines, setbacks and shattered dreams.”

—Lawrence Anthony, Marine Corps veteran

While helplessness and despair are among the immediate responses to learning a spouse has unexpectedly died, for a widow or widower, the emotional impacts and long-term financial challenges can seem to extend their grieving period indefinitely.

That’s why, in the case of veterans who die due to service-connected disabilities, securing VA survivor and dependent educational benefits is so critical for the future of their surviving spouse and their children.

In 2011, Lorrene Eads was a 26-year-old wife and mother who had already seen her husband, Ronson, struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts as a result of his time in Afghanistan. Just a week before discovering she was pregnant with their second child—a boy—Ronson tragically took his own life. Eads, taking the advice of a family friend, reached out to DAV through benefits advocate Don Inns.

“Don was pretty straightforward about the claims process going into it,” Eads said. “He said it might be a battle but that I deserve this. I didn’t have any expectations, as it’s not commonly known that spouses can qualify for these benefits.”

With DAV’s help, the VA granted service connection for the cause of her husband’s death and entitlement to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA).

“I was at work one day and just happen to call and check my bank account, and I just started crying,” Eads said. “I was always saving pennies where I could. Paying all the bills that come out of the woodwork when someone dies. Now, I was able to say we got this—my kids have a future.”

Generally, for a spouse or child to be eligible for DEA benefits, the service member must be adjudicated as 100% permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability or have died while on active duty or as a result of a service-connected disability. These benefits can make all the difference according to Marine Corps veteran Lawrence Anthony. Anthony has first-hand experience with the impact of educational benefits, as he used his to obtain his doctorate in education.

“The benefits that veterans and their families receive

from education are some of the most powerful weapons in their arsenal of tools to help bring future financial security and peace of mind,” said Anthony. “Education is the vehicle that helps veterans and their families to drive over life’s land mines, setbacks and shattered dreams.”

David Hough saw a lot in his 37-year Marine Corps career. He enlisted in 1974 and retired as colonel in 2011, but he and his wife, Jen, still didn’t have a good grasp of the benefits process.

“The retirement process is challenging enough, and it is imperative that you do the correct thing to ensure you and your family’s financial security,” said Hough. “The process as stated was not clear.”

Fortunately for Hough, a good friend he served with recommended he contact DAV. After a methodical review of Hough’s file, a DAV benefits expert filed for an increase, and Hough’s rating increased from 70% to 100%, permanent and total, making his son eligible for DEA benefits.

“We received educational benefits for our son,” said Jen Hough. “It is so helpful to have someone knowledgeable to ask questions to. Someone who knows how to get the information, the correct form to fill out, and how to cut through all the red tape.”

Educational benefits do vary from state to state, so Inns suggests that survivors and dependents make sure they are aware of any and all possible benefits they have earned.

“They can always email directly with a local DAV benefits advocate by going to benefitsquestions.org,” Inns said.

“The veteran may not know how many of their kids’ birthdays they missed,” Jen Hough said. “They may not know how many Christmases they have missed or Halloweens because they were busy doing an important job, but I bet their kids remember. Educational benefits for their kids are a small way to make up for the time lost.”

Inns sees them as an investment in the country’s future.

“While obtaining VA disability compensation for veterans can be life-changing,” he said, “securing educational benefits for their children changes the course of our country.” ■

Battling the 'PCS Penalty'

Permanent changes
of station make
unemployment
among military
spouses too common

By Bryan Lett



Today, more than 605,000 active-duty military spouses face unique challenges while trying to find and build their own careers. The frequency of military moves can create significant gaps in their resume, limit their professional networks and limit the geography of their job search.

A 2019 Defense Department study found that 22% of military spouses were unemployed. In contrast, this past March, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an unemployment rate of 6% for all other Americans. This challenging professional environment for military spouses requires flexible thinking and unique solutions.

“When someone on active duty is relocated to a new duty station, it is often for career advancement,” said National Employment Director Jeff Hall. “For their spouse, that means uprooting their career and possibly needing to go through a new state’s license or certification requirements. They need all the help they can get.”

Colette Stein, an active-duty spouse, knows all too well the impact a change in her husband’s career

plan can ultimately have on her own. She met her husband while attending the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, but before she could graduate, he joined the Army. He would soon be stationed across the country in North Carolina.

“We did the long distance thing for a while,” Stein said. “But when I graduated in 2018, I decided to make the move to North Carolina.”

While fending off her own feelings of frustration during her career search, Stein worked as a server for a period of time before doing some freelance work to keep her professional skills sharp. Then, she attended a virtual DAV career fair in November 2020.

“I saw an opportunity in Winston-Salem for a journalist and I went for it,” said Stein.

She was hired in February by NBC affiliate WXII Channel 12 as a multimedia journalist and hasn’t looked back.

“There are opportunities out there,” Stein said. “Don’t be afraid to attend these events. We should be

aggressive and put ourselves out there. I was impressed that it was offering career jobs. We have to use all of the resources available to us, and these career fairs are one of them. It got me a job in television.”

According to a 2017 report from Hiring Our Heroes, “Military Spouses in the Workplace,” nearly every military move forces an average of four to six months of unemployment for the spouse. Some people, including Maj. Paul Kearney, have started using the term “PCS penalty” to refer to the lost wages caused by permanent changes of station. Kearney is an active-duty Army Strategist and Wargaming Strategist at the Center for Army Analysis. In an article for Army War College’s War Room Journal, Kearney noted that taking just a month off work can result in the forfeiture of over four times the amount of lost salary, factoring in the value of employee benefits, savings or investments, and decreased future earning power.

“Like many American families, military families want or need two incomes,” said Hall. “It can impact the quality of life for children, complicate a service



Colette Stein attended a DAV virtual career fair and landed a job as a multimedia journalist in North Carolina, where her husband is stationed.

member’s transition out of the military, and can impact a spouse’s overall feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction with their personal ambitions and accomplishments.”

Abbey Ehn has been an active-duty military spouse for more than a decade. Eight moves in nine years resulted in the pursuit of five different career paths before she found her calling. She is a co-founder of MilSpo Academy, an eight-week program designed to train military spouses in recruiting, business development, digital marketing and customer success.

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“Work needs to be portable. Spouses want **flexible, remote positions**. ... Just like anyone else, they want something they can maintain.”

—Abby Ehn, co-founder of MilSpo Academy

“Work needs to be portable,” Ehn said. “Spouses want flexible, remote positions. We need to make sure that our training gives them what they need to find an entry-level position where advancement is possible so they don’t have to keep finding new jobs every time they move. Just like anyone else, they want something they can maintain.”

and military spouses toward becoming creators, innovators and entrepreneurs. DAV has partnered with PBC on events to support business owners.

“I think most military spouses get to the point that I call ‘the intersection,’” Pilcher said. “It’s when they realize many jobs just aren’t conducive to their lifestyle and they are staring down different roads while trying to decide

their next move. I think this is when many decide to try something different.”

Pilcher and the military spouse community also see an opportunity where many businesses struggled to adapt over the last 18 months: working remotely.

“What we have seen at PBC is a lot of the spouses who had started their own business out of their home were the best prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic,” Pilcher said. “They were used to not being able to plan too far out, and most were already working

in remote settings with remote employees.”

While the coronavirus may have inadvertently helped military spouses by forcing companies to think differently about how they staff their teams, one thing that remains true is the continued need to study, track and promote employment resources for the military spouse. ■



Learn More Online

To learn more about the resources available through Patriot Boot Camp and MilSpo Academy, visit patriotbootcamp.org and careerdash.com/milspoacademy. A complete listing of DAV career fairs is available at jobs.dav.org.

Military Spouse Unemployment

22%

unemployed in 2019



20 weeks

average time spent
searching for a job

3.5%

2019 national unemployment,
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



SOURCE: THE OFFICE OF PEOPLE ANALYTICS. MILITARYONESOURCE.MIL/DATA-RESEARCH-AND-STATISTICS/SURVEY-FINDINGS

Jen Pilcher, a military spouse, has a master’s degree in speech-language pathology. It’s one of many areas of expertise that require a state license in order to practice legally and earn a living.

“I moved three times in five years and needed a new license each time,” said Pilcher. “It becomes expensive and time-consuming to pursue. It would take three to six months to even get the license to start looking for work. By the time I would get the state license, it was time to move again.”

Pilcher ultimately decided that entrepreneurship was her path forward. She is now the CEO of Patriot Boot Camp (PBC), whose mission is to amass an inclusive community that advances military members, veterans

From the NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTOR

JEFFREY C. HALL



Corralling COVID-19's impact

For the last several months, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the American economy, which has made a difficult situation even harder for transitioning service members or veterans looking to obtain employment or improve their career prospects.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the 2.9% unemployment rate among veterans at the end of 2019 reflected the lowest rate in nearly 20 years. This rate remained steady early in 2020. But then news began to break about a virus making its way across the globe, and it wasn't long before the American workforce felt the impact.

As a result of the coronavirus's assault on the U.S. job market, the unemployment rate among veterans had soared to between 8.5% and 11.9% by summer 2020. In a matter of weeks, the pandemic pushed veteran unemployment from a 20-year low to a 20-year high.

More recently, as the country continued to heal and our economy worked to recuperate, the unemployment rate among veterans settled in around 5.5% to 6%.

While this is an improvement from the peak of the outbreak, it is still nearly double the pre-pandemic numbers. In fact, we haven't seen numbers this consistently high since DAV launched its employment program in 2014.

In order to recapture the low rates of 2019, we must continue to diligently monitor the situation and bring solutions to the table. One thing we can do is help make veterans and their families aware of

the various DAV employment resources available to them. Transitioning to the civilian sector or a new career is hard enough. Add to the mix a pandemic the likes of which we haven't seen in a century, and it can become helplessly overwhelming.

One of those resources is our job fairs. In spring 2020, DAV was able to move our in-person job fairs to virtual events. This helped DAV offset the impact the virus was having on the job market by hosting 92 job fairs with over 32,000 candidates. We have also begun to move back to in-person hiring events, and you can find a complete listing of them by visiting our website, jobs.dav.org.

Veteran employment will remain an issue of great importance as our towns, cities and states begin to resemble normalcy. While we have all endured many challenges during the past year, I call upon each of you to help those we serve secure meaningful employment by encouraging them to utilize DAV employment resources.

Even with the restrictions from the pandemic, companies continued to recruit and hire veterans because they know the teamwork, skills, values and talents we bring to their workforce.

Lastly, there are many great companies that deserve our thanks for their ongoing efforts to hire veterans, so I also ask each of you to nominate a vet-friendly company or encourage a company to submit online for employer recognition by visiting patriotemployers.org.

Adapting for

ADAPTIVE SPORTS

DAV and VA go online to provide disabled veterans virtual versions of annual adaptive sporting events

By M. Todd Hunter

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached American shores, the Department of Veterans Affairs was forced to cancel the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass, Colorado, scheduled to take place in March 2020. What the DAV and VA organizers didn't know was that they were at the vanguard of a trend that wouldn't show signs of receding for over a year.

In spring 2020 and the months that followed, as the country adapted to its new and unplanned reality, industries began to more widely embrace video conferencing in order to operate as normally as possible throughout the crisis.

In September 2020, the National Disabled Veterans TEE (Training, Exposure, Experience) Tournament—an annual adaptive golf clinic co-presented by DAV and the VA in Iowa City, Iowa, that serves as a rehabilitation program for veterans with visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), amputations, spinal cord injuries and other disabilities—transitioned to an online event dubbed TEE At Home. Participants were provided virtual golf lessons with Professional Golfers' Association professionals and challenged to put their instruction to use at local courses across the country in an effort to engage and invigorate them to directly improve their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

“Nearly 300 registered veterans who applied for the original in-person golf clinic were invited to participate

Adaptive sports play an incredibly important role in a veteran's recovery.”

—Dave Riley,
National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports
Clinic and TEE Tournament chairman and
DAV past national commander

in TEE At Home, and we were happy with the turnout and positive feedback,” said Nick Beelner, director of the TEE Tournament. “Beyond the direct Q&A with the PGA pros, we created nine instructional videos that will remain on the TEE website for any veteran to view in the future in what is the beginning of what will become a comprehensive library of golf instruction.”

With the success of TEE At Home, DAV and the VA used the same blueprint to offer a virtual version of this year's winter sports clinic, appropriately named the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic At Home, which took place March 29–April 2.

“Unfortunately, there just wasn't enough time last year between the cancellation and the scheduled event for us to put something together for our participants,” said Teresa Parks, director of the winter sports clinic, which promotes rehabilitation through adaptive winter sports for injured veterans and their families. “When we saw what Nick's team was able to accomplish with some preparation time and the success they had with the golf clinic, we knew we'd be able to not only repeat it with our event this year but also hopefully expand on it.”

The Winter Sports Clinic At Home provided participants with numerous instructional videos ranging from proper ski and snowboarding equipment

Advanced Mono-Skis



Scarver



Tensor



Left: The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic At Home video session titled *Equipment 101: Novice to Advanced* gave veterans a peek at the adaptive ski equipment used at the annual event in Snowmass Village, Colorado. **Bottom left:** PGA professional Jim Dickerson instructs veterans on how to set up a golf shot. **Bottom right:** PGA Professional Austin Kopp created a series of instructional golf videos for TEE At Home participants.



to recommendations for athletes with specific injuries. There were also sessions focused on mental health, self-defense, specific injuries (such as TBI), yoga, and other winter sports such as ice hockey and curling, as well as a daily series of testimonials featuring a veteran's story of overcoming the obstacles of personal injury.

The event's opening day featured a keynote address from Medal of Honor recipient Hershel "Woody" Williams, a Marine Corps veteran who spoke about how, through programs like the TEE Tournament and the winter sports clinic, DAV and the VA are providing a service to veterans that would not be available otherwise and are giving them a life that they could have never experienced before the World War II era.

"When I view the accomplishments of the veterans taking part in this program, I'm enthralled, and I wonder where the grit and the drive comes from," said Williams. "I believe it's the same drive that they exhibited while serving America in the armed forces."

"Woody is 100% correct, because adaptive sports play an incredibly important role in a veteran's recovery," said Past National Commander Dave Riley, a quadruple amputee who serves as chairman for both the TEE Tournament and the winter sports clinic.

"The pandemic hasn't been an easy time for a lot of disabled veterans, but with golf and winter sports, there's a certain amount of self-competition and calmness that does wonders for your mental health. And I can't wait for the day that DAV and the VA can get everyone back to these events in person." ■



Marine Corps veteran and Medal of Honor recipient Hershel "Woody" Williams delivered the keynote address at the 2021 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic At Home virtual event.

ASTOUNDING

A man in a light blue long-sleeved shirt, khaki shorts, a baseball cap, and sunglasses is standing on a boat, holding a fishing rod that is bent. The boat has a Minn Kota motor and a Lowrance fish finder. The background shows a calm lake and a line of trees under a clear blue sky.

“

There are barriers to being a wounded veteran, for sure, but Mike is living proof you can overcome them.”

— Trent Dilks,
Department of Minnesota
benefits protection team leader

ADVOCACY

Army Green Beret, Afghanistan veteran receives DAV's 2021 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award

By Matt Saintsing

On Sept. 11, 2001, Mike McElhiney and the rest of his Special Forces team knew they'd be headed directly into harm's way in response to the terrorist attack that claimed nearly 3,000 lives in New York City, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania.

In the weeks following 9/11, the elite soldiers deployed to Afghanistan to conduct irregular warfare and track down Taliban and al-Qaida leaders. McElhiney's team, Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 574, was tasked to take on the enemy just outside the southern city of Kandahar.

"It was just chaos," said McElhiney.

In addition to assaulting and defending key terrain, ODA 574—part of 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)—was selected to escort back to Afghanistan a relatively unknown ousted diplomat, Hamid Karzai, who would serve as the war-torn country's president from December 2001 to 2014.

However, McElhiney's deployment was cut short in early December 2001 when an American bomb was mistakenly dropped on his position, killing three of his fellow Green Berets—Master Sgt. Jefferson Donald, Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Henry Petithory and Staff Sgt. Brian Cody Prosser—in addition to five friendly Afghan fighters.

Nearly two dozen Special Forces soldiers and 18 Afghans were injured along with McElhiney while fighting the Taliban and al-Qaida. The Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), a single satellite-guided bomb weighing 2,000 pounds, struck their position by accident after a new piece of equipment malfunctioned.

"I was about 40 meters away from where the bomb impacted," recalled McElhiney. "I remember the



McElhiney (left) stands with an Afghan man as other Special Forces soldiers operate around a Toyota Hilux pickup truck. American Green Berets deployed to Afghanistan in the weeks following 9/11 to conduct unconventional warfare and root out Taliban and al-Qaida fighters.

red flash, and I remember coming to and trying to triage myself."

The sheer force of the explosion caused life-threatening injuries. He had a hole in his torso, known as a sucking chest wound; a compound fracture in his left arm; and no initial feeling below his waist. McElhiney also noticed that his right thumb touched his arm's crease, indicating a severe trauma.

There were many firsts for him while in recovery immediately following the tragedy.

In Germany, he woke up to learn his right arm was gone. McElhiney also spotted golf ball-sized wounds in his legs. At Walter Reed Army Medical Center, he

realized he was the beginning of a long chain of injured veterans to be wounded after 9/11.

“When we first got to Walter Reed, we were the only show in town,” he said. “We were the new young set of heroes, and everybody was there to help and support us.”

During his recovery at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, he got his first taste of veteran advocacy. While McElhiney was already equipped with a state-of-the-art prosthesis, he noticed a younger soldier with a similar injury who had a rudimentary hook as his only artificial arm.

“I’ve seen what these [prostheses] can do, and this guy’s here stuck with the hook,” recalled McElhiney. “It didn’t seem like there was a lot of good advocacy or anyone really taking care of him.”

He provided the soldier with the resources that were extended to him, such as numbers for congressional offices and other points of contact.

“I said, ‘Call. They’re waiting to hear from you,’” he said.

That was just the start and a preview of what was to come.

The Army Special Forces motto is “de oppresso liber,” Latin for “to free the oppressed.” Green Berets are trained to fight for those who can’t fight for themselves and assist others in their pursuit of freedom. It’s that ingrained ethos from years within the highly exclusive profession that McElhiney credits for his passion to not settle for the status quo.

Retiring in 2010 after 21 years in the Army, he settled in Minnesota, where he would become instrumental in unequivocally affecting veterans statewide. Larry Herke, the commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the state of Minnesota, has witnessed firsthand the impact McElhiney has made.

“Mike brings a wealth of knowledge about veterans

issues because of his lived experience through the VA system,” said Herke, a DAV life member. “He’s a great depository of information, and he knows how to navigate a lot of the systems that many of our veterans are challenged with.”

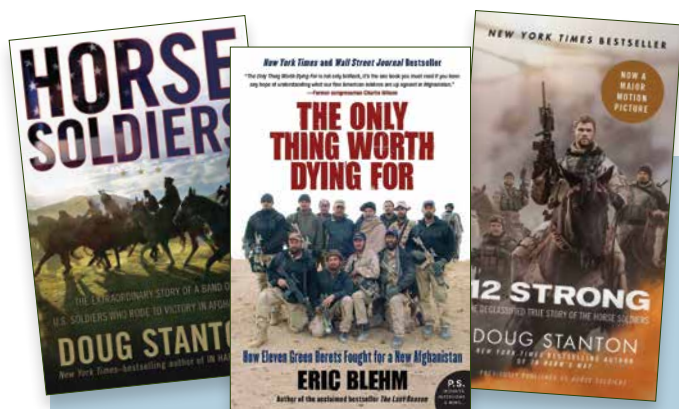
McElhiney, the current chief of staff to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, previously served as the department’s legislative director, a position through which he was heavily involved in crafting important legislation and testifying to the Minnesota Legislature, conveying the realities veterans face.

One of McElhiney’s most notable achievements was part of a multiyear effort, beginning in 2015, to establish three new veterans homes in Minnesota, securing state planning and federal funding. Thanks in part to McElhiney’s advocacy, the Minnesota Legislature set aside \$32 million, representing 35% of the total required backing. The other \$80 million will be covered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Construction on the new homes, which will provide additional long-term care to veterans, will begin this fall. Five other veterans homes in the state have also been upgraded.

In more recent years, he was involved in establishing a program financed by the sales of the state’s “Support Our Troops” license plates, which fund grants to groups aligned with supporting and improving the lives of veterans and their families. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, entities could apply for funding from \$1,000 to \$100,000.

During the pandemic, the department launched two other grants: one worth \$1,000 for veterans or their family members who suffered a loss of income due to COVID-19 and one for special need up to \$3,000. Altogether, the state has dispersed \$6.2 million in pandemic grants. McElhiney was involved in establishing the eligibility requirements that have helped so many, said Herke.



The story of ODA 574 has been told in several forms of media, including “The Only Thing Worth Dying For,” a book chronicling the earliest days of the war in Afghanistan, and “Legion of Brothers,” a documentary produced by CNN Films.”



McElhiney uses his prosthetic hook to hold a piece of shrapnel doctors pulled from his left arm after being gravely injured in an accidental bombing in Afghanistan in December 2001.

But Herke said one of the most significant impacts McElhiney has had is setting a positive example of what is possible even after a serious injury.

“Mike demonstrates every day that you can come back and have a meaningful life—and he wants to help others,” he added. “I think that’s what drives him, both as a past legislative director and current chief of staff. A lot of people are inspired by his story and what he’s done.”

That sentiment is shared by DAV Department of Minnesota Benefits Protection Team Leader Trent Dilks, who has known McElhiney, a member of DAV Chapter 28 in Rochester, for seven years.

“He is somebody showing you can keep doing these awe-inspiring things,” said Dilks. “There are barriers to being a wounded veteran, for sure, but Mike is living proof you can overcome them.”

McElhiney, an avid outdoorsman and a top-notch angler, according to Dilks, has helped to lead the charge on trying to increase access to hunting and fishing opportunities for veterans by advocating for reduced fees for state licenses.

Dilks also said he’s helped to drive crucial funding to the DAV Department of Minnesota by introducing DAV to Bob Lange, an entrepreneur who was looking to use his influence and private estate in Glenwood to support those who’ve served.

“I wanted to put something together for veterans for outdoors that would be impactful but also treat disabled veterans right, but I didn’t know where to turn,” said

Lange, who owns several businesses, including an insurance brokerage company and hotel.

That’s where McElhiney came in, recommending DAV. Prior to COVID-19, annual fundraisers were held at Lange’s home, the first of which raised \$250,000 for the Department of Minnesota’s outdoor excursions.

Lange credits the success of his events—as well as the substantial generosity of his customers, with more than \$1 million raised to support the state’s DAV and other veteran-related causes—to McElhiney.

“All of this could not have happened if Mike hadn’t gone out and done the work he did,” Lange added. “Mike is one of those guys who pulls so many strings in the background that things kind of just happen.”

Despite all of this, McElhiney remains a humble servant to his fellow veterans.

“I can’t take credit for everything,” he said. “I just played my role, just like anyone in my position would hopefully do. This is really about all of the stakeholders, the veteran organizations, the legislature, the governor’s office—we’re all part of that mix of making attempts to come to fruition.”

“Impressed doesn’t begin to describe how other veterans and I across Minnesota feel about Mike and the immense impact he’s had,” said Minnesota native and National Commander Butch Whitehead. “Mike brings a new meaning to what it means to serve veterans.” ■

Unplanned loss, unexpected redemption

Combat-injured Marine Corps veteran
receives discharge upgrade through help
of DAV-sponsored pro bono program

By M. Todd Hunter

Lafe Cotton and his wife knew he'd lose more than half of his income as a journeyman steelworker when he left Michigan to join the Marine Corps in 2008. Regardless, at 23, he felt that the experiences he'd garner as a combat engineer would provide him the knowledge needed to achieve his professional goal of becoming a general contractor when he got out. What he didn't know was what else he'd lose along the way, or how long and difficult the journey ahead would be in attempting to recover it all.

Meritoriously promoted twice in his first 15 months of service, Cotton seemed pointed toward a promising enlistment. But six weeks into his first deployment to Afghanistan in 2010, Cotton's Camp Lejeune-based battalion took part in the famed Battle of Marjah.

"My first deployment, we did 150 missions in seven months," said Cotton. "There happened to be a 120-pound IED (improvised explosive device) about 100 yards from an Afghan National Army post. That's where we got smoked."

The blast left Cotton with a traumatic brain injury (TBI), which was immediately diagnosed by medical personnel in-country. After two weeks of light duty, his route clearance patrol team got hit by another IED just six hours into their first mission back. It wasn't the last.

"I got blown up three times—knocked completely unconscious," Cotton explained. "The first one is what got me, though."

"The big one," as Cotton calls it, severely affected his short-term memory and brought on a sensitivity to light that necessitates wearing sunglasses "pretty much everywhere." He also began having severe migraines

and uncontrollable vomiting that sometimes persists for days. Add in post-traumatic stress disorder from witnessing the deaths of friends and children overseas, and Cotton's injuries began taking a toll when he returned home. To cope, he turned to the bottle—drinking a fifth of liquor and a case of beer each night by his estimation, on top of taking double the amount of his prescribed anti-anxiety medication.

"I didn't drink before I joined the Marines. It's something I kind of despised," Cotton said earnestly. "[But I did it] so I could actually go to sleep at night. I spent the last year of my Marine Corps career going to medical appointments and sleep studies."

Eventually, the combination of his TBI, PTSD and drinking put a strain on his marriage. It also led to a drunk driving arrest, multiple demotions in rank and a charge of disrespecting a commissioned officer. In 2012, just 17 days before his four-year contract was complete, Cotton was given an other than honorable (OTH) discharge as a private. He and his wife returned home to Michigan where they divorced the following year.

"Everyone has their own reasons for serving, but no one goes in expecting they're going to get hurt and there's going to be life-altering consequences because

"Do two combat deployments, walk in and not be considered a veteran? It's [expletive] heartbreaking."

—Lafe Cotton, Marine Corps veteran

of it," said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. "Unfortunately for Lafe, his injuries not only altered his health and marriage, but they also affected other aspects



Above: Lafe Cotton during a training exercise at Twentynine Palms, California, in February 2010.



Left: Cotton poses with his platoon mates in Garmsir District, Afghanistan, in August 2011.

of his future because having an OTH discharge can present serious barriers for veterans once they're out."

These barriers include ineligibility for disability compensation, education and employment benefits, and home loans through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I couldn't even go into my DMV and get 'veteran' designated on my ID," Cotton explained. "Do two combat deployments, walk in and not be considered a veteran? It's [expletive] heartbreaking."

Hoping to gain access to the benefits he earned, Cotton first petitioned the Naval Discharge Review Board in 2013 for a discharge upgrade, which was denied. He tried two more times with the same result before a friend pointed him to The Veterans Consortium (TVC), an organization that provides veterans with pro bono legal services. Cotton reached out despite having no expectation of success after three denials in eight years.

"Generally, when a veteran applies on their own for a discharge upgrade, their success rate is very, very low," said Danica Gonzalves, program director for TVC's



“To be able to help veterans get their discharge upgrade and allow them to obtain the benefits that they need is not only a success for our program but also for the veterans.

Having DAV be a partner with us is what really allows us to reach more veterans and make a difference in their lives.”

—Danica Gonzalves,
program director for TVC's
Discharge Upgrade Program

Discharge Upgrade Program, who attributed such outcomes to veterans' lack of experience with legal burdens and processes.

“We showed that his conditions led to the subsequent behaviors that led to the discharge,” said Gonzalves. “When we can show the connection between the mental health conditions and the misconduct, the board is more likely to upgrade the discharge.”

Cotton is just one of more than 2,000 veterans TVC's Discharge Upgrade Program provides with free legal assistance annually through the support of a \$1 million grant from the DAV Charitable Service Trust. This past September, Cotton's discharge was upgraded to general under honorable conditions—opening his eligibility to a range of VA benefits.

“At first, I was in complete disbelief about it because I had been waiting so long and trying so hard to get this done,” said Cotton. “I was elated. I was in tears. And all it took was a phone call, a few letters of recommendation and the right people.”

“To be able to help veterans get their discharge upgrade and allow them to obtain the benefits that they need is not only a success for our program but also for the veterans,” said Gonzalves. “Having DAV be a partner with us is what really allows us to reach more veterans and make a difference in their lives.”

Now remarried and once again working in steel construction, Cotton is awaiting one final letter from his neurologist before he submits his application for VA disability compensation. After years of struggling, his newfound eligibility for VA benefits could completely change his life.

“The Veterans Consortium is a straight-up blessing,” he said.

“If I was to try to go stand in front of the Navy review board without them, I'd be [useless],” Cotton explained. “They are the [tool that you need to get the job done].” ■



Lafe Cotton and his wife, Bridget, on their wedding day in August 2017. Cotton is once again working in steel construction in Michigan.

Past National Commander Jim Sursely

■ Past National Commander and combat-disabled Vietnam veteran Jim Sursely died May 30 due to complications from COVID-19 in Billings, Montana. He was 73.

The son of a World War II Army Air Corps veteran, Sursely was an energetic spirit who exuded unmatched charisma. He was elected as national commander of DAV at the national convention in Reno, Nevada, in 2004.

The Minnesota native enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1966. Volunteering for combat duty in Vietnam two years later—one month before the brutal Tet Offensive began—he was assigned to F Troop, 17th Cavalry Regiment. Sursely was seriously injured in January 1969, when an enemy land mine exploded, resulting in the amputation of his legs above the knee and left arm above the elbow.

Following emergency battlefield medical evacuation, he began his recovery in Japan, where he underwent 12 surgeries before regaining consciousness. His recovery continued at Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Aurora, Colorado, where he was medically retired at the end of 1969 before returning to his family.

Although his future as a disabled veteran was uncertain, his will and determination were anything but. After returning to Minnesota, he attended Rochester State Junior College for a year before moving to Florida to attend Seminole Junior College. He earned an Associate of Science degree in 1977 and became a licensed real estate agent, ultimately becoming the top active seller of homes in Apopka, Florida, where he called home.

Sursely joined DAV in 1970 and was a life member of Chapter 16 in Orlando, Florida. After ascending through the ranks, serving as a leader at the chapter and state levels, he was encouraged to get involved as a national line officer.

A close personal friend of actor Gary Sinise, Sursely was instrumental in helping forge a partnership between Sinise's foundation, DAV and Boulder Crest Retreats that facilitates post-traumatic growth for disabled veterans. Through that program and outdoor sporting programs and events, Sursely spent decades mentoring the more recently wounded.

Sursely was named DAV's Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year in 1993 and was the DAV Freedom



Jim Sursely, seen here in 2004 at the driving range at Boulder Creek Golf Club in Henderson, Nevada, during the 56th National Amputee Golf Association Invitational Championships & 6th Robinson Cup Matches, was active in outdoor sports throughout his life.



Award recipient at the 2001 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. In 2015, he was elected to the board of directors of the Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation.

With more than five decades of service to his country and his fellow veterans, Sursely's loss will be felt at every level throughout DAV.

"Jim Sursely will forever be a giant in the eyes of DAV and his fellow veterans," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "He will be remembered as the loyal veterans advocate we all knew him to be and a devoted husband to his wife, Jeannie. Although DAV's light will not shine as bright without him, we are all better to have known the luminary that is Jim Sursely."

He is survived by wife Jeannie, his four children and 12 grandchildren.

Sursely was just weeks away from returning from his combat tour when a land mine southwest of Da Nang traumatically amputated three of his limbs. He went on to achieve success as a father, business owner and, ultimately, national commander of DAV.



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dav.org/membership/member-advantages

¹\$1.50 is donated to DAV for every qualifying prescription filled. The prescription program is managed by United Networks of America, and DAV is not responsible for negotiating prescription rates. The agreement between DAV and UNA Rx Card runs through June 4, 2022. ²DAV receives a royalty payment from northAmerican of 1% of the after discount line-haul transportation for a DAV member's household goods move. The agreement between northAmerican and DAV runs through Dec. 31, 2021. ³Avis (Budget) will provide 5% of annually reported base rate and mileage revenue at participating locations in the U.S. and District of Columbia (excluding Alaska) to DAV. In order to qualify for payment for the minimum base rate and mileage, revenue must exceed \$5,000. The agreement between Avis (Budget) and DAV runs through Dec. 31, 2021.

From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

DIANE J. FRANZ



Overcoming the obstacles

In the two years I have served as the DAV Auxiliary national commander, we as an organization have overcome so much. Of course, the pandemic cast a cloud over much of my tenure, but it did not stop us from achieving our goals. Instead, it challenged us all as an organization to grow and, through that, revealed our many strengths.

I look at moments like our 2020 Virtual Salute, which took the place of our national convention, as an example of our ability to adapt. On a last-minute pivot, with the fantastic efforts at national headquarters and from our members at home, we were able to offer many of the same informational events and recognitions that we have always done. We were able to celebrate those who went above and beyond for our organizations.

The DAV 5K was still able to take place all around the country this year. The event was made possible by the entire organization's efforts from the top down to the units and chapters throughout the country. The 3-mile race raised awareness for this organization on new platforms, both virtually and throughout your communities.

I think of the fact that we can celebrate DAV's centennial from inside the walls of Memorial Hall in Cincinnati, where the organization was founded, to chapters, units and homes everywhere. Much like the beginnings of DAV and the Auxiliary, we face new challenges every day.

These challenges, though, are part of

our history. Without the need to improve the lives of veterans, DAV would never have come into existence. Without the needed aid and support from veterans' families, we at the Auxiliary would never have become DAV's partner for nearly a century of service. At our very roots, this organization thrives in times of hardship. It is what we do, and we must continue to overcome in times such as these.

My pride in this organization and the success we have had in my tenure as commander would be nothing without the people I've worked with during this time. I want to thank Auxiliary National Adjutant Pat Kemper, Assistant Adjutant Bunny Clos, Ann Glende, and the Auxiliary national officers and chairpersons. Without your support, many of these achievements would not have come to fruition.

I also want to thank DAV and DAV Auxiliary Department of Florida officers and members. I especially want to thank the Central Florida DAV Chapter and Auxiliary Unit 16, where I call home. Of course, I want to congratulate DAV National Headquarters for all the incredible work they do. Thank you to my family, Mark, Sharon, Owen and Wyatt. Thank you for understanding my often chaotic schedule over the years.

Finally, thank you to the members. Without you, none of this is possible. Because of you, generations of veterans and their families have been able to transition back to civilian life with the benefits and recognition they deserve.

The answers inside

Veteran brain banks may hold the key to understanding PTSD, TBI and CTE



By Tom Jenkins

According to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, nearly 414,000 American military members were diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) between 2000 and late 2019. More than 185,000 VA veteran patients have been diagnosed with at least one TBI.

These numbers signal an urgent need to better understand the relationship between TBI, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE)—a degenerative brain disorder caused by repetitive brain trauma—and post-traumatic stress disorder.

CTE is known to cause mood and behavior problems, impair cognitive function and disrupt standard sleep patterns. But even though physicians have been aware of the condition's symptoms since the 1920s, the field of study is still in its infancy. To properly diagnose the disorder—and develop ways to effectively treat and prevent it in others—one must look inside the brain after death.

Established in 2008, and thanks to a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs, Boston University and the Concussion Legacy Foundation, the VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank has become the world's leading

research program on the long-term effects of TBI and head impact exposure. At the helm of this research program is Dr. Ann McKee, one of the world's most accomplished researchers on neurodegenerative disease.

"The primary reason I run brain banks as a neuropathologist is that it's the fastest way to accelerate research on a specific condition," said McKee. "For this brain bank, we study repetitive head trauma. We study contact-sport athletes and military veterans primarily."

Brain banks follow organized research protocols that allow for harvesting of brains after individuals have died. Through donations, these brain banks receive their subjects at autopsy when the brain is removed. The brain is then directed to the VA-BU-CLF research center and from there frozen and set up for further research.

The donations from veterans come through an initiative called Project Enlist. This initiative serves as a catalyst for research on military veterans with TBI, CTE and PTSD by rapidly increasing the number of veteran brains donated for study.

"Brain donation may sound a bit macabre in normal conversation, but especially for the families who have watched their loved one cope with the debilitating symptoms of CTE and PTSD, having that proper diagnosis after the veteran passes away can help bring

closure,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Randy Reese. “And just like any other organ donation, it can help to advance research and benefit others as well.”

Word-of-mouth communication from pledged donors has helped fuel new donations. But since the harvesting must happen within a short window after an individual has died, advance planning is crucial. Former VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald, an Army veteran and DAV member, has become a proponent for the brain bank and is a pledged donor.

“The more I learned, the more compelled I became,” said McDonald. “By offering my brain for research, I knew it could be helpful going forward. At this time, we cannot discover CTE using scanning techniques; we actually needed the brain itself. We can only diagnose through dissection. When I discovered that, I knew we needed more brains—more veteran brains.”

So far, the bank has received just over 1,000 brain donations. Out of that, more than 600 of the cases were diagnosed with CTE. That is more than 70% of the world’s cases, all showing signs of CTE and other brain-related injuries. Out of those numbers, only 189 donors

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—Robert A. McDonald,
Army veteran, DAV member
and former VA secretary

were veterans with just one female veteran. Of the 189, 40 veterans were diagnosed with TBI from their service and only 17 were exposed to blasts.

Both McKee and McDonald say brain donations among veterans must continue to grow, which could have a positive impact on the next generation of veterans.

“All of us who have served in the military look for opportunities to continue to serve,” said McDonald. “This is another opportunity for veterans. This is an opportunity to donate their brains and further the medical science and, more importantly, further preventive techniques of brain damage.”

“The importance of this work is really for the people who come after these individuals,” said McKee. “It is a legacy donation. Each brain is cared for and treated with extreme respect. There is no identification or personal information that is released whatsoever. For the families, it’s a way of making the death of a loved one lead to bigger discoveries. It advances the research that may help lead toward diagnosing CTE during life and developing treatments for it.” ■



Learn More Online

To pledge a donation to the VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank, visit www.projectenlist.org. For imminent brain donation, if a veteran has died and the family is interested in brain donation, please call the 24-hour VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank emergency brain donation number, 617-992-0615.

NOW ACCEPTING

REAL ESTATE DONATIONS

TO SUPPORT VETERANS



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

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

Gifts that cost nothing during your lifetime

You can be a hero to future generations of veterans



“Naming DAV as a partial beneficiary of my insurance policy seemed **the right thing to do** after they helped me. **And it was so easy to do.**”

—Brian Tanner, Army veteran

For more information about giving to DAV

- Call 800-216-9802, press 1
- Email giftplanning@dav.org
- Return the attached postcard
- Visit davplanmygift.org
- Visit freewill.com/dav to create a no-cost will

If you do name DAV in your plans, or if you already have, we'd like to extend our gratitude through the Guardian Society and help to ensure your wishes are met.

DAV® Guardian Society

Would you be surprised to learn that gifts that cost nothing during your lifetime are making almost half of DAV's work possible? For years, gifts through wills, trusts and easy beneficiary designations have been providing 40%–50% of DAV's net fundraising income. Members and supporters who include DAV in their final plans are making all the difference for more than 1 million veterans each year.

After taking care of your loved ones, consider a legacy gift to benefit your fellow veterans. You'll keep your cash flow now, and you can change your plans at any time. Here are some options:

August is Make a Will Month

Resolve to get organized; make sure you have your final plans in place by August, which is Make a Will Month. Make a no-cost will today at Freewill.com/DAV, or contact us to learn more about naming DAV in your estate plans. As always, be sure to inform us if the DAV national organization is already in your plans!

Bequest language for your attorney

“I give, devise, and bequeath to DAV (Disabled American Veterans), P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250, Tax ID: 31-0263158, ____% of my estate, or the sum of \$____; or the following described property ____; or ____% of the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate.”

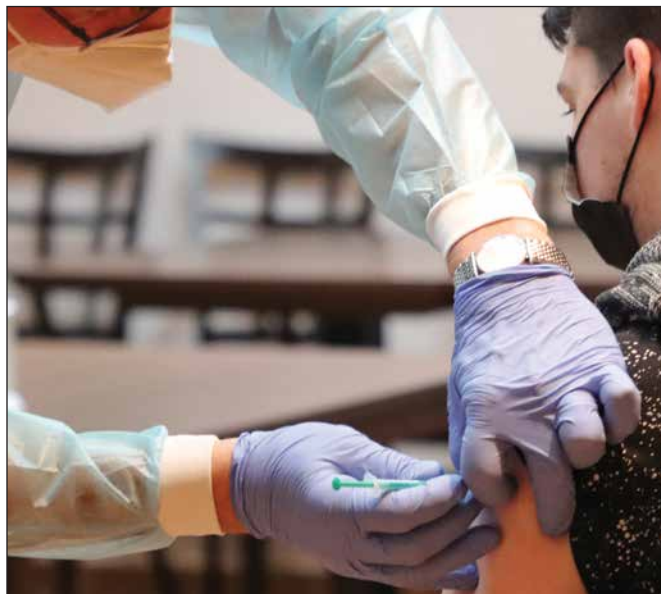
15-minute beneficiary designations

No need to revise a will! Simply request a change of beneficiary form from your financial company, then name DAV and any loved ones, as percentage beneficiaries of an IRA, life insurance policy or financial account. Just use our legal name, address and tax ID (EIN number). If the form requires a physical address, DAV's new street address is 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018. Bonus: Beneficiary designations can reduce or eliminate taxes on retirement assets and reduce or avoid probate fees.

Transfer on death deeds for real estate

More than half of all states now permit real estate to pass immediately to heirs or to a charity by way of a Transferable on Death deed. Your house, condo, vacation home or commercial building would pass outside of probate, and you can change your plans at any time. To learn if your state has this option, ask your attorney or contact us. Currently, Southern and East Coast states are less likely to offer this option. ■

SAVE LIVES Act expands COVID-19 vaccine accessibility



The SAVES LIVES Act increased the numbers of those eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, including veteran spouses, caregivers, certain beneficiaries and others.

■ In April, President Joe Biden signed the SAVE LIVES Act into law (P.L. 117-4) to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs can provide COVID-19 vaccines to all veterans—including those not enrolled in VA health care, veteran spouses, caregivers, and some beneficiaries, including 12- to 17-year-olds, who qualify

under VA's Civilian Health and Medical Program.

According to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, the SAVE LIVES Act removed some of the legal limits on the medical care the VA can provide to veterans based on eligibility requirements.

“The SAVE LIVES Act increases the number of individuals who are eligible to get lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines from VA from 9.5 million to more than 33 million,” said McDonough. “Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA's workforce is up to the task.”

The ability to deliver the vaccine depends on a readily available supply and requires the VA to continue to prioritize vaccinations and health care delivery for veterans already enrolled in VA health care.



Learn More Online

Veterans, their caregivers, and veteran spouses and beneficiaries who may qualify under the legislation can get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at the VA by visiting va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine. More information regarding veterans and the COVID-19 pandemic can also be found at dav.org/covid.

Veterans benefits tools made accessible through VA.gov

■ Veterans seeking to access the Department of Veterans Affairs' benefits-related, web-based features—such as filing and tracking claims—can now do so through the central VA.gov website rather than accessing other sites.

In April, the VA announced all features from the eBenefits web portal would now be housed under the VA.gov site, allowing users to

log in using their current Digital Service logon or by creating a new ID.me account.

“VA.gov offers veterans an enhanced site in terms of usability and security with the implementation of two-factor authentication,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “The most frequently used features are now readily accessible on one website, to include the ability to file a disability claim, check the status of a claim, or change direct

deposit and payment history.”

The eBenefits site will remain in use through March 31, 2022, to give veterans an opportunity to complete claims started on the platform.

To directly create an ID.me account, visit ID.me and click “My Account” in the top right corner, then “Create an ID.me account.” Follow the prompts to set up multifactor authentication in your ID.me account.



Visit [VA.gov](https://va.gov) for more information.



From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN MICHAEL P. DOVER

Singing stars



There is a book of the Bible called Job in which the titular protagonist speaks of the stars singing.

Perhaps he had in mind the resonance that radio astronomers have only recently begun to listen to with the aid of their powerful dishes. Or perhaps he meant the same kind of wordless song that only the silent light can sing. Or maybe it was just his way of saying that the magnificent beauty of the stars is a kind of song in itself.

The singing of the stars is a song I have sought to hear for most of my life. Sometimes, by my faith, I believe I hear it singing of and to the Creator. It reminds me of the vastness of who he is. If the stars are singing, as the Bible of my faith says they are, I am as certain as can be that they are singing a chorus to my Creator, who made them and by whose immense, wordless power their mass is held together and kept burning so brilliantly.

Our lives are a wordless song that only resounds in our faith walk, with whatever love we can lend to the chorus. It is an ancient, timeless, ever-new song. Perhaps what I desire most of my soul is straining to hear the prelude, maybe even just the tuning

up of the orchestra. When it does erupt, it will be a song that will never be forgotten—indeed, it will never cease to be sung.

Rarely do we know all the songs our life can sing. I am continually learning from others. Sometimes we need to sing songs to help us remember important truths we tend to forget. Other times, our singing enables us to put words to painful feelings, and just by singing, the hurt can be forgotten. Singing songs in

our life walk can help us to forget as well as remember.

We are losing sight of what our life is all about. At the heart of it all, in the midst of our struggle, we have forgotten to sing. The ancient melody has long been lost, and so we need to listen to it anew in hopes of hearing a new set of notes. From my

perspective, there is something about my Creator that I have forgotten. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him I have life, and that life is the light that sings to all peoples.

In closing, how is your life reflecting the song that is within you? Will others continue to sing your song, as well as theirs, once you're gone?

In His Service to You.

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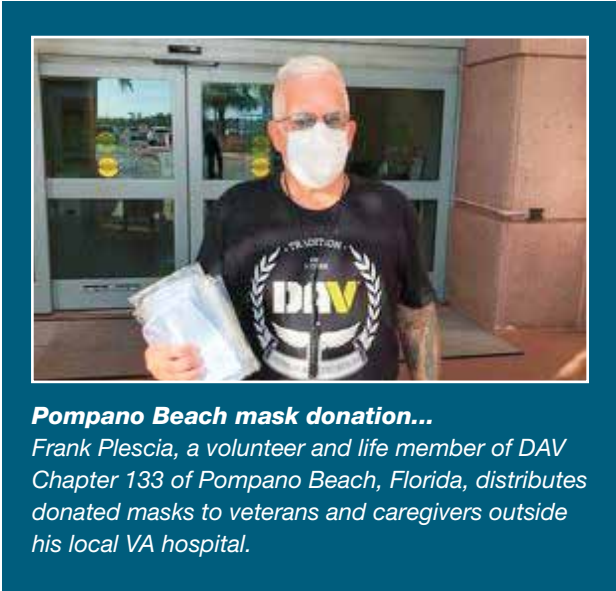


Final respects...

Department of Nevada Judge Advocate and Past Department Commander William “Bill” Dolan (center with flag) distributed six American flags in handmade cases to veteran patients at Valley Hospital Medical Center in Las Vegas. The items were purchased by Dolan and the cases were handmade by Bruce Cook, a life member of Chapter 15 in Pahrump. The flags will be given to families to honor veterans who die at Valley Hospital.

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Pompano Beach mask donation...
Frank Plescia, a volunteer and life member of DAV Chapter 133 of Pompano Beach, Florida, distributes donated masks to veterans and caregivers outside his local VA hospital.

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Send photos of your DAV or Auxiliary news to production@dav.org. Please provide a JPEG image, a description of the photo and the names of those pictured.



A gift for voluntary services...
Chapter 6 of Hampden, Maine, donated \$1,000 in cash and wish list items to the Togus VA Maine Healthcare System Voluntary Service Program. Wish list items included gift cards, cash cards, clothing, grocery store cards and personal care items. Chapter 6 Commander Craig Florey (left) presented the gift to Voluntary Service Specialist Jen Cook.

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Blankets of love...

Chapter 31 in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, assisted the Military Order of the Purple Heart in building a memorial. The recently dedicated memorial includes a records repository for veterans to share their military stories. From left: Troy Jackson (artist); Military Order of the Purple Heart Commander Don Nichols; DAV member Paul Braun; Military Order of the Purple Heart Adjutant John Cooper; DAV members Harold Ogden, Don Scott and Woody Burchett; and Chapter 31 Commander Leon Halpain.



Honoring a hero...

DAV members in Maine honored a life member who was a three-time prisoner of war and survivor of the infamous Bataan Death March. World War II veteran Donald Lucero, 99, of Augusta, Maine, earned the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars while serving in the U.S. Army with Battery B, 200th Coast Artillery. DAV officials presented two flags to Lucero while members of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services presented a World War II coin and certificate of appreciation.



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

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



Atlantic City helps homeless heroes...

DAV Department of New Jersey and Chapter 10 in Absecon recently hosted a mobile Homeless Veterans Stand Down. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the department and its chapters have held mobile stand downs as a way of helping veterans get back on their feet and endure the difficult times. Volunteers hand out food, toiletries and information on how to access benefits.



Food drive for California veterans...

Chapter 85 in Marina teamed up with DAV Department of California and the Veterans Transition Center of Monterey County to hold a food drive and marketplace for veterans and their families in the Marina community. Over 100 contacts were made with veterans and service members to educate them about their benefits and more than 300 veteran families were provided meals. Seated at the information table are Chapter 85 Commander Patricia Hendrix (left) and Department Service Officer Michael A. Silver Jr.

REUNIONS

ARMY

7TH SQUADRON 17TH AIR CAVALRY RUTHLESS RIDERS-PALEHORSE Oct 13-17, Tucson, AZ, Contact: Joe, Email: joseph.wirth@yahoo.com, or Shane, Ph: 248-887-6093, Web: ruthlessriders.co

25TH INFANTRY DIVISION ASSOCIATION Oct. 3-10, Honolulu, HI, Contact: Email: TropicLtn@aol.com

101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION VIETNAM VETERANS Aug. 25-29, Branson, MO, Contact: Ron Long, Ph: 310-977-4253, Email: ronlong71@msn.com, Web: 101namveteran.com

504TH MILITARY POLICE BATTALION Sept. 9-11, Nashville, TN, Contact: Tony Stills, Email: Ctsills7147@bellsouth.net

630TH ENGINEER COMPANY (LIGHT EQUIPMENT) VIETNAM Sept. 16-18, Branson, MO, Contact: Cecil Brown, Ph: 731-415-6460, Email: ceclinbrown@charter.net

MARINES

1ST BATTALION, 1ST MARINE REGIMENT, VIETNAM Oct. 6-10, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Samuel Verdja, Ph: 952-303-1534, Email: SamuelVerdja@yahoo.com

3RD RECON ASSOCIATION Oct. 5-10, Tucson, AZ, Contact: Floyd Nagler, Ph: 952-440-1553, Email: floydagnagler@yahoo.com

ANGLICO ASSOCIATION Oct. 7-10, San Diego, CA, Contact: Jack Olson, Email: olson79@gmail.com, or Reginald Owens, Ph: 760-212-1520, Email: owens.reginald33@gmail.com

HMM-165/VMM-165, ALL HANDS, ALL YEARS Oct. 21-24, Glendale, AZ, Web: 165whiteknights.com

NAVY

USS BADGER (DE/FF-1071) Sept. 8-12, Nashville, TN, Contact: Lois Harden, Ph: 734-323-5698, Email: loiso@umich.edu

USS BOSTON (CA-69/CAG-1/SSN-703) July 8-11, King of Prussia, PA, Contact: Barry Probst, Ph: 508-580-3808, Email: president@ussboston.org, Web: ussboston.org

USS BEALE (DD/DDE-471) Oct. 3-6, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Paul Barry, Ph: 321-338-5753, Email: ussbealeinc@gmail.com, Web: ussbealedd-dde471.org

USS CANBERRA (CA-70/CAG-2) NAVY AND MARINE SHIPMATES Oct. 13-17, Pittsburgh, PA, Contact: Ken Minick, Ph: 740-423-8976, Email: usscanberra@gmail.com, Web: usscanberra.com

USS CONCORD (AFS-5) Sept. 21-26, Nashville, TN, Contact: Sherry, Email: sherry.a.completareunion@gmail.com, Ph: 719-380-1412 or Carly, Email: carly.a.completareunion@gmail.com, Ph: 719-380-1412, Web: a.completareunion.com/uss-concord

USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (CVB/CVA/CV-42) AND AIR GROUPS July 28-31, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Bill Solt, Ph: 321-362-5806, Email: sisbill@aol.com

USS HOLLISTER (DD-788) Oct. 6-10, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Casey Orr, Ph: 319-377-4759, Email: cworr78@gmail.com, Web: usshollister.org

USS NAVARRO (APA-215) Sept. 15-18, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Donald Bush, Ph: 256-413-7295, Email: drbushrbc@comcast.net

USS PATRICK HENRY (SSBN-599) Nov. 4-7, Kings Bay, GA, Contact: Ron Pelletier, Ph: 508-769-2360, Email: rpelle9011@aol.com

USS PAUL (DE/FF-1080) Oct. 8-10, Norfolk, VA, Contact: Kim Atkins, Ph: 843-359-0354, Email: seadragon1080@gmail.com

USS ROBERT A. OWENS (DDK/DDE/DD-827) Oct. 4-7, Pittsburgh, PA, Contact: Bill Miller, Ph: 412-622-4154, Email: billmiller15644@gmail.com

USS ROCHESTER (CA-124) Aug. 30-Sept. 3, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Joe Hill, Ph: 931-432-4848, Email: nitecraw@twlakes.net

USS REEVES (DLG-24/CG-24) ASSOCIATION Sept. 23-27, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Tom Bailey, Ph: 719-647-2872, Email: tombailey@ussreeves.net, Web: ussreeves.net

USS VOGELGESANG (DD-862) Oct. 22-24, Charleston, SC, Contact: Ron Savino, Email: Ldobb@aol.com, Ph: 703-474-3185

VQ ASSOCIATION (VQ 1, 2, 5, 6 AND NSG ALL ERAS) Oct. 4-7, Warwick/Providence, RI, Contact: Ron Jarabak, Ph: 813-390-3790, Email: broken3@outlook.com, Web: vqassociation.org

AIR FORCE

55TH & 58TH WEATHER RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRONS Sept. 15-17, Branson, MO, Contact: Joe Devenport, Ph: 228-222-2434, Email: joe.devenport@sbcglobal.net

AC-119 GUNSHIP ASSOCIATION Oct. 6-10, Fort Walton Beach, FL, Contact: Jim Dunn, Email: ac119KJimD@aol.com, Web: ac119gunships.com

MAXWELL-GUNTER ALUMNI REUNION Oct. 6-11, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Laura Wilson-Leonard, Email: lewileonard@yahoo.com; Elnora Seabrooks-Fluellen, Email: elnorafuellen@gmail.com or Janet "JJ" Hawkins, Email: jdjhawk60@gmail.com

ALL SERVICES

36TH (ALMOST) ANNUAL NEBRASKA VIETNAM VETERANS REUNION Aug. 12-15, Lincoln, NE, Contact: Roy Schoen, Ph: 402-477-9113, Email: lsroyschoen@gmail.com, or Jaime Obrecht, Ph: 402-435-0454, Web: vetsreunion.com

PLEIKU AIR BASE, VIETNAM, AND SURROUNDING AREA Sept. 12-15, Harrisburg, PA, Contact: Ron Chromulak, Ph: 412-515-7247, Web: pleikuab.com

INQUIRIES

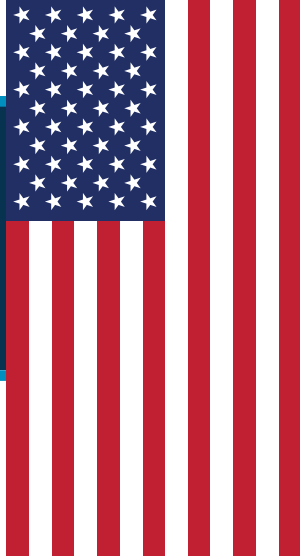
• Searching for anyone from the Army 567th Transportation Company, 71st Transportation Battalion, who, along with myself as part of a 160-man detachment, was sent in late December 1966 from Long Binh, Vietnam, to support the development of a new base camp for the 2nd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, in the Mekong Delta in what became known as Đồng Tâm. Contact: Jon D. McClelland, Ph: 518-4414320, Email: jonm430@gmail.com

- Searching for any Navy Seabees and Navy personnel who transported, sprayed or have knowledge of a defoliant (Agent Orange) being used to kill the jungle vegetation around 6922nd Security Wing Operations Building 850 and the AN/FLR-9 antenna field, Clark AB, Philippines, 1963-1970. Contact: Mike Moore, Email: MikeSonba@gmail.com
- Searching for medical personnel involved in a bus accident in Yeosu, South Korea, who served with Spc. 5 Claude Ivory Andrews and Spc. 4 David Stroup from 1965 to 1967 in Battery D, 4th Missile Battalion, 44th Artillery Regiment, Camp Humphreys, South Korea. Contact: Stanley Cole, Email: teapotshorty@gmail.com
- Searching for members of Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, Vietnam. Contact: Jeff Wilcox, Ph: 616-581-9659, Email: wilcoxjsw1@att.net
- Searching for anyone who knows Leon Carter, Vietnam, 1969. Contact: Deb Piontek, Email: melittledeb1@yahoo.com
- Searching for Jim Martin and Dave Shue or Marines who served in the 5th and 7th Communication Battalions on Vandegrift and Đồng Hà combat bases in Vietnam, 1969-70. Contact: Gene Vaal, Email: gvaal49@yahoo.com
- Searching for U.S. Air Force veteran Earl Boucher, with whom I served from 1961 to 1965 at both Yokota AB and Stewart AFB. Contact: Jim Abel, Ph: 303-359-5390
- Searching for airmen who were at Pope AFB from 1961 to 1963, especially any avionics guys or any who went on operations Ranch Hand in '62 or Mule Train in '63, or if anyone knows about reunions. Contact: Jim V., Email: nowisnicejimv@gmail.com
- Searching for Robert J. Carlson from Boston, MA. I was with him in 1968 at LZ Stud when he was hit. Contact: Don Anderson, Ph: 520-266-9300, Email: d.g.anderson2020@gmail.com
- Searching for anyone who remembers Army Capt. John Charles Calkins, an Apache pilot of the 68th Aero Apache Wing in Cambodia in 1973. Any memory profoundly appreciated. Contact: Ceren Farr, Ph: 803-238-4735, Email: nebi00004@outlook.com
- Searching for anyone who served with Army Pfc. James A. Green, Company D, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was killed in action June 18, 1970, while on patrol near Srae Khtum, Monduliri Province, Cambodia. I am his first cousin and looking for anyone who served with James on that fateful day who could share stories or photos of him during his time in Vietnam. Information to be used for a family history project. Contact: Richelle Kemnow, Email: desertfox1a@q.com
- Searching for Air Force Basic Training Squadron 3707 pictures. Entered Basic Military Training Nov. 6, 1961. Training instructors Airman Payne and Tech. Sgt. Jamison. Contact: Edward Gebeault, Email: etgebeault@gmail.com
- Searching for anyone who went through the Marine Corps Boot Camp, Platoon 3002, and graduated in October 1968. Contact: Leonard Guzman, Ph: 860-232-0279
- Searching for anyone who served with the 111th Engineer Company (WS) in Vietnam from 1966-70. Contact: Joe Sousa, Ph: 860-989-8683, Email: usasgm92@comcast.net



Presidential Volunteer Service Award...

Members of Chapter 41 in Wichita Falls, Texas, received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award in January, presented on behalf of then-President Trump. The award recognizes the vital role of volunteers and the positive impact they have on their communities.



Honoring Old Glory

A brief guide to flag etiquette

The flag of our nation means many different things to our veterans.

For some, it represents the solemn oath they took to defend the country and its citizens when they entered the military ranks. It can stand as a symbol of the freedoms and privileges we enjoy as Americans and the sacrifices that have been made to ensure others have a chance to pursue the same. To others, it is a poignant and sometimes painful reminder of those lost in battle, whether the flag be draped over a casket or carefully folded and placed into the arms of a loved one. Even for those who may see the flag as mere fabric and thread, it is inexorably linked to the spirit of our country—a red, white and blue reflection of all that our country is, was and can be.

We know many across the nation want to pay proper respect to the Stars and Stripes. The following guide will help ensure your flag is looking ship-shape wherever—and whenever—you choose to fly it.

Display:

- The flag should be flown at half-mast on Memorial Day until noon, then raised.
- Flags should fly from sunrise to sunset and may be flown at night if properly illuminated.
- Fly the flag at half-mast during times of national mourning.
- Whether the flag is hung vertically or horizontally, the union (blue section) should always be in the upper left side.

Reminders:

- Bring the flag indoors if you're expecting inclement weather (unless you have an all-weather flag).

- The flag should never rest on the ground.
- Flags shouldn't be used as clothing.
- On single flagpoles, the American flag should be on top, and no other flag should be larger.

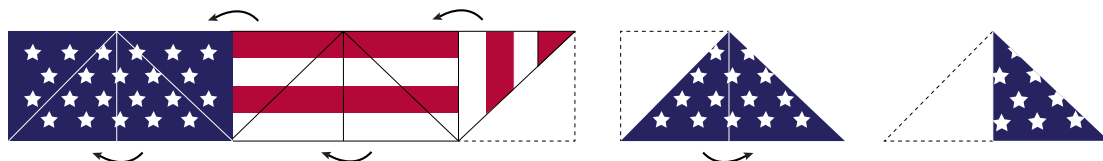
Storing and maintaining the flag:

- A flag should be kept dry and folded properly into a triangle with the union visible.
- When a flag becomes tattered, damaged or otherwise worn out, it should be retired and properly disposed of.

Basic color guard protocols:

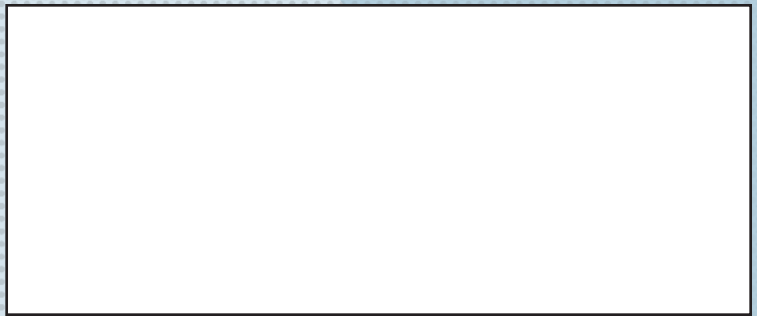
- The color guard will announce, “Ladies and gentlemen, please rise for the presentation of colors and remain standing for the singing [or playing] of the national anthem, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.”
- When the color guard brings the U.S. flag into a venue, whether you are seated in the audience or at the head table, stand and face the colors.
- In the U.S. military, individuals or units passing or being passed by uncased (unfurled) colors render honors when outdoors. Individuals who are not part of any formation begin the hand salute when the colors are six paces distant and hold the salute until they have passed six paces beyond the colors.
- The color guard posts the colors, and then the national anthem is played. Immediately place your hand over your heart (if it wasn't already there) and keep it there until the anthem is completed. If the Pledge of Allegiance is said after the anthem, keep your hand over your heart until completion. After, the speaker should give you permission to “be seated.” ■

How to fold the American flag





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