



MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER 2023

'WE GOT A BLACK HAWK DOWN'

DAV reflects on the
30th anniversary
of the Battle of
Mogadishu

Page 20



Army veteran Nancy Espinosa
elected as organization's 1st Hispanic
female national commander | Page 10



From the NATIONAL COMMANDER NANCY ESPINOSA



Continuing our legacy

In 2018, as I went through my late parents' belongings, I came across a worn, gold-colored card. It says "DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS" on top and declares Joe D. Espinosa a life member. I have known about DAV my entire life, but I didn't know my own father was a member.

Dad served in the Army for over 20 years, beginning in 1943 during World War II. He contracted tuberculosis while on active duty, making him eligible for DAV membership at the time.

My uncles Fred and Benny were also veterans and active DAV members. Fred, a combat-wounded Marine, was a past department commander in Utah. Benny, a service-connected disabled Korean War veteran, was a volunteer with DAV's Transportation Network for many years and provided military honors until he was over 80 years old.

So naturally, when my mother told me I needed to get a part-time job my senior year of high school, I turned to military service. I joined the Army Reserve at 17 and went active duty 10 years later. When I left active duty, I joined the Army National Guard. After separating in 1990, I immediately joined DAV.

As a returning civilian, I struggled to find a good job. Employers either told me I was overqualified or unqualified. DAV's National Employment Program didn't yet exist to help connect me with employers who understood the value of military service. I finally settled for a job as a clerk and started the journey of building a career from the bottom up.

Earlier this year, I retired after 18 fulfilling years at the IRS. For me, the work was about service to others, a principle my family, military service and DAV have ingrained in me.

Through my time as a DAV member, I've had the distinct honor to serve as department commander for Utah, as well as department adjutant. At Chapter 14 in Layton, I'm also a chapter service officer and treasurer, a position previously held by my late Uncle Fred. And now, with humility and gratitude, I'm proud to serve as your national commander.

While this path isn't as predictable as my military service or DAV membership, it is one I am honored and ready to take.

I pledge to you all that I will be a strong advocate for all of DAV's life-changing services and programs—and for all of you. I am immensely proud of what this organization has accomplished over the past century and of its more recent efforts, such as our National Employment Program and DAV Patriot Boot Camp for entrepreneurs. I promise to look to our future as much as our past to help grow our impact.

Together, we will build upon the legacy of service left behind by my father and uncles and so many of your loved ones. ■

CONTENTS



20

On the cover

Thirty years ago, the U.S. military engaged in what was then the bloodiest battle since Vietnam. DAV explores what happened that day in Mogadishu, Somalia.



10

Convention highlights

In case you missed it, we're bringing you highlights from the 2023 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.



18

Iran hostage crisis survivor

As a young Marine in 1979, DAV life member Kevin Hermening watched the biggest crowd he'd ever seen coming his way at the U.S. Embassy in Iran. Read his story of survival.

- 1 National Commander Nancy Espinosa introduces herself to DAV's more than 1 million members.
- 5 DAV's advocacy was instrumental in getting the largest expansion of veterans benefits for toxic exposures ever across the finish line last year. Now, veterans exposed to toxic substances are getting the help they're owed.
- 6 DAV benefits advocates help Vietnam veteran and Purple Heart recipient get the benefits he rightfully earned.
- 9 From ensuring full benefits to disabled retirees to plugging gaps in toxic-exposure coverage, National Legislative Director Joy Ilem explains how DAV members have been busy.
- 24 Forty years after the Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, survivors continue to struggle, but DAV stands ready to help.
- 26 High rates of military service exist in U.S. territories, but when these veterans return home, they must go to great lengths to obtain their earned benefits.
- 30 DAV Patriot Boot Camp welcomed Robert Irvine, U.K. Royal Navy veteran and host of Food Network's "Restaurant: Impossible," to the Silicon Slopes of Utah for the entrepreneurial program's latest cohort of vetrepreneurs.

DAV[®] MAGAZINE

Nancy Espinosa

National Commander

Barry A. Jesinoski

National Adjutant/Publisher

Cody VanBoxel

National Headquarters Executive Director

Daniel J. Clare

Chief Communications and Outreach Officer

Rob Lewis

National Communications Director

M. Todd Hunter

Deputy National Communications Director

Matt Saintsing

Assistant National Communications Director

Kevin C. Miller

Associate National Communications Director

Brian Buckwalter

Senior Communications Associate

Elizabeth DePompei

Communications Associate

Chris Mayhew

Communications Writer

Doreen Briones

Production Manager

Marissa Coffenberry

Senior Graphic Designer

Karla Sheppard

Senior Graphic Designer

Michelle Bradburn

Graphic Designer



DAV



@DAVHQ



DAVHQ



COMPANY/DAVHQ



DISABLED VETERANS

DAV MAGAZINE • September/October 2023

Contact us: dav.org • Toll-Free 877-426-2838 • 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018 • feedback@dav.org. Volume 65, Issue 5, *DAV Magazine* (ISSN 0885-6400). Editorial Office: DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. Telephone 859-441-7300 or toll-free (877) I AM A VET. Published and circulated bimonthly bulletin by the Disabled American Veterans, a congressionally chartered, nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. DAV homepage is dav.org. Available on recording for people who are blind or who have physical disabilities that preclude reading printed material. The magazine is mailed free to DAV and Auxiliary members who are paid subscribers. Nonmembers may subscribe for \$15 per year. Periodical postage paid at office of publication, Erlanger, KY 41018, and at additional offices. Printed in the U.S.A. Change of Address: When notifying of a change of address, send former as well as new address, including ZIP code, to: DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550.



From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT BARRY A. JESINOSKI



Suicide prevention is everyone's business

Suicide is devastating, painful and tragic, but it's also preventable. We all have a responsibility to help anyone contemplating suicide, and knowing what we're up against can help save lives.

While the only acceptable number of veteran suicides is zero, progress has been made in recent years. According to the 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, the veteran suicide rate was reduced in 2020 by nearly 10%, the most significant decrease since 2001.

While this statistic is positive news, far too many of our brothers- and sisters-in-arms are losing their battle with dark and consuming thoughts.

Veterans are 1 ½ times more likely to die by suicide than their civilian counterparts. Geography also matters, as suicide is 20% more likely among rural veterans than those who live in cities. This ongoing crisis is why the Department of Veterans Affairs rightfully lists suicide prevention as its highest clinical priority.

The VA announced last year that it would provide \$174 million over three years to organizations working to reduce veteran suicide.

Likewise, DAV has committed to reducing suicides by supporting Save A Warrior, a nonprofit organization whose mission is ending the staggering number of veteran, active-duty service member and first responder suicides. Thanks to a grant from DAV's Charitable Service Trust, Save A Warrior opened a National Center of Excellence for Complex Post-Traumatic Stress in Hillsboro, Ohio.

The DAV-sponsored center, which opened last year, provides lifesaving retreats that leverage the best interdisciplinary approaches to suicide prevention.

But when identifying the risk factors, no one is more fit to help veterans than our own.

Younger veterans, ages 18–34, are the most at risk for suicide. They are also the most online group, with many keeping in touch through social media. We might not think that scrolling through one's Facebook feed could potentially save lives, but there are warning signs we should all be on the lookout for.

Messages of despair and hopelessness should be met by showing support and ensuring that someone exhibiting risk factors feels included. The VA's Social Media Safety Toolkit for veterans consists of the signs to look out for and steps you can take to help someone in crisis, including sample messages.

Behind all these facts and figures are people who raised their right hand to defend everything we hold dear. And if they meet seemingly insurmountable obstacles upon returning to civilian life, they should know that help is only a phone call, or social media message, away. ■



The Veterans Crisis Line can be reached 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for free, confidential support and crisis intervention. Dial 988, then press 1; chat online at veteranscrisisline.net/chat; or text 838255.

Panama Canal Zone veterans

I am a DAV life member. Other veterans and I cannot get anyone to support H.R. 5026. This is for those of us that served in the Panama Canal Zone and were exposed to the testing of Agents Orange, Purple and Blue. We are dying at the same rate as those who served in Vietnam. Why can't we get help with our claims? Who is covering our six?

Paul Harmon, via Facebook

Editor's note: H.R. 5026 was introduced during the 117th Congress and effectively died with the seating of the 118th Congress in January. This legislation, the Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act of 2023, is now known as H.R. 2447, which DAV supports.

Wonderful DAV asset

Don Inns was my representative when I lived in Indiana. He's a great credit to DAV, having helped so many during his time as a service officer, including Keith [Ezell] and my best friend's stepfather. DAV is lucky to have him and we veterans are lucky to have both him and DAV.

Gary Soots, Wimauma, Florida

Editor's note: Don Inns and Keith Ezell are both survivors of the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut. To learn more about their connection, please go to Page 24 as DAV recognizes the 40th anniversary of the attack.

Enrolling service members before separation

We should take a page from the medical evaluation board process and work toward enrolling service members as part of their separation process. Get service members linked up to resources before they final

out with that DD214. Let's reduce the hoop jumping and confusion by streamlining VA examinations with the Transition Assistance Program. Make it mandatory at six months out from the end of service or retirement.

Dawn E. DeRossette, Boston

Medical marijuana update

Thanks, DAV, for supporting S. 326 (VA Medical Cannabis Research Act). Let's get rid of the stigma that is still associated with cannabis use. There is documented proof of the benefits, so why not have an option that does not risk opioid addiction? **David Kidd Jr., Redmond, Washington**

[Medical cannabis] changed my life. I am now at 13 years without opiate dependence. I am service-connected and compensated at 100% permanent and total since 1992. My head injury required midlife brain surgeries and caused service-connected PTSD. With the creative arts and sativa cannabis, I manage well. I'm staying alive one day at a time. Salute to DAV for supporting this! **Wayne Williams, Westminster, Colorado**

SSDI and Individual Unemployability

I think the law should be changed with regard to Total Disability Individual Unemployability. Veterans with multiple disabilities, but less than 100%, who were granted total disability due to unemployability upon reaching their Social Security retirement age should be reverted

back to their original disability rating unless they have become rated 100% before their reaching the Social Security retirement age. This will make them on par with disabled nonveterans who are drawing Social Security Disability Insurance due to disabilities that make them unemployable. SSDI recipients are converted back to their Social Security retirement upon reaching their Social Security retirement age.

Fernandez Freudian, via Facebook

Dismantling the VA

I have been with the VA since I got out of the Army in 1977. They have their ups and downs. Wait times are decent. For those who complain, don't miss your appointments, because they don't reschedule for you. You have to do your part. I have back-to-back appointments all the way to February 2024. Veterans, do your part. They don't know your schedule.

Ricardo Aguilar, El Paso, Texas

Disaster relief in Kentucky

After reading the article "Hazard meets disaster" (May/June DAV Magazine), I have to give kudos to DAV for your quick response in aiding National Guard member Kathleen Mills and other veterans impacted by the Hazard, Kentucky, floods. The \$500,000 in disaster relief checks showcases your commitment to veterans. Admirable work, DAV!

Chi Kodilinye, Plano, Texas

WRITE TO US Please send feedback to DAV Magazine, 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018, or via email to feedback@dav.org. We also welcome feedback on our social media pages. We regret we are unable to acknowledge every letter due to the volume received. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving claims are referred to DAV's Service Department.



A VA benefits milestone, one year later

Last year, DAV's advocacy was instrumental in getting landmark toxic-exposure legislation across the finish line. Here's how it's helping America's veterans

By Matt Saintsing

Last year, the largest expansion of toxic-exposure benefits marked a new era for veterans suffering from the deadly effects of burn pits, Agent Orange and other poisonous substances encountered in service. Thanks to a historic law, more than a quarter of a million veterans and their survivors have completed such claims, with an 80% approval rate, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Since last August, the Honoring our PACT Act (Public Law 117-168) has added nearly two dozen conditions, including cancers and respiratory diseases, to the list of ailments the VA presumes were caused by military service. That means veterans no longer have to prove their illness stems from their service if they served in eligible countries. The VA has conducted more than 3 million toxic-exposure screenings in addition to processing claims.

The VA only establishes a presumptive condition following a change in law or policy, which is why DAV's advocacy in enacting the PACT Act was so crucial.

"We are thrilled to see the transformative effect this expansion of toxic-exposure benefits has had on

veterans," said DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. "By lifting the burden of proof off the ailing shoulders of America's warfighters, our nation is keeping our promise to veterans when they encounter harmful substances in the normal course of their duty."

Claims related to the PACT Act take an average of 155 days, with just under half of claims taking less than 125 days. The law has also brought more veterans into VA health care, with more than 240,000 enrolling from August last year to April this year, an increase of 36,000 over the same time the year before.

The watershed bill also establishes a dedicated fund ensuring VA health care and benefits under the PACT Act will have sufficient backing in the future.

"DAV's corps of benefits advocates stand ready to assist veterans, their families and their survivors in filing these toxic-exposure claims," said DAV National Service Director Jim Marszalek. "Our experts in VA benefits are the best in the business and will always represent you for free, so no matter where you are on your journey to receive justice, you never have to face it alone."

DAV has been a leader in advocating for toxic-exposure legislation and was the first veterans charity to bring the issue of burn pits to the media's attention in 2008. DAV Chief Communications and Outreach Officer Dan Clare helped uncover the issue when he was deployed to Iraq by leaking an internal memo explaining the potentially lethal effects of burn pits. ■



Learn More Online

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 RELUCTANT recipient

DAV helps combat-wounded Vietnam veteran get overdue earned benefits

By Kevin C. Miller

It was 1967, and the war in Vietnam was in full swing. At 21 years old, Jose Badillo-Bonilla was a part-time electrical engineering student at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez trying to complete his degree. But that summer, the U.S. government changed his life forever by calling his selective service number.

Badillo-Bonilla was drafted into the Army and shipped off for boot camp. After completing basic training and infantry school, he joined the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, out of Fort Lewis, Washington. His unit soon received its orders and, in March 1968, embarked on a yearlong deployment to Dấu Tiếng in southeastern Vietnam.

In country, Badillo-Bonilla conducted patrols and provided base security. Mortar and rocket attacks often barraged the base camp. In late fall 1968, one such air assault struck nearby.

“The blast knocked me over, and I took shrapnel to my head and shoulders,” Badillo-Bonilla said. “Fortunately, I was not gravely hurt and medevaced to safety.”

Badillo-Bonilla was awarded a Purple Heart for his injuries and healed up at the local Army infirmary. Upon recovering, he reunited with his unit to finish his deployment before returning to the U.S. in March 1969. A few months later, he completed his terms of military service and went back home to his family in Puerto Rico.



Army Spec. Jose Badillo-Bonilla at Dấu Tiếng Base Camp in southeastern Vietnam (1968).



War causes wounds that last beyond the battlefield, and Badillo-Bonilla didn't want his combat experience to affect the rest of his life and tried his utmost to leave the unpopular war behind him. When he first returned, he only filed for disability compensation for hearing loss. He used his education benefits to finish his degree and started a successful air conditioning and electrical repair company, which he ran until his retirement a few years ago.

For the most part, Badillo-Bonilla wanted nothing to do with the Department of Veterans Affairs and rarely,

“He had sacrificed so much in service to his country and had gone decades without these earned benefits. It was great to help guide him and get everything he and his family deserved.”

— Alex Martinez, DAV benefits advocate



if ever, engaged with it. He became a member of DAV based on his service-connected hearing loss but had never considered filing any additional disability claims despite being a Purple Heart recipient.

Though he never expressed it, his family knew he struggled with his experience from Vietnam and that he was not accessing all of his earned benefits. They heard about a local DAV information seminar to help veterans with their benefits, but he was reluctant to go. At the urging of his wife and youngest son, he decided to attend.

While there, he learned about the additional benefits he might qualify for and how DAV could assist. He also met local benefits advocates, Angel Esribano and Alex Martinez, who convinced Badillo-Bonilla to sign up and have DAV represent him in filing additional disability compensation.

“Jose was unaware of the disability claims he could file that were related to the injuries that he received his Purple Heart for or health conditions related to toxic exposure from Agent Orange,” Martinez said. “He had sacrificed so much in service to his country and had gone decades without these earned benefits. It was great to help guide him and get everything he and his family deserved.”

Besides assisting Badillo-Bonilla with disability compensation, Martinez helped enroll him for VA health care. Badillo-Bonilla already had private health insurance, but Martinez informed him how the VA could supplement his health care. Now, Badillo-Bonilla chooses to use the VA for his prescription medications and appointments related to his service-connected conditions.

“When I finally decided to use [the] VA again, I noticed how it had changed dramatically from when I got out of the Army after Vietnam,” Badillo-Bonilla said. “The care is great, and the staff treats me well. I am very pleased with the changes and grateful to DAV for all the help they have provided me and my family.”

“Jose’s story is all too common,” said DAV National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “Veterans benefits are not automatic. It’s up to veterans and their families to pursue them. It does not matter how long a veteran has been out of the military; DAV’s benefits advocates are experts and will help our nation’s heroes get what they have rightfully earned.” ■

The advertisement features a white tow truck with a red SUV on its flatbed. The background is a stylized American flag with stars and stripes. The DAV logo is in the top right corner. The text reads: "YOUR CAR DONATION SUPPORTS VETERANS". Below the image, it says: "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 banner says "Always offering free vehicle pickup" and the phone number "855-510-5437" and website "dav.org/car" are listed.

DAV

**YOUR CAR DONATION
SUPPORTS VETERANS**

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

Always offering free vehicle pickup

855-510-5437 | dav.org/car



Miracles on a Mountainside

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is scheduled to return to the mountains of Colorado in 2024, and interested veterans can now submit an application to participate.

The annual event, co-presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs, will take place April 1-7. The clinic serves as a leader in adaptive winter sports instruction for disabled veterans, promoting world-class health care at a one-of-a-kind rehabilitative event. Known as “Miracles on a Mountainside,” the clinic offers veterans opportunities for self-development and challenge through sports therapy and rehabilitative activities such as adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing, rock climbing, sled hockey and scuba diving.

Participation is open to U.S. military veterans with qualifying disabilities such as spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputation, blindness or low vision, and certain neurological problems. Veterans who currently have inpatient or outpatient status at VA medical facilities will have first priority. ■

APPLY NOW

The application can be downloaded at wintersportsclinic.org and must be completely filled out and signed.

Applications should be mailed to:

VA Western Colorado HCS
Teresa Parks/WSC
2121 North Ave.
Grand Junction, CO 81501

They can also be scanned and submitted to teresa.parks@va.gov.

APPLICATION DEADLINE
IS NOV. 30, 2023

From the NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

JOY J. ILEM



The impact of your action

Seeing so many of our members in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for the 2023 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention was a clear reminder of why DAV remains a leader in veterans advocacy. Make no mistake, we would not be what we are today without you.

That commitment shines brightly when advocating on behalf of our fellow veterans. DAV members have already sent more than 445,000 emails to members of Congress this year urging them to pass life-changing legislation for those who raised their right hands to defend our nation. Taking such decisive action ensures we keep our promise to America's ill and injured veterans.

These selfless efforts and abiding dedication are why DAV has already seen legislation advance on several of our six critical policy goals this year.

Take the issue of unequal compensation benefits. When service members retire, they are entitled to every benefit they qualify for, including retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation. However, to receive both fully earned benefits, retirees must complete 20 years of service and have a VA rating of at least 50%. This issue of concurrent receipt unjustly affects droves of veterans who retire early due to injury or illness, which is why passage of the Major Richard Star Act (S. 344/H.R. 1282) is so urgent.

We've also seen legislation introduced (H.R. 3489) that would repeal the required offset of separation pay from VA disability compensation, a long-standing goal for DAV. The Caring for Survivors Act (S. 414/H.R. 1083) would improve Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits for survivors. And the Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act (S. 1028) would improve the claims process and help ensure that survivors of military sexual trauma receive the benefits they deserve.

We have also called on the VA to keep up with the evolving needs of service-disabled and aging veterans. The Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act (S. 141) would expand access to home and community-based long-term care options when deciding how best these veterans can receive care.

And S. 326, updated legislation that contains the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act, requires the VA to study the medical benefits of marijuana for veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or chronic pain. This potential alternative therapy could improve the symptoms associated with these debilitating conditions, and we owe it to veterans to examine every promising treatment possible.

There's still time to ensure your voice is heard, and it's as simple as a few clicks. If you haven't already, I encourage you to sign up for DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network), where you can message your members of Congress and throw your support behind these bills and other key legislation aimed at improving veterans benefits and health care services.

If there's one thing I've learned in Washington, it's that our thoughtful and devoted members can impart powerful change. And it's never too late to start. ■



2023 CONVENTION SPURS MORE VICTORIES FOR VETERANS

First Hispanic woman veteran unanimously elected to lead DAV

By Brian Buckwalter

Photos by Steve Poisall/The Gallery Studios

Nearly 2,500 DAV and Auxiliary members and guests gathered at the 2023 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention, held Aug. 5–8 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Members elected new leadership, passed resolutions that will drive DAV’s legislative agenda, and attended seminars and workshops to better understand the benefits and services available to veterans.

During the convention’s final business session, delegates unanimously elected Nancy Espinosa to succeed Joe Parsetich as DAV’s national commander. The first Hispanic woman to hold DAV’s highest post, Espinosa, a service-disabled Army veteran, is a member of Chapter 14 in Layton, Utah; the DAV Department of Utah adjutant; and a past department commander.

During her remarks, Espinosa said DAV members understand the importance of equitable representation for all veterans and have continued to elevate the voice of the underdog.

“We recognize that for decades, too many of those voices were silenced, sometimes intentionally, but often unwittingly,” she said. “Through volunteerism, legislative advocacy and benefits assistance, you have helped lift your fellow underdogs to new heights. We must continue that work with the grit and determination that inspired our military service. Not because we have something to prove, but because it’s who we are—the underdogs who refuse to back down.”

During his report, Parsetich thanked DAV’s members for their support and their service to the organization.

“My term as your national commander has exceeded my greatest expectations in every regard,” said Parsetich. “That’s because I was able to meet so many of you and see the impact of DAV’s mission from so many different angles.

“Our DAV is a living, breathing community that can provide faith, hope and love. But we must love one another in the very true, selfless way we love our families. And often that’s enough to walk someone back from the breach when they’re ready to throw in the towel.”

In addition to Espinosa’s election, delegates elected other DAV national officers: Senior Vice Commander Dan Contreras, 1st Junior Vice Commander Coleman Nee, 2nd Junior Vice Commander John Donovan,



Left: DAV members unanimously elected Nancy Espinosa as DAV's national commander during the convention's final business session. Espinosa, from Chapter 14 in Layton, Utah, is the first Hispanic woman elected to DAV's highest post. **Right:** Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough told convention attendees that this is the "year of execution" for the VA and provided updates about its initiatives.

3rd Junior Vice Commander Cynthia Madison, 4th Junior Vice Commander James Procnier, Judge Advocate Michael Dobmeier and Chaplain Debra Varner Dancer.

The DAV Auxiliary elected AnnMarie Hurley as its new national commander. She first learned of the Auxiliary at the beginning of her more than 30-year career as an executive secretary with the DAV Department of Massachusetts.

"I have been blessed with the kindness, friendship and joy in my life because of the DAV and our Auxiliary," said Hurley. "I promise to do the best job I can as your national commander."

Other Auxiliary leaders elected were Senior Vice Commander Christopher Easley, 1st Junior Vice Commander Melissa Pierce, 2nd Junior Vice Commander Terry Grabowski, 3rd Junior Vice Commander Kathleen Wenthe, 4th Junior Vice Commander Carolyn Harris, Judge Advocate Paula Raymond and Chaplain Aura-Lee Nicodemus.

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough addressed convention attendees during the joint opening session.

He started off by crediting DAV and Chief of Communications and Outreach Dan Clare for exposing the dangers of burn pits. Clare blew the whistle on burn pits through DAV when he was deployed to Iraq in 2008.

McDonough also praised DAV members for their advocacy work on behalf of the Honoring our PACT Act, saying it would not have passed without DAV's support. The PACT Act is the largest and most comprehensive expansion of veterans benefits for toxic and environmental exposures.

McDonough also called 2023 the "year of execution" for the VA. He updated attendees on the VA's progress in combating homelessness, the rollout of the Veterans Crisis

Line (988 Press 1) for suicide prevention, expanded health care worker hiring initiatives and increased access to care for veterans.

"But this year of execution isn't because of me," said McDonough. "It's because of you. And it's because of the nearly 450,000 VA employees in your communities and neighborhoods across the country who keep vets at the heart of their care."

Comedian and activist Jon Stewart, who has been a prominent advocate for years for burn pit legislation and getting Congress to pass the PACT Act, received the DAV Bugle Award for his outstanding media contributions in support of disabled veterans.

"If you had offered me a flugelhorn or a French horn, I may not have accepted it," joked Stewart.

Stewart received the award for his years of committed involvement in pressing federal legislators to address military toxic and environmental exposures. He was most prominently in the public spotlight during the summer of 2022 when congressional logjams nearly scuttled the PACT Act's passing.

He credited the work of reporters Kelly Kennedy of The War Horse and Leo Shane and Patricia Kime of Military Times for getting the issue of toxic exposure and burn pits in front of the American public.

"Too bad there's only one mouthpiece," he said about the award. "If we could build one with four, that would be more appropriate."

He also praised DAV members for their advocacy role.

"Through your tireless efforts, the claims process for veterans is way up, and people are finally going to be able to take advantage of the benefits that they themselves have earned," said Stewart.

DAV also awarded several other people during the convention for their efforts in serving veterans, including



Jacob Weber (center left), of Canton, Michigan, receives the 2023 DAV Scholarships Program top prize of \$30,000. The DAV Scholarships Program honors outstanding young people for their volunteer support of veterans through the VA's Voluntary Service Program and through DAV's Local Veterans Assistance Program. Weber has worked with the VA medical center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for five years, distributing candy, cards and essential items to veterans at the facility. He currently attends Michigan State University and is pursuing a degree in supply chain management.

Additional 2023 DAV Scholarship Winners

\$20,000	Suraj Vadapalli, Texas
\$15,000	Kyla Griffin, North Carolina
\$10,000	Destiny Klinkhammer, Wisconsin
\$7,500	Jalynn Justice, Texas
\$7,500	Kaitlyn Horton, Arkansas
\$5,000	Adam S. Kelley, Ohio
\$5,000	Jes Robison, Kentucky
\$5,000	Seojin Kim, California
\$5,000	Simran Kaur Singh, California

top DAV scholarship winner Jacob Weber and Disabled American Veteran of the Year Kim Hubers.

Weber received \$30,000 to continue his studies at Michigan State University. He began volunteering as a teenager at the VA medical center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, inspired by his grandfather who served in Vietnam and is dealing with the effects of Agent Orange exposure. Weber said he'd like to work for the VA in supply chain management after he graduates.

Hubers, a South Dakota Army National Guard veteran, battles the effects of her service-connected conditions daily but doesn't let them deter her from helping other veterans. Medical issues including arthritis, bursitis, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury all stemmed from her time as a truck driver in the Middle East in 2003. These eventually led to the Army medically retiring her even though they determined her conditions were not due to her service.

She had wanted to make a career of the military. "I was a lifer. I was a leader. I was good at it. It was

something that was meant for me, so having to be ripped away from that was like losing your entire family overnight," said Hubers. "I never knew what to do to fill that hole in my heart, and I found a way to do that with DAV. And I had my family back."

She found DAV through benefits advocate Owen Richards, who spent several years working with Hubers to help her prove her disabilities were related to her military service.

Hubers, who joined DAV Chapter 1 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, as a life member in 2018, pays it forward by looking out for other veterans and volunteering her time with DAV. In addition to being her chapter's commander, she volunteers as a department service officer, veteran mentor and women veterans advocate. She and her husband, Clinton Hubers, who is also a Chapter 1 member, regularly use the petting zoo they own to raise funds for DAV.

Hubers said DAV provides hope and a lifeline for veterans.

"Don't ever give up. Don't ever stop. Just keep going," she told convention attendees. "There's always somebody here that will help lift you up when you need it and somebody you can lift up when they need it."

In addition to attending daily business sessions, convention-goers participated in resolution committee meetings and sat in on seminars about benefits; veteran-focused research; and ways to bolster their departments, chapters and Auxiliary units.

There were also many opportunities to relax, including the annual Fun Night concert.

Perennial convention favorite Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band took to the stage Monday night for the event presented by TriWest Healthcare Alliance. Sinise and his band entertained attendees with hit song covers from the past several decades, ending with Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A."

"I always leave our conventions reenergized by our members, and this year was no exception," said National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "It's obvious how much each one of our members cares for their fellow veterans. They are committed to putting in the hard work necessary to make sure each veteran they encounter has a chance to live life to the fullest extent possible. There's no doubt DAV is poised to have an extremely successful year helping and growing our community." ■

The 102nd national convention is scheduled for Aug. 3-6, 2024, at the Phoenix Convention Center in Arizona.



Joe Provenzano (center), director of mobility and volunteerism at the **Ford Motor Company Fund**, presents a check to the DAV Transportation Network for \$200,000, representing the value of the eight donated vehicles announced at the convention.



From center left: Robert Chisholm, Zachary Stolz and Scott Kilpatrick from the law firm **Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick** present DAV with a check for \$200,000. In addition to the firm's financial generosity, it has collaborated with DAV since 2008, representing more than 15,000 veterans with their appeals in court.



Golden Corral Associate Director of Marketing Travis Caison and Camp Corral CEO Phil Kowalczyk (second and third from left) join Adjutant Barry Jesinoski, then-Auxiliary Senior Vice Commander AnnMarie Hurley, Charitable Service Trust President Dick Marbes and then-National Commander Joe Parsetich for a check presentation to **Camp Corral**—a camp for military and veteran children. The \$800,000 donation made through DAV's Just B Kids program will provide scholarships for hundreds of kids to attend camp free of charge.



Army and Army National Guard veteran Aaron McCoy, a regional executive on **Humana's Veteran Channel Team**, personally thanks DAV for advocating for veterans and their families who need assistance.



Air Force veteran Tara Leweling, chief diversity and sustainability officer for **USAA**, speaks to convention attendees about the partnership between DAV and USAA.



Retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague, director of the **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency**, updates convention attendees on the recovery efforts of his organization. The agency estimates that 38,000 service members missing in action are recoverable.



Army Reserve Col. Charles Djou, secretary of the **American Battle Monuments Commission**, assures convention attendees that the memory of those who served overseas defending our country will never fade.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

DISABLED AMERICAN VETERAN OF THE YEAR



Kim Hubers, an Army National Guard veteran, has fought tirelessly to receive the veterans benefits she earned. She consistently puts others before herself, including helping veterans with their Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims and serving as commander of DAV Chapter 1 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She also serves on DAV's National Interim Women's Committee.

AUXILIARY OUTSTANDING MEMBER OF THE YEAR



Delores Roussey, an Auxiliary member for 41 years, helps new units set up their bank accounts and guides any unit or chapter treasurer who requests assistance with learning how to navigate the annual financial report process successfully. Roussey serves as treasurer and adjutant of DAV Auxiliary Unit 101 in Nokomis, Florida.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR



Veterans Health Administration Employee of the Year

Rhonda Sanford: Sanford is the veterans justice outreach social worker for the VA in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, where she coordinates services for veterans and provides clinical support, referrals and education to veterans at the Montgomery County Correctional Facility.



Veterans Benefits Administration Employee of the Year

Christopher Gaylord: The Army veteran is a program support assistant at the VA regional office in North Little Rock, Arkansas, where he has been a dedicated employee for more than 14 years and has shown compassion in serving his fellow veterans.



National Cemetery Administration Employee of the Year

Nathan Hooker: The Army National Guard staff sergeant is a part-time civilian police officer, funeral honor guard presenter and cemetery representative at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, Illinois, and has led the planning of hundreds of funeral services for veterans.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT AWARDS



Judge Robert S. Marx Award

Department of South Dakota: Commander Dan Francis accepts the award, which recognizes the department with the highest percentage increase in fully paid life members over goal.



Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright Award

Department of Wyoming: Adjutant Floyd Watson accepts the award, which recognizes the department that closes the year with the largest percentage increase in total new members.



Top NSO Recruiter of the Year
Hank Myers of the Wyoming office recruited 349 new members.



Top Member Recruiter of the Year
Michael Crowe of Chapter 8 in Mesa, Arizona, recruited 185 new members.



Membership Recruiters Hall of Fame
Daniel Knabe of the St. Louis office recruited 122 new members.



DIVISION I:
Department of New York award accepted by Past Commander Scott Stephenson.



DIVISION II:
Department of Missouri award accepted by Past Commander David Gerke.



DIVISION III:
Department of Puerto Rico award accepted by Commander Delvis Collazo Rivera.



DIVISION IV:
Department of Connecticut award accepted by Commander Juliet Taylor.



DIVISION V:
Department of Wyoming award accepted by Adjutant Floyd Watson.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR



DAV Volunteer of the Year

John Raber is a member of DAV Chapter 18 in Bradenton, Florida; a member of DAV Auxiliary Unit 18 in Bradenton; and a past Department of Florida commander. Over the past 20 years, Raber has logged more than 6,000 volunteer hours working to improve the lives of veterans and regularly recruits others to join him in volunteering for legislative and fundraising activities.



DAV Auxiliary Volunteer of the Year

Vickie Partridge (right) is the commander of Auxiliary Unit 1 in Portland, Oregon, and is also the Auxiliary commander for the state of Oregon. She helps make the Portland VA medical facility a more welcoming place for veterans and has accumulated close to 600 lifetime volunteer hours working with the VA in the name of the DAV Auxiliary.

LOCAL VETERANS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AWARDS



DIVISION I:

Department of Virginia (229,929 hours) award accepted by Assistant Department Adjutant Lisa Gregory.



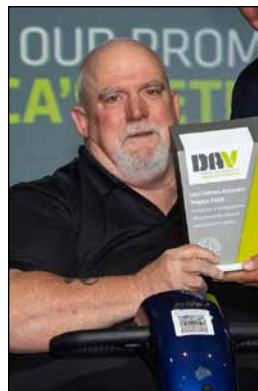
DIVISION II:

Department of South Carolina (307,364 hours) award accepted by Department Adjutant Joyce Roberts.



DIVISION III:

Department of Wisconsin (79,252 hours) award accepted by Department Adjutant Matthew Kempainen.



DIVISION IV:

Department of Iowa (60,857) award accepted by Department Adjutant Chris Salladay.



DIVISION V:

Department of South Dakota (38,806 hours) award accepted by Department Adjutant Martin Pennock.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

ENTREPRENEUR AND EMPLOYMENT AWARDS



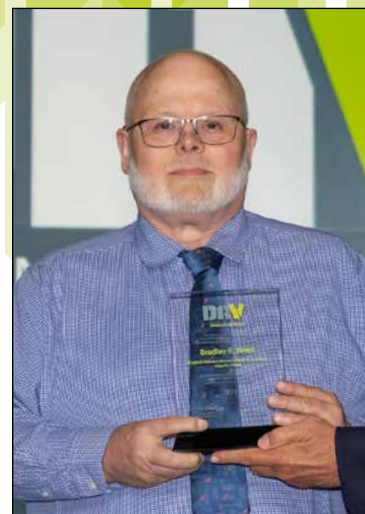
Arthur H. and Mary E. Wilson Award for Top Venture Impacting Veterans

Carrie Roeger, along with her husband and fellow Marine veteran Ralph Roeger, opened Semper Fi Bar & Grille in 2015. Filled with military memorabilia and photos donated by locals, their restaurant has fostered an atmosphere where veterans feel comfortable sharing their stories of service with friends and family. Roeger is a member of DAV Chapter 6 in Marietta, Georgia.



Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER)

Eric Brown is an LVER for the Texas Veterans Commission, where he has worked for the past three years educating and assisting employers and finding veterans meaningful jobs.



Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist

Bradley Bean is a DVOP specialist in Maine. In 2022, he provided individualized career services to 110 eligible veterans and helped 48 veterans find meaningful employment.

DAV PATRIOT EMPLOYERS OF THE YEAR



SMALL EMPLOYER: ZeroEyes

CEO Mike Lahiff accepts the award. Of its 140 employees, around 70% are veterans, transitioning service members, reservists, National Guard members or military spouses. The company partners with various veterans organizations to recruit and retain the best veteran talent.



MIDSIZE EMPLOYER: NTT

Dr. Ben Stewart, senior vice president of operations, accepts the award. To retain and attract more veterans, the company has a robust veterans employee resource group that provides support, mentorship and professional development. Of its 581 employees, nearly 25% are veterans.



LARGE EMPLOYER: Kimberly-Clark

Bryson Dumas, training for excellence leader, accepts the award. The company has a robust and active employee resource group for veterans and their supporters, Service Alliance Uniting Together (SALUTE), with more than 825 members across the United States.

Nominate a company that hires veterans at patriotemployers.org.



To view or download photos from the 2023 national convention, visit flickr.com/theDAV.

444 DAYS to liberty



Marine Sgt. Kevin Hermening (center) and four other released American hostages arrive in Germany after being held captive for nearly 15 months at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran.

In 1979, the U.S. Embassy in Iran was overrun, with 66 Americans captured. This DAV member lived through it.

By Matt Saintsing

Kevin Hermening was on his way to evening chow in 1978 when a giant banner inviting him to learn about the Marine Security Guard program caught his eye. The life-size cutouts of Marines in dress blue uniforms standing in front of the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal and on the Great Wall of China were enough to sell the young Marine on the special duty.

“One thing that the military does a great job of is recruiting,” he said. “It’s about the image, it’s about patriotism, and it’s about all the things that resonate with those of us who raise our right hand.”

But the Wisconsin native got more than he bargained for when the U.S. Embassy he was assigned to was overrun in 1979.

“That was the biggest group of people I had ever seen in my life descending toward me,” recalled Hermening,

a member of DAV Chapter 64 in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. “And I made a beeline for the front door of the main embassy building.”

That was Nov. 4, 1979, when 66 Americans were initially taken hostage. Hermening and 51 others would spend 444 days as prisoners during the Iran hostage crisis, a major international calamity that shattered U.S.-Iran relations and forever changed Hermening’s life.

The seizing of the embassy in Tehran sent shock waves down the spines of Americans everywhere.

Hermening was selected for Marine Security Guard training in mid-1979 and, initially, was assigned to West Germany. However, his dreams of skiing the Alps and driving at lightning-fast speeds on the Autobahn were trounced as the Marine command switched his assignment to Iran.

For the first few months, Hermening loved it there. He dedicated time to studying Farsi, the official language of Iran, and took opportunities to visit the shopping district in the city. Two weeks later, however, the embassy was overrun.

The attack occurred on a cool, drizzly Sunday morning. Hermening was in the main embassy planning a ball for the Marine Corps birthday, just six days away. That’s when he caught wind of a demonstration at the front gate.



On Nov. 4, 1979, thousands of Iranian protesters descended on the U.S. Embassy, seizing the grounds and dozens of Americans, who would be held for 444 days.

“Looking out onto the front grounds, I saw hundreds of Iranians already gathering and thousands more smashing through and eventually opening the front gate,” he said.

The Americans used tear gas to delay the entry for as long as possible.

For over a year, Hermening was at the mercy of his captors. They would wake Americans in the middle of the night, place an unloaded gun to their heads and pull the trigger in a mock execution. Army Col. Charles Scott, chief of the Defense Liaison Office at the embassy, was beaten severely during an interrogation, and three of his teeth were broken off at the gum line—injuries that went untreated until after they were released.

Bill Keough's health visibly declined while in captivity. The then-superintendent of the American International School in Islamabad, Pakistan, was visiting Tehran to obtain student records when the embassy was seized. A hulking man at 6 feet 9 inches tall, Keough lost 80 pounds before being released. He died in 1985 from Lou Gehrig's disease.

“We begged the guards all the time as we saw Bill's health starting to deteriorate,” recalled Hermening. “‘Please bring him to a doctor, bring a doctor in to see him, anything.’ And they never did.

“I'm not saying he would've survived [after being released], but frankly, he never had a chance,” he added.

With the crisis stretching into its sixth month, a military attempt to rescue the hostages ended in tragedy. On April 24, 1980, the ill-fated special operations mission saw three of the eight helicopters fail, prompting President Jimmy Carter to cancel the mission. That's when an American helicopter collided with a C-130, killing eight service members and injuring five. The next day, Carter took full responsibility.

“Our rescue team knew, and I knew, that the operation was certain to be difficult and it was certain to be dangerous,” Carter said in an address to the nation. “We were all convinced that if and when the rescue operation had been commenced that it had an excellent chance of success.”

“They were the real heroes in the hostage crisis,” said Hermening. “The rest of us were just survivors. We were the ones who got to come home.”

All of the hostages were released the day President Ronald Reagan was inaugurated. At the same time, the U.S. unfroze \$8 billion in Iranian assets. After 444 arduous days, Hermening and the others were finally freed.

Ironically, Hermening was initially awarded the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the nation's highest peacetime military decoration. However, in 2001, he received the Prisoner of War Medal.

“Our nation must ensure we properly recognize and honor the service and sacrifice of veterans like Kevin,” said DAV National Commander Nancy Espinosa. “Although his time in captivity is considered peacetime, the experience he and others went through is anything but. We at DAV are proud to have Kevin within our ranks.”

More than four decades later, Hermening reflects on his catharsis when speaking about his experience.

“I managed to get all the bad stuff out of my system,” he said. “And so that's a big part of the reason why I adjusted fairly well.” ■



Hermening meets with Presidents Ronald Reagan (left) and Jimmy Carter (right). In the years following his release, Hermening has shared his story across the nation and remains an active member of DAV Chapter 64 in Wittenberg, Wisconsin.

‘LIKE TURNING IN TO A WALL OF LEAD’

Their mission seemed like a success. Then a Black Hawk helicopter was shot down.

By Matt Saintsing

Larry Perino is stoic as he recalls a Black Hawk helicopter falling from the sky. As an Army Ranger and platoon leader on the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, his instincts kicked in, with one thought racing through his mind: We’re not leaving now; we need to get to the crash site.

“I could generally see where it was,” said Perino. “It looked like it was two blocks away.”

Perino attempted to direct the Ranger chalk he was leading to the downed aircraft but quickly ran into a barrage of heavy enemy fire.

“As soon as we made that left turn, it was like turning in to a wall of lead,” he said. “Lots of gunfire everywhere, [rocket-propelled grenades] going up and down the street.”

At one point, enemy bullets skipped between his legs while he engaged a Somali fighter.

Tragedy struck while one of Perino’s team leaders, Cpl. Jamie Smith, was firing an M203 grenade launcher at an enemy fighter.

PHOTO BY SGT. STEVEN GALIMORE/U.S. ARMY

Soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division watch as American helicopters circle the skies on Oct. 4, 1993, following the Battle of Mogadishu.



“I have my right arm on his shoulder, and I’m pointing with my left hand, and I’m trying to tell him where to shoot when these rounds hit,” said Perino. “And one of them, how it missed me, I have no idea, but it hit him, and that’s where it hit his femoral artery.”

Medics never stopped caring for and attempting to save Smith until he died from his wounds late that night.

The fighting occurred on Oct. 3, 1993, when Perino and other soldiers from Task Force Ranger muscled into a hornet’s nest on a raid to capture rebel leaders. What became popularized as “Black Hawk Down,” the Battle of Mogadishu was, at the time, the fiercest combat the American military had seen since the Vietnam War. By the end of the relentless 15-hour battle, 18 U.S. service members were dead and another 73 wounded.

American intervention in Somalia began in 1991 when a severe famine and a collapsed central government hurled the beleaguered nation into civil war. Faced with a humanitarian disaster, President George H.W. Bush ordered the military to join the United Nations mission to provide security for relief efforts. At the same time, warring factions of rebel clans competed for control, filling a power vacuum by governing through violence.

Conditions came to a head in June 1993 when U.N. troops suffered their greatest loss in nearly three decades. Twenty-five Pakistani U.N. peacekeepers were killed in an ambush that injured another 59. Three Americans were also wounded, and estimates of Somali deaths range from 16 to 35. The U.N. ultimately blamed the rebel leader and former Somali military general, Mohammad Farah Aidid.

That prompted President Bill Clinton to dispatch a team of elite American soldiers and special operators with a single mission: kill or capture the terrorist leader. On the morning of Oct. 3, intelligence indicated that two of Aidid’s lieutenants would meet at a compound in the Bakaara Market, a treacherous area known for heavy rebel and other nefarious activities.

After a quick brief, the assault force headed to the time-sensitive target. Rangers repelled from Black Hawks

operated by the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, setting up a cordon around the target building. That’s when the first American casualty occurred.

Army Pfc. Todd Blackburn was injured after the pilots quickly maneuvered the aircraft to evade a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). The move saved everyone on board from near-certain death, but the jostling caused the young Ranger to fall 60 feet to the ground.

“It slowed them down,” said Mark Bowden, author of “Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern Warfare.” “The essence of the kind of snatch-and-grab mission they undertook was to get in and out fast.”

Despite the setback, the raid’s targets, and 21 others, were captured just 20 minutes after Blackburn’s fall.

“That part of the mission was a success—which is lost history,” said Lee Van Arsdale, a retired Army colonel who served for decades in an Army Special Missions unit.

Somali rebels had observed and learned from six previous American mission successes, drastically reducing the enemy’s response time. Armed and angry rebels descended upon the Rangers and operators. A Humvee gunner, Sgt. Dominick Pilla, became the day’s first U.S. soldier killed in action.

Then, an iconic line was heard across the radio: “We got a Black Hawk down.”

The crash of that first helicopter, brought down by an RPG, caused the mission to shift from a raid to a rescue. Pilots Cliff Wolcott and Donovan Lee Briley, both Army chief warrant officers, were killed instantly. Two survivors

of the crash began defending the wounded and dead Americans.

“One of the [American special operator] snipers in the back of the helicopter, Dan Busch, held the militia off single-handedly at the cost of his own life,” said Van Arsdale.

The urgent situation escalated again when a second Black Hawk, the one Perino flew in for the raid, was brought down by another RPG about a mile from the target compound. With a second crash site unsecured, two U.S. special operators, Sgt. 1st Class Randy Shughart and Master Sgt. Gary Gordon, repeatedly asked to touch down from their helicopter to secure the crash site.

The duo was inserted and defended surviving pilot Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mike Durant. With enemy fighters enveloping the site, Shughart and Gordon were killed. The two posthumously received Medals of Honor—the first since Vietnam—for their heroic actions.

Van Arsdale knew both men, having served in the same squadron for years.

“They were both the epitome of the quiet professional,” said Van Arsdale.

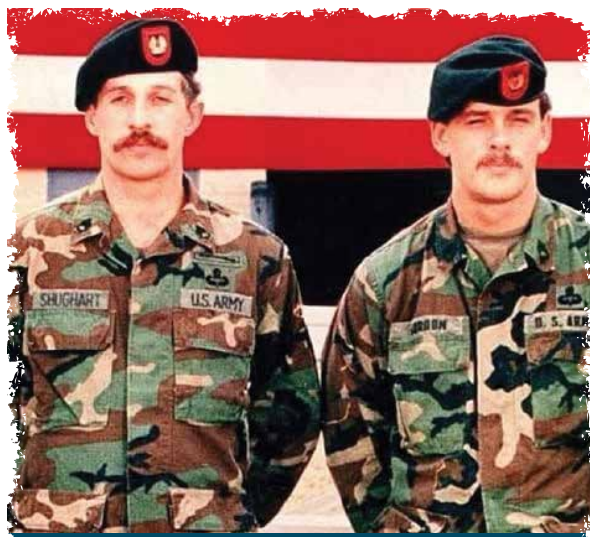
“I had a number of people tell me they went on a suicide mission, and I disagree with that because that’s just not how people like that are wired,” he added. “They saw a job that needed to be done and volunteered to do it, plain and simple.”

“They knew the odds were stacked against them, but there was nobody else,” said Perino.

Durant was freed after being held for 11 days by clan fighters.

For the Americans still in the city, rebels attacked from nearly every direction, drawing a thundering cacophony of modern warfare.

“The biggest thing was the noise,” said Van Arsdale. “You’ve got continuous small-arms fire, automatic fire, and rocket-propelled grenades going off. It’s just freaking loud.”



Army special operators Sgt. 1st Class Randy Shughart (left) and Master Sgt. Gary Gordon (right) were posthumously awarded Medals of Honor for their heroic actions in defending a downed American helicopter crew. (Photo by Katie Lange)

And the fighting was harrowing. American vehicles returned to their base to regroup, leaving some 99 soldiers surrounded throughout the city. AH-6 Little Bird helicopters conducted strafing runs to protect the trapped Rangers. Estimates of dead Somalis range from 300 to a few thousand.

An American rescue element reached trapped Rangers and Durant’s downed helicopter in the early hours of Oct. 4. By 6:30 a.m., the Rangers and operators piled into crowded U.N. and American vehicles and reached the Pakistani-held Mogadishu Stadium.

“My feet never even touched the ground,” Perino said of entering a rescue vehicle. “I remember hanging in there, and I was almost horizontal.”

Others ran out of the city on foot.

The story and valor of this battle are captured in Bowden’s New York Times bestseller “Black Hawk Down.” The book and subsequent movie were massive successes, a surprise for Bowden.

“I knew it was a great story, and I thought it was an important story, and so I was thrilled to be doing it. But there was no suspicion that this would become a big commercial project or a movie,” he said.

In 2021, the Army announced that 60 special operators would have their awards upgraded for their actions in Mogadishu. Fifty-eight awards, including Perino’s, were upgraded to the Silver Star, the third-highest military valor award, and two Distinguished Flying Crosses, an honor reserved for heroism while in aerial flight.

As for the lasting legacy of “Black Hawk Down,” Bowden said he aspires to enlighten people about combat’s dark nature and horrors.

“I hope that when people read that story, they realize the incredible courage and real nobility of those willing to do these kinds of missions,” said Bowden. “And they also understand a government’s moral and ethical obligations to use that kind of force wisely.” ■



BEYOND THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

We believe there's no better way to show our appreciation
than to make a difference in the many issues facing
the veteran community.

And there's no challenge more urgent
than the epidemic of veteran suicide.

USAA founded **Face the Fight™** to end veteran suicide.
Learn how you can join the fight, find help
and support your fellow veterans.

usaa.com/VeteransDay



Face the Fight™ is a coalition to prevent veteran suicide by breaking the stigma
of seeking help, increasing awareness and supporting our partner organizations.



We came in PEACE

Legacy of triumph and tragedy continues for Beirut veterans

On Oct. 23, 1983, a suicide truck bomber attacked the Battalion Landing Team headquarters in Beirut, killing 220 Marines, 18 sailors and 3 soldiers. It was the Corps' largest loss of life in a single day since the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945.

Forty years after the bombing, the veterans of Beirut and the families of those who perished there are still haunted by the tragic loss, even as many continue to fight a different battle.

Among the survivors and veterans of the peacekeeping mission in Beirut, an invisible enemy was unleashing a deadly attack from within. Many of those Marines had been stationed at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, from 1953 to 1987 and unknowingly ingested toxic chemicals that had polluted the groundwater there.

Keith "EZ" Ezell deployed to Beirut with 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, as the country was embroiled in the civil unrest and bloodshed that would lead to the barracks attack.

"We weren't there on a combat mission at all—though it turned into one," he said. "We got toward the end [of our deployment] and the bombing happened. We were less than a month away from going home."

While Ezell was not wounded in the attack, the enormity of what had happened was difficult to process. "I didn't really understand the outcome of it all," he said. "At the time, I was just glad to be home."

Ezell was fortunate to survive his tour in Beirut. Later in life, though, he would face an invisible foe lurking within his own body. An aggressive form of bladder cancer had been waging a secret war against him.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, scientific and medical evidence points to the development of certain diseases, including bladder cancer, as a result of toxins in the water at Camp Lejeune.

In his time of need, Ezell was able to turn to a fellow Marine veteran of Beirut, Don Inns.

As a DAV benefits advocate, Inns has dedicated his post-service life to advocating for his fellow veterans and their families.

"I consider it an honor to assist veterans of any era and their families," Inns said. "But it feels incredibly special to be there for those who served in Beirut."

"Sometimes we feel forgotten or overlooked. I know that through my benefits work, I'm able to do my part to ensure their sacrifices are remembered."

Because of Inns' diligence, the VA approved Ezell's claim for service-connected bladder cancer. Additional benefits—such as Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance—were also granted.

Unfortunately, Ezell lost his battle with bladder cancer on March 15 this year.

"Before Keith had passed away, he wanted to make sure that his wife, Kim, was taken care of," Inns said. "Since his passing, I submitted Kim's claim for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, which the VA has granted. I'm glad that DAV could be there when Kim needed us most. That's a promise I made to Keith."

"DAV is more than just a name or an acronym; it's people that have been there and been through it and have gotten the background to understand how to [file for benefits through a VA disability claim]," said Kim.

The intertwined tragedies of the Beirut bombing and the poisoned water at Camp Lejeune have irreversibly affected the lives of thousands. But for Inns, as well as the other Beirut veterans and those affected by the poisoned water at Camp Lejeune, the battle continues. ■

“We will keep fighting, whether for recognition of what we endured in Beirut as we attempted to bring peace to Lebanon or for those who were poisoned back home. Like the Marines, DAV is not afraid to stay in the fight, especially for those who cannot fight for themselves.”

— Don Inns, DAV benefits advocate



Above: Keith Ezell stands in front of the Beirut Memorial outside of Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. **Right:** Ezell with fellow Marine veteran and DAV benefits advocate Don Inns, who also survived his tour in Beirut.



Did you know?

In 2022, the Camp Lejeune Justice Act of 2022, which was signed into law as part of the larger Honoring our PACT Act, gave veterans and their dependents the ability to file a civil suit against the federal government for harm suffered as a result of the toxic groundwater.

However, monetary awards will be reduced by the amount of any VA disability compensation or other benefits provided based on a veteran's exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune.

"It's critical that veterans and their family members affected by the toxic water at Camp Lejeune know that these lawsuit awards can come with a price," said DAV National Service Director Jim Marszalek. "This could reduce the amount of the award recipients actually receive from the court, but it would not affect their eligibility to apply for or receive VA benefits or health care."

Marszalek said DAV encourages all veterans to take the most appropriate actions for their individual situations, starting with an appointment with a DAV benefits advocate.

Veterans and family members can locate the nearest DAV office by visiting **benefitsquestions.org**.



Watch Video Online

See the video about Keith Ezell at **dav.la/3im**.

The PATRIOTS we forget



Rep. James Moylan (front row, third from left) with the Army National Guard at his district office in Hagåtña, Guam, in April.

High rates of military service exist in U.S. territories, but when these veterans return home, they must go to great lengths to obtain their earned benefits

By Kevin C. Miller

For many service members returning home to remote locations, reintegration into civilian life may make them feel like they are isolated and receive second-class care options. But for more than 83,000 veterans living in the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands, it is a distinct reality.

High rates of military service exist in the U.S. territories, but veterans who reside in these areas are largely forgotten and often have to go to great lengths to obtain the benefits they earned.

“Disabled veterans have already sacrificed greatly in terms of their impairments and loss of earning capacity,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Randy Reese. “Veterans who live in U.S. territories should

not be burdened by an arduous travel reimbursement process for their medical appointments.

“DAV urges Congress to make the necessary improvements to this program on behalf of our nation’s veterans.”

In rural areas of the continental United States, many veterans face challenges with access to health care and services. Compared with urban areas, these communities have higher poverty rates; more older residents; poorer health; and fewer physicians, especially those who provide specialty care. Due to the geographic isolation of U.S. island territories, all such issues are exacerbated.

Most veterans from those territories only have access to a Department of Veterans Affairs Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), which provides primary health care but lacks many specialty care options veterans need. Puerto Rico, the only island territory with a VA medical

center, located in San Juan, continues to deal with chronic staffing shortages, with pay disparity playing a significant role in the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Unfortunately, the VA Community Care program is also not a viable alternative in Puerto Rico.

“Community Care continues to be a struggle for our veterans trying to access that program,” said Alex Martinez, DAV national service office supervisor in San Juan. “Not enough providers have joined the program, and as a result, there is not enough capacity for what our veterans need here for their care.”

According to the Puerto Rico Department of Health, Puerto Rico has seen an exodus of medical professionals, losing nearly half of its physicians since 2010. Losses have derived from pay disparity, emigration, death, retirement or the aftermath of natural disasters. Although rebuilt, the CBOCs in Arecibo and Vieques received extensive damage due to Hurricane Maria in 2017 and remain at risk for future severe storms.

The U.S. Virgin Islands has CBOCs on two of its three main islands, St. Croix and St. Thomas. However, most Virgin Islands veterans still need to go to the San Juan VA Medical Center for specialty care or hospitalizations and must travel by air or boat. These visits can be extremely challenging for veterans with multiple disabling conditions or mobility limitations. The VA covers travel expenses and accommodations, but flights and boat rides to and from San Juan are limited.

Veterans who reside in the Northern Mariana Islands do not have access to any local VA facility. The closest location to them is Guam, which is at least a one-hour flight. As with most CBOCs, the VA facilities in Guam and American Samoa both lack specialty care and have similar issues of specialty provider availability under the Community Care program. These veterans’ nearest specialty care appointments are in Hawaii, which is a seven-hour flight away.

The VA Beneficiary Travel Office provides mileage reimbursement to certain veterans to cover the costs of traveling to and from their health care appointments. According to a recent report from the VA Office of Inspector General, the VA is not meeting its goals of streamlining this service and expediting reimbursement.

“Not all cases are qualified for reimbursement, and for those that are, the process is tedious and time-consuming, and many times unfair to the veteran and their family,” said Rep. James Moylan, an Army veteran and Guam’s current congressional delegate. “Veterans that reside in Guam and other U.S. territories deserve equitable access to care just like their peers who live on the mainland.” ■



Left: Moylan takes questions from veterans at a town hall event in Mangilao, Guam, in April.

Above: Moylan meets with veteran constituents after a town hall event.



VA police to use body, dash cams

■ On June 16, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that all VA police officers will start using in-car and body-worn cameras by the end of 2023. This new policy is an effort to provide transparency in interactions, build trust and promote de-escalation while avoiding the use of force on VA grounds.

The VA has taken steps to ensure that the use of the cameras does not infringe on the privacy of patients or VA employees. Under the rules set by the VA, the cameras will automatically start recording video and audio whenever an officer draws a firearm or activates the emergency lights in a police vehicle.

Officers also must manually turn on their body-worn cameras when conducting investigations and during enforcement encounters. In-car cameras will be turned on while making traffic stops, responding to calls for service and transporting those in custody.

This move will affect about 4,700 VA police officers.

i For more information For more information about VA police, visit department.va.gov/about/va-police/.



VA, NIH study looks into Gulf War Illness

■ On April 17, the Department of Veterans Affairs and National Institutes of Health launched a collaborative research project investigating Gulf War Illness (GWI). This study aims to obtain a better understanding of GWI

to develop definitive diagnostic criteria, testing and potential treatments.

GWI refers to a group of unexplained or ill-defined chronic symptoms in veterans deployed to the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield. The problems reported from GWI include joint pain, fatigue, rashes, memory issues and digestive problems, with no apparent cause. It afflicts about one-third of the 700,000 U.S. troops who served during these operations.

The causes of the illness have been debated for over three decades. Deputy National Legislative Director Shane Liermann calls the new study significant in potentially outlining more precise guidelines for filing those claims and seeking medical treatment for the illness.



Learn More Online

To learn more about the study or how you can volunteer, visit dav.la/3in.



From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

ANNMARIE HURLEY



Partners in service

I am greatly honored by my fellow DAV Auxiliary members for electing me in Atlantic City as your national commander. The opportunity to serve in this capacity is both humbling and the thrill of a lifetime. It is my sincere hope that we are able to enhance and build upon what is already a tremendous record of assisting ill and injured veterans and their families during my tenure as national commander.

For more than 30 years, I worked as the executive secretary for the DAV Department of Massachusetts. This role gave me the chance to work closely with Auxiliary officers. Inspired by their example, I became much more active in the Auxiliary after retiring in 2005. I have served as treasurer of Unit 3 in Dorchester, Massachusetts, since its inception; Massachusetts Auxiliary commander in 2016; and national Auxiliary Mae Holmes Outstanding Unit Award committee chairwoman last year.

Many of my family members—like yours—have answered the call to serve, including my brother Frank, a retired major in the Marine Corps, who deployed to Vietnam four times. My late husband Michael and late grandson Michael James each served in the Navy. My nephews Michael and John Patrick, aunt Celia, and uncles Charles, Eddie and Bill all served our country. My daughters Shannon, Kristin and Margaret-Mary are Auxiliary members, as is my granddaughter Madison, whose paternal grandfather died in Vietnam.

My family is like so many others in our proud organization. We know what it means to sacrifice during and after a loved one's service. And together, we form a special family of our own.

I want all of us to work to grow our Auxiliary family to continue to be a strong resource for veterans and their families from all war eras and branches of service. Reach out to veterans' families with an offer to talk and listen. Hear their concerns and thoughtfully respond with kindness and empathy. Remind them of what services are available.

Tell them how being engaged with the Auxiliary is a pathway to improving the lives of all veterans and their families. Share your passion for the Auxiliary and tell your own volunteerism story.

Please make sure they know that one is eligible for membership as a spouse, child, grandchild or extended family member of any person injured or ill because of their service or anyone injured and still in America's military.

Remind those who served in your family that any veteran who's eligible for DAV membership is also eligible for membership in the Auxiliary. Tell them about what makes your unit a special community and talk about the opportunities to get involved.

In the tradition of past Auxiliary commanders, I leave you with this reminder of what our Auxiliary is: partners in service for disabled veterans and their families. ■

Ready to **SOAR**

DAV Patriot Boot Camp participants witnessed the release of two golden eagles. Celebrity chef and mentor Robert Irvine likened the release to the work DAV does to empower veterans through entrepreneurship.



DAV Patriot Boot Camp partners with chef Robert Irvine to give veteran entrepreneurs flight

By Elizabeth DePompei

Between the mountains of Big Springs Park in Provo, Utah, U.K. Royal Navy veteran and famed chef Robert Irvine urged onlookers to “stand in the moment.” What they were about to witness would be truly special.

With care, Irvine loosened a cap placed over the head of a golden eagle that had spent months being rehabilitated by Great Basin Wildlife Rescue. It would be one of two eagles released back into the wild that evening.

Irvine, best known as the host of Food Network’s “Restaurant: Impossible,” likened the eagles’ paths to the stories of those who gathered in front of him—and the organization hosting them.

Earlier that day, DAV Patriot Boot Camp welcomed a new cohort of entrepreneurs from the military and veteran community to MX Technologies headquarters in the Silicon Slopes of Lehi, Utah, about 20 miles northwest of the park. Dozens of participants listened to world-class business experts and connected with leading mentors to help grow and accelerate their ventures. Irvine, a successful entrepreneur who has long supported the military and veteran community through his Robert Irvine Foundation, served as one of those mentors.

Marie Bailey, a retired Navy commander and founder

of Mortgage Me Free, had a one-on-one mentoring session with Irvine. Her company offers a mortgage reduction program that gives homeowners a customizable, interactive tool to help them better track and pay down their debt.

Bailey said Irvine challenged her business model and encouraged her to market to banks. Before she knew it, he was on the phone with a close associate in the banking field and connecting Bailey with an invaluable resource.

“It was exciting,” Bailey said. “Watching him and how much he cares about the vets was just unbelievable.”

Phillip Bragg, a retired Marine and founder of 1350 Distilling, said Irvine similarly pushed and surprised him. His company specializes in handcrafted spirits, with each bottle dedicated to a different branch of the military or first responders.

“I told [Irvine] I did a little under \$400K [in revenue] last year, and he looked at me in the eye and he says, ‘If you can make \$400K, you can make \$5 million,’” Bragg said. “And that was probably the most inspirational thing that I’ve heard in a long time.”

Irvine is a longtime supporter of DAV. Through the Robert Irvine Foundation, veterans, first responders and families are connected with life-changing opportunities that unlock the potential in their personal and professional lives. But this was his first time he leveraged his talent through DAV to provide direct services to veteran entrepreneurs.

“I never had mentors,” Irvine said. “And I’m sitting in the room listening, in the first five minutes, to information I would have loved 20 years ago [when I was starting out].”

“ [This] is what DAV does. We rehabilitate. We give the resources. And we give you new training to go on to do something better. ”

— Chef Robert Irvine



Marie Bailey, a retired Navy commander and founder of Mortgage Me Free, said Irvine connected her with an invaluable industry contact on the spot.



Phillip Bragg, a retired Marine and founder of 1350 Distilling, attended DAV Patriot Boot Camp to help scale his company. Bragg said the mentorship and peer support reenergized him.

“It’s been unbelievable. ... What DAV is doing with Patriot Boot Camp is something special.”

Volunteers like Irvine and the dozens of speakers and mentors who attended the three-day event are the lifeblood of the program, said DAV Patriot Boot Camp Director Nick Brophy.

“We are incredibly grateful for Chef Irvine and all the people who generously volunteered their time and expertise to this cohort of entrepreneurs,” Brophy said. “We know that mentorship is crucial for a successful business, especially for those founders who spent their formative years focused on selfless service to our country. DAV Patriot Boot Camp gives them access to invaluable resources, and in return, we all benefit from their impactful, purpose-driven businesses.”

Back at the park, the cohort watched in awe as the first golden eagle leaped from a volunteer’s arms, spread its wings and flew toward the mountains.

“[This] is what DAV does,” Irvine said, comparing the eagles’ release to the support DAV provides veterans.


“We rehabilitate. We give the resources. And we give you new training to go on to do something better.”

Bragg, a life member of DAV, said that’s what he loves about the organization. From disability claims assistance to employment and entrepreneurship programs and volunteer opportunities, DAV supports and empowers veterans across all phases of their life.

Entrepreneurship, Bragg said, is a particularly powerful tool in that mission.

“You join the military because you have that sense of purpose, and you completely tie your identity to your job. And then one day, you’re not on active duty anymore and everything that you tied your identity to is not there anymore, and so you have to find a way to replace it,” Bragg said.

“And one way that you can do that is through small business. There’s nothing [like] that feeling of belonging and ownership and purpose.” ■

 To learn more and sign up for updates, visit patriotbootcamp.org.



Minter

Deputy National Voluntary Services Director

■ **Ron Minter** was appointed deputy national voluntary services director at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky. He had served as assistant national voluntary services director since March 2018. Minter has played an integral role in supporting and leading a corps of dedicated DAV and Auxiliary volunteers who donate millions of hours annually to support veterans.

He also helps direct the DAV Transportation Network and the annual National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports and Golf Clinics, which are both co-presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Minter enlisted in the Navy from his home state of Texas in 1990. He was medically discharged in 1995. In 1999, he left the Veterans Benefits Administration after being accepted into Class VIII of the DAV National Service Officer Training Academy in Denver.

He apprenticed at the service office in Waco, Texas, where he continued to serve until 2007 when he transferred to Baltimore. There, he was promoted to supervisor in 2009.

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



Mathis

Assistant National Legislative Director

■ **Naomi Mathis**, a combat-disabled Air Force veteran of the Iraq War, was appointed assistant national legislative director at DAV Washington Headquarters. She had served as associate national legislative director since July 2022. Mathis works to support DAV's ongoing advocacy efforts and advances policies that improve the lives of disabled veterans, their families and their survivors.

Throughout her DAV service, Mathis has leveraged her personal story to spread the word about DAV's mission, including appearing in DAV's public service campaigns.

Mathis enlisted in the Air Force in 2000, serving with the 728th Air Control Squadron. She had several deployments to Kuwait and deployed to Iraq in 2003. Mathis medically retired in 2007 due to a combat-related disability.

Shortly after her retirement, she joined DAV as a transition service officer at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. She apprenticed as a national service officer in Bay Pines, Florida, in 2018.

A native of Queens, New York, Naomi is a life member of DAV Chapter 10 in Dumfries, Virginia.



Couser

Assistant National Employment Director

■ **Lamarr Couser** was appointed assistant national employment director at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky. In his new capacity, he will support and help lead DAV's efforts to connect veterans and spouses with employment through job fairs, outreach to employers, and other programs and initiatives that enhance and empower veterans and military families.

A service-disabled Navy and Army National Guard veteran, he served in Somalia, Iraq and Kuwait before retiring from the Virginia Army National Guard in 2014. He joined DAV in 2007 as an apprentice in Baltimore before becoming a senior national service officer in the Washington, D.C., office in 2011. He has supervised the DAV office in Baltimore for the past nine years.

Couser is a life member of Chapter 33 in Jessup, Maryland, and served as the DAV Department of Maryland commander in 2013 and judge advocate in 2009.

From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBRA VARNER DANCER



Embrace change

To embrace change, you must have a courageous spirit that stirs a desire to rise above what may seem like an impossible situation.

Courage is what will help manifest the change you seek. It is an effective motivator to make a difference in your life and the lives of others. When you step out of your comfort zone and away from what is familiar, you can become inspired toward doing something better. I've learned that for this change to have a positive effect, you need to learn to faithfully embrace it and not to run from it.

As you gain the courage to face change, there are a couple of things to remember to help you realize success.

First, don't be afraid to ask for help. Unfortunately, many people will often miss the opportunity of embracing change because they refuse to ask for help. They get scared and overwhelmed by the feeling they must go the road alone. But help is usually nearby and often comes from knowing what resources are available to you. There are likely people you know who have the skills or knowledge to help you face whatever may be in your path. When seeking to make changes, finding the right type of help increases the odds of realizing success and the ability to sustain those changes.

One of the reasons many people do not ask for help is because of pride; you don't want anyone to know that you may be incapable of completing a task or overcoming a challenge. But contrarily, asking for help before you hit the walls of discouragement can reduce anxiety and despair.

Next, it's important to know what you have and what you need to live your best life. Needs, unlike wants, are what move you to survive. To attain those needs, you may need to set goals. These goals should be direct, concise and timely. Positive goals set you up for success because they give you clear priorities to focus on as you navigate change in your life.

Change happens in families, relationships and careers. It is inevitable. You can either embrace it or run from it. But, change embraced is an adventure. And after you have experienced change, gained courage and seen the benefits of adapting, you will feel confident about the next season of your life and whatever challenges may come your way. ■

When seeking to make changes, finding the right type of help increases the odds of realizing success and the ability to sustain those changes.



DAV National Officers 2023-2024

National Commander

Nancy Espinosa, Utah

Senior Vice Commander

Daniel Contreras, California

1st Junior Vice Commander

Coleman Nee, Massachusetts

2nd Junior Vice Commander

John Donovan, Arkansas

3rd Junior Vice Commander

Cynthia Madison, Virginia

4th Junior Vice Commander

James Procnier, North Carolina

National Judge Advocate

Michael Dobmeier, North Dakota

National Chaplain

Debra Varner Dancer, Alabama

Past National Commander

Joe Parsetich, Montana



Front row, from left: Debra Varner Dancer, Nancy Espinosa, Daniel Contreras

Back row, from left: Coleman Nee, John Donovan, Cynthia Madison, James Procnier, Michael Dobmeier

DAV NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

District 1

Francis F. Whitty, Massachusetts

Alt: Deb Olson, Massachusetts

District 2

Israel Rivera, New York

Alt: Michael Martin, New York

District 3

Joyce Gaddis, Maine

Alt: Lisa Sloan, Vermont

District 4

Johnnie Walker, New Jersey

Alt: Mark Donberger, Delaware

District 5

Leonard M. Johnson, Pennsylvania

Alt: David M. Gui, Pennsylvania

District 6

John Patterson, Maryland

Alt: Nachee Miller, Washington, D.C.

District 7

Mary Ann Keckler, Florida

Alt: Thomas Ayala, Florida

District 8

Dave Sensat, Louisiana

Alt: Mason Causey, Louisiana

District 9

Leon Booker, Georgia

Alt: Robert Solomon, Georgia

District 10

Rolly D. Lee, Michigan

Alt: Beth Gonzales, Michigan

District 11

Dennis F. Hanneman, Ohio

Alt: James M. Bailey, Ohio

District 12

John Polk, Wisconsin

Alt: K C Johnson, Wisconsin

District 13

Eric D. McGinnis, Indiana

Alt: Bob Carnagey, Indiana

District 14

Kevin Grantier, Montana

Alt: Lyle Onsager, Montana

District 15

David C. Gerke, Missouri

Alt: Jamie Jakub, Nebraska

District 16

Gerald Wilson, California

Alt: Michael Kerr, California

District 17

Jerry D. Estes, Utah

Alt: John Carmona, Colorado

District 18

Bill Dolan, Nevada

Alt: Carl Jones, Nevada

District 19

Brigitte G. Marker, Washington

Alt: Wanda S. Janus, Oregon

District 20

Charles Edwards, Texas

Alt: Teresa Johniken, Texas

District 21

Harry O. Komprood, Arkansas

Alt: Anna Schermer, Oklahoma

Auxiliary National Officers 2023-2024



Front row, from left: Carolyn Harris, AnnMarie Hurley, Paula Raymond
Back row, from left: Aura-Lee Nicodemus, Kathleen Wenthe, Melissa Pierce, Christopher J. Easley, Terry Grabowski

National Commander
AnnMarie Hurley, Massachusetts
 Senior Vice Commander
Christopher J. Easley, Oklahoma
 1st Junior Vice Commander
Melissa L. Pierce, Iowa
 2nd Junior Vice Commander
Terry Grabowski, New York
 3rd Junior Vice Commander
Kathleen Wenthe, Louisiana
 4th Junior Vice Commander
Carolyn F. Harris, Alabama
 National Judge Advocate
Paula K. Raymond, Illinois
 National Chaplain
Aura-Lee Nicodemus, New Hampshire
 Past National Commander
Darlene Spence, Texas

AUXILIARY NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

District 1

Janet M. Pratt, Massachusetts

Alt: Nancy J. Ferullo Hoey, Massachusetts

District 2

Linda A. Trulio, New Jersey

Alt: Josephine "Nancy" Rivera, New York

District 3

Erin P. O'Brien, Maine

Alt: Karen Rediker, Vermont

District 4

Linda S. Applegate, New Jersey

Alt: Kathleen A. Walker, New Jersey

District 5

Loretta J. Nosko, Pennsylvania

Alt: Beverly A. Spicer, Pennsylvania

District 6

Amy Bowser, Virginia

Alt: Carol L. Simmons, Maryland

District 7

Amie Raber, Florida

Alt: Rose A. McGinnis, Florida

District 8

Jeff Jungkans, Tennessee

Alt: Dorothy Robinson, Tennessee

District 9

Ann Wilner, South Carolina

Alt: Yvonne Cunningham, South Carolina

District 10

Linda Walters, Michigan

Alt: Barbara A. McComb, Michigan

District 11

Carol S. Parker-Park, Ohio

Alt: Darlene M. Hanneman, Ohio

District 12

Rose Williams, Wisconsin

Alt: Patricia A. Davis, Wisconsin

District 13

Terri S. Young, Indiana

Alt: N/A

District 14

Helen "Meg" Parsetich, Montana

Alt: Jennie Ann Onsager, Montana

District 15

Danny Pierce, Iowa

Alt: Ashley M. Temps, Missouri

District 16

Caroline J. Morris, California

Alt: Linda Duste, California

District 17

June Schow, Utah

Alt: Susan Miller, Colorado

District 18

Hope Mulnix, Arizona

Alt: Lisa Thomas, Arizona

District 19

Phyllis "Diane" Mason, Idaho

Alt: N/A

District 20

Sharon K. Thornton, Texas

Alt: Kathy Dunham, Texas

District 21

Kimberly Stake, Arkansas

Alt: Vera Hendrickson, Arkansas

Tax-wise ways to support veterans now, without writing a check!

Make a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA at age 70 1/2 or older; reduce your taxable income. Make your gift online by visiting freewill.com/qcd/dav, or contact us for transfer instructions.

Create a no-cost will by visiting freewill.com/dav.

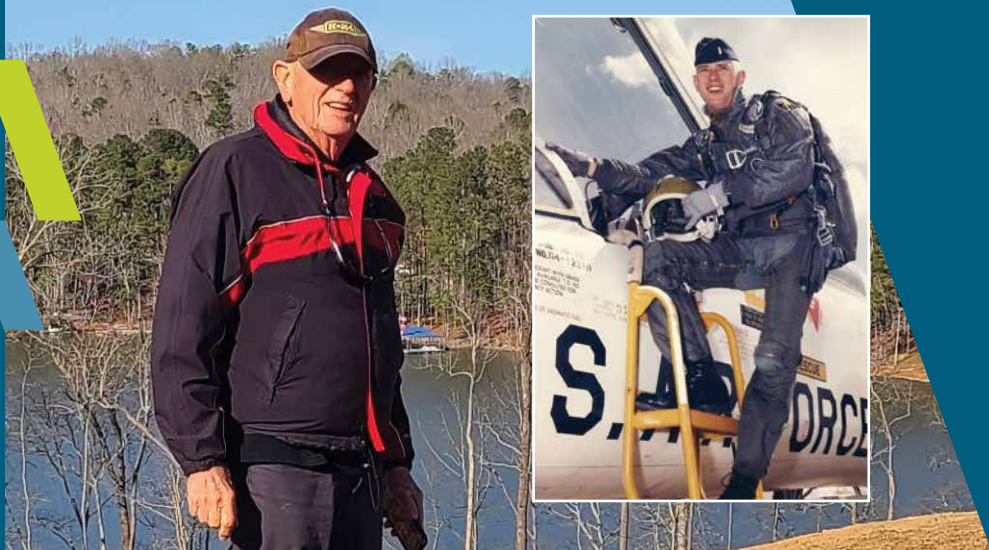
Transfer shares of appreciated stock; eliminate capital gain tax, plus claim a deduction if you itemize. DAV pays no taxes when selling the stock, so its full value helps veterans. Please contact us for transfer instructions; do not sell the stock first.

Leave part of your retirement assets to DAV instead of the IRS! Retirement assets left to nonspouse heirs are heavily taxed, so consider leaving other assets to children or loved ones instead.

For more information about giving to DAV

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

DAV® Guardian Society



Air Force veteran Tom Jacobus piloted the OV-10 Bronco during the Vietnam War. Reflecting on generations of veterans who have suffered and sacrificed, Tom was moved to donate to DAV from his IRA.

One generation supporting the next

Vietnam veteran gives from his IRA to support fellow veterans and their families

Air Force veteran Tom Jacobus piloted the OV-10 Bronco, a twin-turboprop light attack and observation aircraft, during the Vietnam War.

"I flew top cover for what they called the 'ranch hands'—the C-123s that sprayed Agent Orange," said Tom.

Later in life, Tom discovered he had service-connected prostate cancer and began receiving disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Yet he counts himself fortunate, knowing so many of his fellow veterans have been significantly affected by other devices of war.

"Particularly, I'm talking about the later wars where they used [improvised explosive devices]," he said. "I think about just how lucky I was. So many people gave so much, and they continue to give every day just by being disabled. It moves me, what they gave up."

Tom was so moved that he decided to support his fellow veterans by giving a contribution from his retirement account to DAV.

"I try to check out various charities online, and DAV had a good reputation," said Tom.

"I do very much have a tremendous amount of respect for all the veterans that served and put their life on the line for the country. And if I can give back to them, that's where I want it to go."

Contributing to DAV through your individual retirement account (IRA) is one great way to give, benefiting our veterans as well as the donor. If you are 70 ½ years or older, you may make a gift of up to \$100,000 from your qualified IRA.

"It's the most efficient way to give to a charity of your choice and the most tax-friendly way to do it," said Tom. "You can give the entire amount without having any tax consequences as far as income reported to the government." ■



DAV Commanders and Adjutants Association gathers to learn, network ...

The annual DAV Commanders and Adjutants Association orientation was held in June at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky. At the three-day event, dozens of state-level leaders from across the nation learned the tools and proven techniques necessary to enhance their leadership abilities and organizational knowledge.

"We had so many turn out, and everyone involved showed a reverence for our solemn mission with their intense attention to the task at hand," said Burl Jimmerson, then-association president. "We urged those gathered to network and grow their knowledge."

Jimmerson added that the event is timed to include as many newly elected and appointed state-level leaders as possible. These newer leaders were provided with the opportunity to network and learn from those with more experience as well as national leaders who provided a broader perspective and updates on new initiatives.

"State-level DAV leaders play a key role in carrying out our mission nationwide," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "The association plays a critical role in sharing best practices and connecting our department leaders with resources. We're extremely proud to host this event to receive feedback from our top leaders in the field and orient them to DAV's mission so they can be even more effective when they return to their communities."



Chapter 17 yarn donation ...

Kathy Sabel (left) of the Oshkosh Correctional Institution's Veterans Unit accepts a donation of yarn from Barbara Belmont (center), commander of DAV Chapter 17 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and Julie Hert (right) of DAV Auxiliary Unit 17. The incarcerated veterans use the yarn for community service projects that give back to society.



Department of Wisconsin convention ...

Then-DAV National 4th Junior Vice Commander Cynthia Madison (front row, second from left) joined members of the DAV Department of Wisconsin at their 2023 department convention in Madison. Members of Chapter 17 in Oshkosh awarded her a blaze orange chapter T-shirt, which she wore alongside Navy veteran Barbara Belmont, the first female commander for the chapter.



NOW ACCEPTING



REAL ESTATE DONATIONS

TO SUPPORT VETERANS



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

Learn more:

[DAV.ORG/REAL-ESTATE-DONATION](https://www.dav.org/real-estate-donation)
or call 844-277-HOME (4663)



PRESENTED BY



Walk, Roll, Run and Ride to
HONOR AMERICA'S VETERANS

REGISTER ONLINE AT DAV5K.ORG



NOV. 11, 2023
CINCINNATI

NOV. 11-30, 2023
VIRTUAL



\$2 OFF WITH PROMO CODE DAVMEMBER

DAV members have access
to even **more discounts** to

**EAT, PLAY, SHOP
AND TRAVEL**



We've recently expanded our Member Advantages program to give you more access to special discounts and savings on national and regional brands! This is one of our valued partners.



Moving? Save on your next move with northAmerican Van Lines. DAV families receive discounts* on professional interstate moving, packing and storage-in-transit services with free personal property protection coverage of up to \$100,000 with a \$0 deductible. **To qualify for your discounts, call 800-928-0599 or submit online at movingnavl.com/DAV.**

* DAV 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, 2023.

To learn more about special offers, visit dav.org/membership/member-advantages and check your email for more info.

REUNIONS

ARMY

1ST SIGNAL BRIGADE Sept. 20–24, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Bob Van Pelt, Ph: 518-210-2868, Email: bvpccsm@aol.com, Web: 1sba.wildapricot.org

18TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE, SENTRY DOG UNITS (VIETNAM) Nov. 10–12, Phoenix, AZ, Contact: Gary Smith, Ph: 713-614-2503, Email: puppypusher@att.org, Web: facebook.com/groups/VietnamSentryDogAlumni

249TH ENGINEER BATTALION ASSOCIATION (ALL ERAS) Sept. 21–24, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Robin Wandell, Ph: 660-815-1166, Email: firewoodfriends@hotmail.com

330TH RADIO RESEARCH COMPANY Oct. 12–15, Branson, MO, Contact: Jim Mossman, Ph: 513-779-7145, Email: jmossman@fuse.net, Web: facebook.com/groups/60801664318

864TH ENGINEER BATTALION "PACEMAKERS" (ALL ERAS) Oct. 18–22, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Steven Sattinger, Ph: 253-905-3744, Email: ssattinger@hotmail.com, Web: 864thpacemakers.org

ALPHA TROOP ASSOCIATION (TROOP A, 2ND SQUADRON, 17TH CAVALRY REGIMENT, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION) Sept. 13–17, Cocoa Beach, FL, Contact: Nathan Reed, Ph: 325-518-2927, Web: alphatroopalumni.com

BATTERY A, 4TH BATTALION, 42D FIELD ARTILLERY (VIETNAM) Oct. 15–18, Nashville, TN, Contact: Steve Von Hagen, Ph: 516-322-5382, Email: stevehv7@icloud.com

NAVY

FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION (VA-25/VFA-25) Nov. 2–5, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Chuck Webster, Ph: 605-380-5827 (text), Email: cwebster@nrctv.com, Web: fistofthefleet.org

LSM/LSMR (ALL SHIPS/ALL YEARS) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Angela D'Aloisio, Ph: 803-865-5665, Email: support@nehemiahcommunications.com, Web: uslstrg

MCB 1, MCB 9, MCB 10 Oct. 22–26, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Peter Dowd, Ph: 617-688-2512, Email: mcb1reunion@verizon.net, Web: mcb1-mcb9.org

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF NAVAL PHOTOGRAPHY Oct. 5–8, Washington, DC, Contact: Bill Solt, Ph: 321-362-5806, Web: navyphoto.net/vp

VA-106/VF-62 Oct. 8–10, Charleston, SC, Contact: Bud Huuki or Walt Hulse, Ph: 906-353-6465 or 774-994-0045, Email: gunnerh@up.net, Web: va106vf62.org

VP-11 Sept. 14–17, Bath, ME, Contact: Capt. Mike Brittingham, Ph: 252-537-0484, Email: captemb@gmail.com

US LST ASSOCIATION Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Angela D'Aloisio, Ph: 803-865-5665, Email: support@nehemiahcommunications.com, Web: uslstrg

USS AYLWIN (DE/FF-1081) Oct. 25–29, Virginia Beach, VA, Contact: Kevin Johnson, Ph: 757-377-0114, Email: reunion@ussaylwin.com, Web: ussaylwin.com

USS BARNSTABLE COUNTY (LST-1197) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Scott Gulbransen, Ph: 352-339-0605, Web: uslstrg

USS BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (SSBN-640) Sept. 19–22, Philadelphia, PA, Contact: Wes Williams, Ph: 413-884-5156, Email: mtc_wesw@yahoo.com, Web: ssbn640.com

USS CLAMAGORE (SS-343) Oct. 2–6, Huntsville, AL, Contact: Jim Griffin, Ph: 850-865-2766, Email: realbiggem@cox.net, Web: cvanews.org

USS FORRESTAL (CVA-59) AND AIR GROUPS Oct. 17–21, Tempe, AZ, Contact: Bill Solt, Ph: 321-362-5806, Web: uss-forrestal.com

USS HOLDER (DD/DDE-819, DE-401) Sept. 20–24, New Orleans, LA, Contact: James de Barrios, Ph: 831-458-9062, Email: ussholder_dde819@hotmail.com, Web: ussholder.com

USS JEROME COUNTY (LST-848) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Dennis Hager, Ph: 410-474-9072, Email: dennishager@comcast.net, Web: uslstrg

USS LITCHFIELD COUNTY (LST-901) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Don Lerche, Ph: 309-530-8710, Email: donlerche@yahoo.com, Web: uslstrg

USS OGDEN (LPD-5) Nov. 6–9, Fredricksburg, TX, Contact: Mark Stephens, Ph: 570-640-1094, Web: ussogdenreunion.com

USS PARK COUNTY (LST-1077) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Mike Kempf, Ph: 317-490-4229, Email: koby.43@icloud.com, Web: uslstrg

USS SAGINAW (LST-1188) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Angela D'Aloisio, Ph: 803-865-5665, Email: support@nehemiahcommunications.com, Web: uslstrg

USS SUTTER COUNTY (LST-1150) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Guy Simmons, Ph: 978-476-3895, Email: guysimmons@aol.com, Web: uslstrg

USS TOLOVANA (AO-64) Sept. 18–22, Branson, MO, Contact: Okie Baughman, Ph: 321-795-3940, Email: okie_baughman@yahoo.com, Web: usstolovana.org

USS VANCE (DE/DER-387) Oct. 8–13, Helen, GA, Contact: Jim Ensey, Ph: 410-442-9839, Web: ussvance.com

USS WEXFORD COUNTY (LST-1168) Oct. 2–5, Louisville, KY, Contact: Larry Condra, Ph: 314-604-5221, Email: larrygeec@netscape.net, Web: uslstrg

USS WICHITA (AOR-1) Nov. 10–12, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Tom Verville, Ph: 520-633-6584, Email: tvervi@gmail.com, Web: facebook.com/groups/212480375483795

MARINES

COMPANY G, 2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT (VIETNAM 1965-70) Sept. 20–24, Beaufort, SC, Contact: Dave Kling, Ph: 267-718-0419

COMPANY K, 3RD BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT (VIETNAM, ALL ERAS) Oct. 5–9, Springfield, MO, Contact: Bill Gerke, Ph: 631-433-8575, Email: msggerke@aol.com

AIR FORCE

AC-119 GUNSHIP ASSOCIATION Nov. 8–12, Washington, DC, Contact: Kelly Bridgeman, Ph: 757-625-6401, Email: kelly@afri.com, Web: ac119gunships.com

RED HORSE AND PRIME BEEF ASSOCIATION (CIVIL ENGINEER GATHERING) Oct. 23–27, Fort Walton Beach, FL, Contact: Dave Corbett, Ph: 627-687-8655, Email: fwb2023@rhpba.com, Web: rhpba.com

INQUIRIES

- Searching for anyone from Dover AFB or Charleston AFB who was temporarily assigned to NAS Sigonella, Sicily, during the Lebanese conflict, January–June 1985. I was driving to the Motta residence in a white van. While we

waited at the gate to leave, I was shot in the head by a Lebanese sniper. The bullet took a piece of my right ear. While there, I was also in a bad car accident with five other people. Searching for a buddy statement to those incidents. The commander at the time was Maj. Mark Kahley. Contact: Sherry Day-Peterson ("Dolly the Cook"), Ph: 920-737-4470

- Searching for anyone who served in Special Forces Team A-423, Tinh Biên, Vietnam, during Khmers Kampuchea-Krom training. Please contact to help write up actions from August–December 1965, for submission to The Drop magazine. Contact: Maj. (retired) James Oerding, Ph: 717-706-3544, Email: escapesunlimited@yahoo.com
- Searching for Radioman 2nd Class Billy Garrett, USS Mauna Kea (AE-22), 1966–1967. Contact: Dick States, Ph: 301-848-7804, Email: statesinwally@yahoo.com
- Searching for Ivory Moore, U.S. Air Force, stationed at Francis E. Warren AFB, 1964–65, and Tan Son Nhut AB, 1966–67. Contact: Tom Bloss, Ph: 304-634-8185
- Searching for anyone stationed at Fort Hunter Liggett, CA, 1976–79. Contact: Debi Wolverton, Email: debrakatic@yahoo.com
- Searching for Herman Weaver, Robert Smith, Maurice Smith, Michael Natalie and Michael Payne from 31st Engineer Battalion, stationed at Phước Vinh Base Camp, 1969–70. They were all wounded the same day as me in Vietnam. Contact: Tim Hogan, Ph: 617-840-2940
- Searching for Robert R. Brandenburg, who was a cook at the 225th Station Hospital in Münchweiler, Germany. He was stationed with me at the hospital in November 1955. Contact: Herbert E. Hinton, Ph: 908-475-1586
- Searching for Chief Personnelman Valerie Tarkington, stationed Boston Towers of Crystal City, 1984–88. I was stationed at the Pentagon and left for Rota, Spain, in 1985. Contact: Denise Tuck, Ph: 910 603 0586, Email: denisetuck19@hotmail.com
- Searching for Richard F. Harris, stationed with the 36th Tactical Fighter Wing, Bitburg AB, Germany, 1972–74. Contact: Richard "Woody" Woodman, Ph: 218-969-3955; Joe Paciorek, Ph: 210-601-6307
- Seeking for any crew members, or their family or descendants, who were on the same escort carriers (USS Prince William (CVE-31), USS Barnes (CVE-20), USS Altamaha (CVE-18) and USS Long Island (CVE-1) as my father, ARM1c Herman Victor "Vic" Joachim in World War II, between January 1942 and February 1944. They served with Fighting Torpedo Squadron VT-40, Composite Squadron 40 and VC-20 flying TBM Avengers in the South Pacific, Solomon Islands and Munda Airfield. Vic's pilot was Lt. Everette G. Truly Jr. Contact: Kim Joachim Kraushar, Ph: 206-619-5095, Email: nepenthe2@yahoo.com

PLANNING A REUNION?

We welcome submissions from our readers for reunions and inquiries. Email the details to feedback@dav.org. Submissions must be received at least six months prior to the event date and are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety.



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

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



MONDAY, NOV. 13

DAV and Golden Corral partner again for Military Appreciation Night

Golden Corral will host its annual Military Appreciation Night on Monday, Nov. 13, from 5 to 9 p.m. Golden Corral restaurants nationwide will welcome our nation's veterans and active-duty service members for a free thank-you dinner buffet, drink and camaraderie.

Since partnering with Golden Corral in 2001, DAV chapters and departments have raised over \$18 million as a result of the annual event. In addition, Golden Corral has served more than 6 million complimentary meals. Military Appreciation Night is Golden Corral's way to honor and say thanks to our nation's veterans and active-duty military.



Share your evening! Send photos of your chapter or department at a Military Appreciation Night event to production@dav.org by Nov. 17, and your photo could be selected for the January/February 2024 edition of *DAV Magazine*.



NEW FALL FASHIONS!



LADIES' 3/4 SLEEVE RAGLAN
Navy/Heathered Navy
S-XL \$26 | 2XL-4XL \$29

OGIO COMMAND 1/4 SNAP
Spar Blue
S-XL \$46 | 2XL-4XL \$49



UNISEX TRI-BLEND LONG SLEEVE TEE
Olive Green or Burgundy
S-XL \$23 | 2XL-4XL \$26



ROTHCO U.S. FLAG CAP
Coyote Brown | \$20



1/4 ZIP WINDBREAKER
Graphite
S-XL \$50 | 2XL-4XL \$53



GARMENT DYED LONG SLEEVE POCKET TEE
Coal
S-XL \$23 | 2XL-4XL \$26

CAMELBAK CAN COOLER
Black | \$29



davstore.org

davstore.org | sales@dav.org | 877-426-2838, press 7 | 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger KY 41018 | M-F, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. ET

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