DAV

2012

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THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS AND DAV AUXILIARY



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J.R. Martinez is Disabled Veteran of the Year

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Top left, National Commander Donald L. Samuels addresses veterans and volunteers urging them to "look to each other for support and strength" throughout the week at the opening ceremony of the 2012 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colo.Top right, Many of the activities hosted at the clinic are first-time encounters for veterans. Sled hockey has proven to be an increasingly popular and challenging draw for participants. Left, During the clinic, more than 400 veterans hit the trails on cross-country skis, snowshoes and snowmobiles.

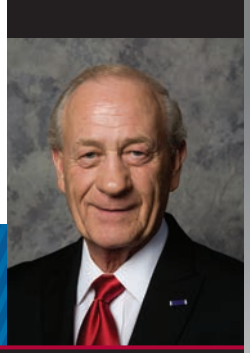
National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic





Left, In addition to traditional winter activities, veterans took part in outdoor water sports activities like kayaking and scuba diving. Right, National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess addresses veterans, staff and volunteers at the clinic. Burgess thanked the hundreds of volunteers, sponsors and nearly 200 ski instructors, for their selfless dedication to make this event possible.

Gratitude for Year of Service



from the NATIONAL COMMANDER

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve as your National Commander. It has been a year in which I witnessed the world's greatest veterans service organization's work from a wholly new perspective. I can say, without equivocation, it was an amazing year in my life and one which I will treasure.

Among the most exciting events were visits to the White House to meet with the President and First Lady regarding veterans issues. I was impressed that they consider veterans a national priority. In particular, it was an honor to represent DAV at a special White House dinner for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars along with National Adjutant Art Wilson and the President in attendance. In addition, the President's participation with us in Veterans Day and Memorial Day events underscored the Administration's high regard for veterans.

During the year, I met with Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki on a variety of DAV issues. I found these meetings with the Secretary to be very productive and informative in which the needs of sick and injured veterans and their families were discussed, and improvements were made in plans to better serve them. The VA's success in claims processing, caregiving, homelessness and other vital issues are some of the landmark results of this cooperation.

On Capitol Hill, I met with Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairmen Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) to discuss our vital legislative issues. Both are powerful advocates for injured and ill veterans.

It was a great honor to represent all 1.2 million DAV members at a joint meeting of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees during our Mid-Winter Conference. The support provided by the hundreds of DAV and Auxiliary members in the audience as I presented our legislative goals was both empowering and humbling. They were the thunder of the DAV storm supporting veterans legislation. You can't ask for better advocates than our membership to drive our message home to Congress.

Among the most rewarding opportunities I had this year was meeting with members at Department conventions across our nation. It's truly heartwarming to meet them and our Auxiliary who are the heart and soul of our grassroots program. They are the force that makes our legislative, service and voluntary services programs work. Without a doubt, they are the most dedicated members of any veterans service organization.

Those conventions also gave me the much-desired opportunity to meet with volunteers who donate their time as Transportation Network drivers, VAVS volunteers and our Local Veterans Assistance Program volunteers who work on behalf of veterans in less served communities around the nation.

A heart-warming event was the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, where I witnessed the transformation of individuals who went from being unsure of their future to being filled with hope and confidence. The winter sports clinic is truly a Miracle on a Mountainside where building better lives for veterans often begins.

I want to give my special thanks to our professional National Service Officers and Transition Service Officers who each day fulfill our mission in its most meaningful way. They are dedicated men and women who devote their lives to service for veterans. They, along with our Department and Chapter Service Officers, are at the core of our service to veterans.

Working with leaders like National Adjutant Art Wilson, National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess and Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski was a rewarding experience. On a daily basis, they manage our organization with an unsurpassed level of professionalism. I thank them for sharing their wisdom and leadership with me. They and their very capable staffs made my job easier and quite enjoyable. I became a better National Commander because of them.

As I close my year as National Commander, I am giving special thanks to all our members. You serve your fellow veterans with pride and dignity, with the same honor and courage as you served our nation. For you war has not ended, nor will it ever. Service is what sets you apart, earning you the proud distinction as honored veterans. Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving you.

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Cover: *J.R. Martinez, Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year (Photo Courtesy of J.R. Martinez)*



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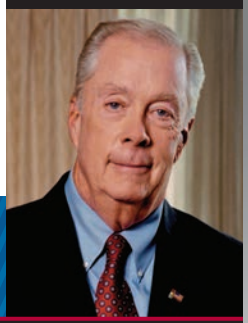
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Honoring Our Promises



from the NATIONAL ADJUTANT

ARTHUR H. WILSON

As it says in our Constitution and Bylaws, the supreme power of DAV is vested in a National Convention. And that's a very good reason to be a part of our 91st National Convention in Las Vegas.

Because we are a rules-based, member-driven organization, crucial decisions such as choosing our volunteer leadership and adopting our legislative priorities are made by the members who are registered delegates to the convention.

We are a dynamic, democratic organization through which our members and their elected Chapter, Department and National leaders have a voice in the decision process that sets DAV's course for the year.

The National Convention is the single largest gathering for our members, chock full of informative seminars and activities that will help bring everyone up to date on vital issues. It's an opportunity to hear first-hand from VA and congressional officials and staff about legislation and policies that affect the everyday lives of disabled veterans and their families. From access to quality health care to the claims processing system and from programs and benefits for family caregivers to the budget battle, you'll gain a better understanding of the opportunities we face in these challenging times.

As National Commander Donald L. Samuels has said, "With our nation at war, you need to hear first-hand about the issues facing our newest generation of disabled veterans and how DAV will address those issues." And it's not just the newest generation of disabled veterans we're here to serve, it's every disabled veteran from every war or conflict who has been injured or made ill because of their service and sacrifice for our great country.

That is why it is so important that our members do all they can to make sure we honor our promises to the men and women who served. Our National Convention is the place to get the information and tools you'll need to carry out our mission.

But remember it's always a fun gathering as well, and we have arranged for a fine lineup of musical talent to entertain you and give you a chance to relax and enjoy each other's company.

Membership in DAV allows you to be a part of an active, powerful force for change in the veterans community. But like any nonprofit membership organization, we struggle with how to get new members while retaining existing ones. So, if you want to help us grow and remain the finest veterans service organization anywhere, I encourage you to attend our 91st National Convention at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel Aug. 4-7.

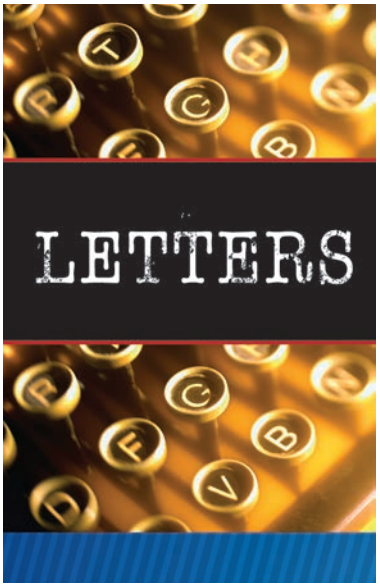
Not Mincing Words

As a disabled Korean Conflict veteran since 1952, a life member since 1977 and an attorney in Florida since 1958, I have come to dislike wordy, self-serving addresses. The address by National Commander Samuels to the House & Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees did not waste a word; it was clear, concise and to the point. Thank you, Commander. ***Charles M. Kelly, Naples, Fla.***

A Modest Proposal

The VA currently employs many contract administrators; why not use this cadre in an oversight and training position and bring contract personnel in to process the many claims on file and all the anticipated new ones?

DAV Magazine welcomes letters. However, due to the volume of mail, we are unable to acknowledge every letter. Readers can also comment via email through feedback@dav.org. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving individual claims are referred to the DAV Service Department, DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, Ohio 45250-0301.



These people employed as contract personnel would offer some savings, as the expansion and withdrawal would not obligate long-term salaries necessary to maintain career employees. There is also the Defense Contracting Agency which administers thousands of varied services by contract. We have the in-house ability in place to solve this problem. Why can't we use what we have? ***Chester A. Swafford, Henderson, Nev.***

Legislation Only a Start

Recently the veterans jobs bill was signed into law. We must be vigilant to ensure our veterans receive full benefit. I am a retired United States Postal Service (USPS) employee. For the last eight years of my employment, I had tried to get the USPS to recognize its obligations under the Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program passed in 1983. If government agencies are not held accountable for veterans programs, how can we monitor the private sector? ***Les Yaeger, Green Bay, Wisc.***

Thanks to DSO

In Lubbock we have a guy who is truly a blessing. He has the title of Department Service Officer (DSO). I think everyone knows that whoever designs the forms and questionnaires for the VA has too much time on their hands. My claim has been pending since January 2011, and the paperwork battle has scared me nearly to death. Fortunately, I have my DSO. I take the forms and letters over to him in his office at the VA clinic. He thumbs through them, pulls out a couple of pages, writes a notation on one of them, and says "Sign here." I then ask, "Is that what I mail?" And he says "No, I will mail it." He makes life easier for a bunch of us old guys. ***Jacob E. Way, Lubbock, Texas***



POW Medal...
Former prisoner of war Marion Fowler, center, is congratulated by Chapter Service Officer Andy Haydu of Chapter 1 in Tuscaloosa, Ala., left, Montgomery Ala., National Service Office Supervisor Michael Michelotti, rear and Chapter 1 Adjutant Al Miller, right, on his receipt of the POW Medal during ceremonies at the Tuscaloosa VA medical center. Fowler credited DAV's work as instrumental in obtaining the medal and POW status 66 years after he was among a group of 42 soldiers captured by German SS troops in Austria during World War II.

Grace Under Fire

By Rob Lewis



PHOTO : LUCIEN CAPEHART/GETTY IMAGES

It almost seemed unfair.

J. R. Martinez won the 13th season of ABC's hit series "Dancing with the Stars" with the grace and confidence of a professional dancer.

But on that night, what was past turned out to be prologue. Martinez's harrowing experience as a severely burned victim of an ambush in Iraq paved the way to a role on a daytime TV drama followed by his dance-show victory.

"If he didn't break after surviving that ambush and those terrible burns, he certainly wasn't going to be broken by any other challenge life has to offer," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "It is that preference and his willingness to become the face of a generation of wounded veterans that we want to honor."

The honor Wilson mentions is the 2012 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year award. Martinez, whose nomination was put forward by the Department of California, will officially receive the award Aug. 4 at the DAV National Convention in Las Vegas.

"Receiving this award from such a prominent group like DAV is almost like receiving a medal for some amazing work I didn't get a chance to continue to do in the military," said Martinez.

Born in Shreveport, La., in 1983 and raised mostly in Dalton, Ga., Martinez enlisted in the Army infantry in 2002. He took part in the invasion of Iraq as part of 1st Platoon, Delta Co., 2/502nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade in the storied 101st Airborne Division out of

J.R. Martinez and Past National Commander Dennis Joyner attend Lady in Red Gala to benefit The American Veterans Disabled For Life Memorial.



J.R. joined the military at 19 as a U. S. Army infantryman.

Ft. Campbell, Ky.

"I enlisted in the Army for many reasons. After 9/11, I felt like it gave me an opportunity to give back to a country that had given so much to my family, who are from El Salvador," Martinez said. "Of course, it also gave me an opportunity to earn college money, be more independent and travel the world."

Fellow soldier Justin Hart, who now serves as National Service Office Supervisor in Hartford, Conn., remembers his impression of Martinez more than a decade after their first meeting.

"He was a great soldier with a high work ethic," Hart said. "I remember having a brief couple of days before we received the orders to invade Iraq. Our leaders were going through different scenarios to see how we would react if someone got shot or blown up. JR said he would run in and get them no matter what because these soldiers were like a second family to him.

"Of course, the answer our supervisors were looking for was to secure the area first. It didn't matter to him. He was going in to help no matter what."

After the invasion, Martinez, Hart and the rest of their unit began the long, arduous process of securing Iraq, city by city. But in Karbala, Martinez's brief military career would come to an end when the Humvee he was driving was hit by a roadside bomb during a security patrol.

Hart, who was manning the .50 caliber machine gun turret atop the vehicle, has a vivid, if fragmented, version of what happened next.

"I remember waking up on the concrete road. I had no idea of what just took place," Hart said. "I felt this immense amount of heat coming from the right side of me and someone yelling in the background. I could not make out what it was they were yelling, so I looked in the direction. I saw this rubble of metal on fire. I was so close to the fire, it was burning the hairs on my body. I

(Continued on page 31)



PHOTO: DISNEY/ABC



PHOTO: KEVAN BROOKS/ADMEDIA

Left, Karina Smirnoff and J.R. Martinez win on "2011 Dancing with the Stars." Above, Martinez, center, joins Hollywood entertainment studios, television networks, talent agencies and guilds to launch "Got Your 6," a collective action initiative dedicated to creating opportunities for veterans in six categories: jobs, education, housing, health, family and leadership.





Above, a young Mike Montgomery on the beach at Chu Lai, Vietnam. Left, U.S. Marines of the 7th Regiment get into firing positions in Operation Utah, Republic of Vietnam, 1966.

Warrior Family Is a DAV Family

By Thom Wilborn

Mike Montgomery knows about service and sacrifice. A longtime member of DAV Chapter 12 in Albemarle, N.C., he's a Vietnam veteran who saw more than 22 combat operations in the 13 months he served in Southeast Asia.

But Mike isn't the only DAV member in his family. His late father, Eugene Montgomery, served with the Navy in the Pacific during World War II, participating in the invasions of Saipan, Tinian and Okinawa. His father-in-law, Milton Reckling, served in the Army infantry and invaded Luzon in the Philippines. His son, Mark, was injured by a roadside bomb while serving with the Army's 101st Airborne during the Gulf War, and another son, Jason, is a Navy Seabee who served two tours in Iraq and is now in Afghanistan.

"There's been somebody from our family in wartime service since my two uncles during World War I," said Montgomery. "We've all fought for our country, and DAV has been there for us the whole time."

"The Montgomery family shows the incalculable value of DAV to the men and women who served and sacrificed for our nation," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "They all served in combat and came to DAV for help."

"The Montgomery family is a DAV history in microcosm," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "Their stories are a testament to their dedication to service and our mission. Part of the family's pride in service in the defense of our liberties includes knowing that DAV always had their backs."

Mike Montgomery served in the U.S. Marine Corps with duty in Vietnam during 1965-66, participating in Operation Harvest Moon, a major offensive against the Viet Cong, and later Operation Utah against North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars.

During Operation Harvest Moon in December 1965, Montgomery was among the Marines ordered into the Que Son Valley to drive out a Viet Cong regiment that

had taken over the area and overrun a South Vietnamese regiment. For 11 days, the battle against "Charlie" seesawed until the enemy was driven off. The Marines lost 45 killed and 218 wounded. The toll of the Viet Cong was much greater – 407 killed and 33 captured.

"I saw villages burning and women and children crying and yelling," said Montgomery. "I saw shooting and people dying. It was the stuff that happened on a daily basis. Once while I was in an ambush, a snake crawled across my arm and I had to be still.

"In Operation Utah in March 1966, my company was flown by helicopter to a place inside the perimeter of the 32nd NVA infantry division," Montgomery said. The enemy troops had dug an underground fortress of interconnected tunnels, bunkers and spider holes on and around what was called Hill 50. The fight continued nonstop for two days against a well-trained, well-armed enemy. The Marines prevailed but lost 98 dead and 278 wounded.

"We got beat up pretty good," said Montgomery. "I didn't know if I was going to make it out of there. We held our positions and fought day and night. When we were re-enforced by two battalions, the NVA pulled out. My company lost probably 15 percent of the people we had. Maybe 20 percent between the wounded and killed.

After his tour in Vietnam, he spent three months in a Navy hospital on Okinawa recovering from malaria. When he was separated from the Marine Corps, he was admitted to a hospital for further care. He also suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the effects of Agent Orange exposure.

Back home, he went to DAV almost immediately with his disability claim and joined the organization, just as his father had. "DAV helped me when I first got out," said Montgomery. "DAV improved the quality of my life. I believe DAV is the best."

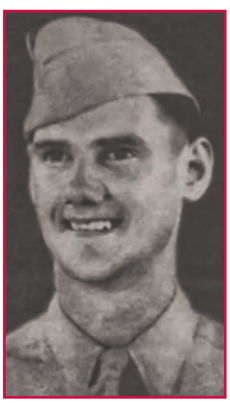
After five years of civilian life, Montgomery joined the Marine Corps Reserves and retires in 1980 as a chief warrant officer after 18 years.

Today, the onslaught of the malaria continues to wrack his body and DAV is updating his claim for increased benefits.

"The value of DAV is immeasurable," said Montgomery. "There's always someone there to help, and that means a lot to me. The National Service Officers are sympathetic. They've been there, and they know your problems and how to help."







Far left, Mike Montgomery, left, with his son, Jason, prior to his deployment to Afghanistan. Top, Mark Montgomery as a member of the 101st Airborne Division during the Gulf War. Bottom, Milton Reckling participated in the invasion of Luzon during World War II.

Montgomery's son, Mark, fought his war in the desert of Iraq against an aggressive enemy determined to stop coalition forces from freeing Kuwait. Assigned to the 101st Airborne, Mark was sent from Saudi Arabia to Forward Operating Base Bastogne, where the unit quickly began establishing a presence.

Satellite refueling stations, such as Bastogne, were set up to handle the vast air and armor armada that flowed into Iraq. The 101st also conducted defensive training operations almost around the clock. Several courses were laid out to practice the difficult task of desert land navigation.

"I was in a Humvee that was part of a convoy of fuel trucks to set up a base for the Blackhawks," Mark said. "On the way, a roadside bomb exploded among a bunch of camels. The Iraqis had booby traps set up in the camels and then attacked us.

"It was horrifying to have a bomb go off so near fuel trucks," he said. "There were about two dozen 10,000 gallon fuel trucks in the convoy."

When he returned from the Gulf War, Mark couldn't sleep more than two hours at a time. "I reacted to every loud sound," he said. "The war came home with me, and it is still there. I try to control it, but it gets triggered by different things.

"I exhausted every resource in the civilian world, but nothing helped," said Mark. "I was told I was fine and had insomnia. My dad told me about DAV, and it seemed like a logical choice. It was the best choice."

Life is better today for Mark since his claim was approved. He's getting the health care he needs and the compensation he's earned. "I'm going day-by-day," he said. "I'm staying employed and I'm taking my ACT test to enter college."

Mike Montgomery's youngest son, Jason, now serves in Afghanistan. "When he gets home, I will give him as much fatherly advice as he can stand and to get in contact with DAV because he's earned his benefits," said Montgomery. "He'll need help getting through the VA maze."

Jason, who also had two tours in Iraq, has already sacrificed for his nation by suffering injuries in the war. "DAV has been as much a part of our family as serving in the military," Mike said. "I have a good war buddy who became a DAV NSO, and my uncle was part of DAV. Going to DAV is pure pleasure."

"I'm proud to be in a family that wants to serve and proud to be in DAV," said Mark. "DAV absolutely does a good job serving veterans. My whole family is an example of that."



Mark Montgomery, standing, with his grandfather Milton Reckling at the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Quality Rating Decisions Solution to Backlog

Congressional oversight is necessary to ensure that the VBA shows progress in reducing or eliminating the claims backlog instead of short-term gains at the expense of long-term reform.



DAV has cautioned the House Veterans' Affairs Committee that accelerating the disability claims process is less of a solution to the mounting backlog than deciding claims correctly the first time, avoiding lengthy appeals.

"In order to achieve real and lasting success, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) must instead remain focused on creating a claims processing system that is carefully designed to get each claim done right the first time," Assistant National Legislative Director Jeffrey Hall said in written testimony.

"Eliminating the backlog is not necessarily the same goal as reforming the claims processing system, nor does it guarantee that veterans are better served," he explained. "While accuracy has been and remains one of the performance standards that must be met by all [VBA] employees, new performance standards adopted over the past two years appear to have done little to create sufficient incentives to elevate quality above production."

Hall urged Congress to keep the VBA focused on improved training, testing and quality control as the foundations for claims reform. "We believe it is essential that all VBA employees, coaches and managers undergo regular testing to measure job skills and knowledge, as well as to measure the effectiveness of the training," he said.

"By catching errors at the regional office level, where they can more easily and quickly be corrected, we not only serve [veterans], we also save the VBA time and resources they would otherwise have expended on lengthy and burdensome appeals," Hall said.

Using DAV's training programs as an example, he explained that our National Service Officers (NSOs) have "a lifelong commitment to achieving excellence." They initially receive 16 months of training in developing claims, followed by a comprehensive Structured and Continuing Training program to keep current on changes to laws and regulations affecting veterans benefits. "They then start the entire training cycle again from the beginning, but the changes, updates and new information that is provided by DAV's national training staff are constantly monitored and updated in the course material," said Hall.

"The VBA training program for its employees, particularly Veterans Service Representatives and Rating Veterans Service Representatives is shorter, less rigorous and has fewer testing requirements," he said. "There is substantial evidence demonstrating that represented veterans receive better and more accurate outcomes than those without representation.

"Our NSOs improve the quality of the claims filed, thereby reducing the workload on VBA," said Hall. "We also reduce the burden on VBA's contact offices by interacting with veterans seeking routine information or updates on the status of their claims."

He praised new VBA initiatives that are streamlining the claims review, such as the Fully Developed Claims process, which encourages the veteran to gather as much evidence as possible to support the claim, and the new Disability Benefits Questionnaires, which can substitute private medical evidence for a VA medical examination, cutting months off processing a claim. (See March/April issue of *DAV Magazine*.)

Addressing the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), Hall noted DAV has helped the VBA improve and redesign its claims process. "We have and will continue to work with VBA as it completes the redesign of the new operating model so that claims are accurately

processed and [decided] right the first time," he said.

The VBMS is an information technology system to provide a comprehensive, paperless, rules-based method of processing and deciding claims for VA benefits. Hall urged the committee to fully fund the program. "Over the next year, Congress must ensure that the funding required and designated for the VBMS is protected from cuts or reprogramming and spent as Congress intended," he said.

"The openness and candor of the VBA leadership in keeping us and others informed of what they are doing are very welcomed," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "The VBA and DAV have worked in cooperation on the VBMS development to ensure that it accomplishes the goals of both organizations timeliness and accuracy. It is to the credit of the VBA that they are working diligently and cooperatively to initiate a program that brings the maximum benefits to veterans."

Next, it is up to Congress to play a crucial role in the process by providing "careful and continuing oversight … to help ensure that the VBA achieves true reform and not just arithmetic milestones," said Hall.

Most important, he said, is the congressional oversight necessary to ensure that the VBA shows progress in reducing or eliminating the claims backlog instead of short-term gains at the expense of long-term reform.

"VBA must transition as quickly as feasible to a fully digital processing system, which may require significant upfront investment, but will pay long-term dividends for veterans," Hall said.

Spending Bill Spares VA From Cuts

By Dave Autry

The House of Representatives has approved legislation providing $135.4 billion for veterans programs and services in the next fiscal year. Of that amount, $60.7 billion is discretionary funding for the VA, about a four-percent increase over this year's level. Military construction, also included in the bill, was cut by 2.4 percent compared to the current level.

The measure, which has yet to be taken up by the full Senate, includes $44.4 billion for medical services, including third-party collections. That is $2.3 billion more than provided in fiscal 2012. About $52 billion for medical care, which includes medical services, medical support and compliance and medical facilities, was provided in fiscal 2012 through advance appropriations.

Included in the bill is $54.5 billion in advance appropriations for veterans medical care for fiscal year 2014.

Also included is $608 million for minor construction projects, well below DAV's recommended level of $3.6 billion.

"Although the bill provides an increase in VA funding, the fact remains that more resources are sorely needed to meet the needs of our injured and ill veterans," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "DAV and other veterans groups have recommended an additional $1.5 billion for medical care and $3 billion more for major and minor construction projects to maintain the VA's critical infrastructure."

Included in the bill is $6.2 billion specifically for mental health services, $73 million for suicide prevention and $220 million for traumatic brain injury treatment. Another $5.8 billion is for treatment services, housing and job training for homeless veterans and $250 million is for rural health services.

Under the bill, 75 percent of funds for the integrated medical record program between the VA and the Department of Defense would be withheld until the program office submits a schedule for data standardization and a report to Congress on the program's annual spending.

"DAV members are urged to contact their lawmakers and urge them to fully fund the VA at the levels recommended in *The Independent Budget*," said National Legislative Director Joseph A. Violante. "Tell Congress to honor our promises to the men and women who have served and sacrificed for this country."

Amazing Volunteers Receive Seal Awards



DAV Seal Award winner Mary Ann Keckler, right, and Tampa VA medical center director Kathleen Fogarty welcome women veterans. (Photo by VA photographer Ebby Talebi)

By Thom Wilborn

Mary Ann Keckler of Valrico, Fla., and Patricia Davis of Oak Creek, Wisc., have been selected to receive this year's George H. Seal Memorial Trophy for their amazing work as volunteers providing exemplary service to veterans. For years, they have given helpful and compassionate care to thousands of ill and injured veterans and their families.

"Keckler and Davis are outstanding representatives of the hardworking, dedicated DAV and Auxiliary volunteers who donate thousands of hours of special care and kindness at VA medical facilities across the nation," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "They are committed individuals who are truly appreciated by our veterans."

"What is remarkable about these volunteers is that they have their own health and physical problems,but they push them aside to give veterans the care and support they need and deserve," said National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess. "Each volunteer has a particular reason to serve veterans, but they all will tell you that they want to thank veterans who have sacrificed for our freedom."

The awards are conferred each year in memory of George H. Seal, who was DAV's Director of Membership and Voluntary Services and a leading organizer and administrator of the VA Volunteer Service program from 1952 until his death in 1977. The presentations will be made Aug. 4 at the 91st National Convention in Las Vegas.

Keckler, a member of Chapter 67 in Brooksville, Fla., is a Navy veteran who served from 1959 to 1962. She will receive the DAV Seal award for her volunteer work in the spinal cord injury, polytrauma and recreational therapy units, as well as for organizing special events at the Tampa VA medical center. During the past 15 years, she has amassed more than 5,700 hours volunteering seven days a week, using a motorized wheelchair to get around the sprawling hospital.

"Seeing the smile on a veteran's face gives me my greatest thrill," Keckler said. "It means I've accomplished something for them. That smile means everything."

Her motorized wheelchair takes her to "every nook and cranny" of the hospital, including areas where veterans are very seriously ill or injured. "I go everywhere with a smile on my face and never take it off," she said. "I never let them see signs of concern."

The spinal cord injury unit has special meaning for Keckler. Her son, Robert, is an Army veteran who requires full-time care after

being paralyzed in a diving accident while on military leave in 1987. She spends every evening caring for her son, but the days are spent helping other veterans. "I get the greatest satisfaction of my life from volunteering," said Keckler. "I realize that my volunteering is making a difference."

"Mary Ann serves with passion and a tenacity that ensures veterans and active-duty service members and their families receive the best care," said Tampa VA medical center Voluntary Service Program Manager Camilla Thompson. "As a veteran, she has a great appreciation for the sacrifices our veterans and active-duty service members have made for our freedoms. She shares their job and their pain."

Davis, a member of Unit 19 in Milwaukee, Wisc., has volunteered more than 21,000 hours during the last 12 years. She will receive the Seal award for her work with the Transportation Network, serving as a recreation volunteer and chairing the VA Voluntary Service Executive Committee at the Milwaukee VA medical center.

"Patty is so giving," said VA Voluntary Service Program Manager Denise Jashinsky. "She has a heart of gold. Whatever the need is on the Palliative Care-Hospice Unit, she'll find a way to fulfill it."

"I feel that veterans need to know we have someone who cares for them and to help them any way we can," said Davis. "It gives me a great feeling that I can help the people who sacrificed to obtain our freedom."

Volunteering is very special for her. "It warms my heart," Davis said. "I am making a difference in a person's life by helping them, and I will do whatever I can to help."

Davis averages 45 hours a week at the VA medical center. As Transportation Network coordinator, she has 152 volunteer drivers who drove 402,000 miles transporting 16,131 veterans and donated 38,888 hours behind the wheel last year.

"If Patty didn't do what she does on a daily basis, the veterans would have a difficult time getting to their medical center appointments and back home, or might even cancel because they would have no means of transportation," said Jashinsky. "She has done so much for veterans and their families. We're so very proud of her."

"DAV and the Auxiliary also are proud of Keckler and Davis," said Wilson. "They do a remarkable job lifting the spirits of veterans who are facing critical medical issues."

"Without question, both of these Seal award recipients have earned this recognition," Burgess said. "They are setting a standard for other volunteers to achieve. They are providing the leadership that DAV and the Auxiliary seek in all those who represent us."

"I wouldn't be able to accomplish what I do without the help of DAV and all the Chapters and Units in Florida," said Keckler. "I only have praise for our National Service Officers who have helped me 100 percent. Volunteering isn't a one-man show."

"I hope I've changed the lives of veterans," said Davis. "I'm grateful to my volunteers and drivers. I'll do this until I can't do it anymore."



Seal Award recipient and Auxiliary member Patty Davis, right, gives instructions to Transportation Network volunteer driver David Willings.



DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY

from the NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF VOLUNTARY SERVICES

RON MINTER

Helping Veterans in Your Community

Where there is the interest in helping a veteran, there is the opportunity for an unmet need to be answered.

In addition to the bread-and-butter programs at VA medical centers, which enhance and make care possible for veterans and their families, we each have a role to play in fulfilling our nation's promises to those who served.

Sometimes that can be as simple as helping that elderly veteran next door clean out his gutters or get to the grocery store. Or, it can be free skills-based services like providing a computer class to veterans or using a special ability to improve the lives of those who've served.

Whether you're doing something one-on-one with a veteran or for a DAV Chapter or Department, or partnering with your friends or coworkers to take on a big project, anyone donating their time to help veterans is a volunteer.

And if you're volunteering, you should be proud of doing the right thing for all the right reasons.

I know that many of you volunteer out of a sense of duty and the satisfaction that comes with making a difference for some, but it's important to take credit for those hours for many reasons.

First, you deserve it. Second, it encourages others to get involved. And it helps organizations like DAV show the public and lawmakers the commitment we share to the men and women who've sacrificed on behalf of our nation.

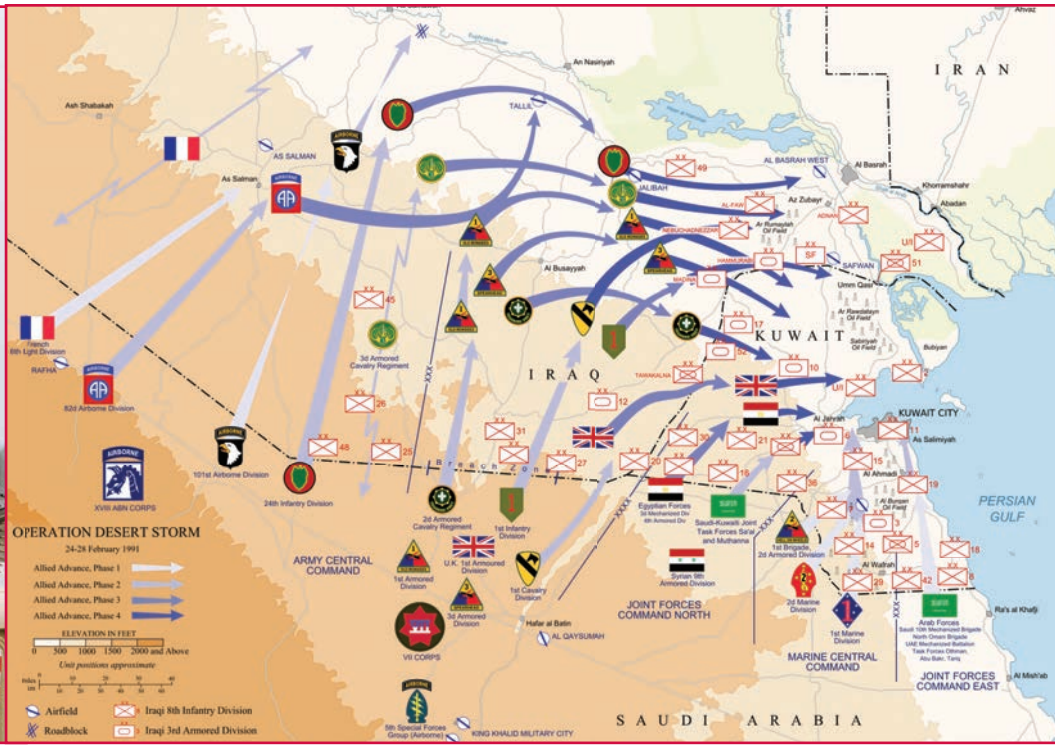
At that, taking credit and keeping track of all your volunteer hours shows one and all that there are those among us who are willing to go above and beyond to honor and respect service.

The Local Veterans Assistance Program helps us track the hard work people are doing beyond traditional volunteerism in and on the road to VA facilities. These hours are accumulated in a variety of ways. Some are generated by those who volunteer in their Units, Chapters and Departments. Others come from the open hearts and creative minds of those who are meeting unmet needs in their communities to help veterans, caregivers and family members.

The hours are recorded at the state level by DAV Departments. Since the program's inception in 2007, more than 780,000 hours of services directly to and on behalf of veterans have been recorded. And while that is an impressive figure, I'm sure it represents just a fraction of the assistance that volunteers provided annually.

Thank you for all you are doing to enhance the quality of life for our heroes who've served. In honor of your service and theirs, please contact your local DAV Department and keep track of your hours. It helps us quantify your compassion and commitment. For those Departments needing assistance accessing the system and reporting volunteering activities, please contact the Voluntary Services Department at National Headquarters and we will help you get started.





Gulf War Vets Sought for Survey

The New Jersey War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) has created a survey designed to help better understand the problems and needs of Persian Gulf War veterans. The survey asks for demographic information (age, sex, etc.), deployment experience(s), physical and mental health problems and treatments or wellness practices that Gulf War veterans may or may not be currently using. Although some of the sections may seem to ask similar questions, researchers have tried to keep the survey as brief as possible while also gathering the information needed to understand what services would be beneficial for Gulf War veterans.

To complete the survey, veterans can find it online at www.surveymonkey.com/s/WRIISC_PGW.

The information gathered is anonymous and will not link survey answers to any individual. At the end of the survey, there is an option for veterans to provide their contact information so that the WRIISC can keep them informed about its clinical, research and education services. This contact information is stored separately from the survey answers and will not create a link to the survey answers. For more information visit the center's website www.warrelatedillness.va.gov.

Disabled Veterans Sought for PBS Documentary

A PBS station that is developing a historical TV documentary about public attitudes toward disability wants to find veterans from different wars who are willing to talk about their experience of coming home as a vet with disabilities.

We want to profile vets from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Iraq-Afghanistan to see if disabled vets in different time periods have experienced different reactions. We're interested in your experiences looking for work as a disabled vet, and attitudes from neighbors and people in general as you reintegrated into your community.

Did disabled vets in the 1940s and '50s have a different experience from Vietnam vets in the 1970s? Do Iraq-Afghanistan vets come back to yet another kind of experience?

If you are willing to talk about your experience for our film, please contact Mary Malone at memalone@simpatico.ca or call 519-432-7395. I'm Not Broken is the working title of the documentary. Also visit http://will.illinois.edu/ for more information.

VA Expands Use of New Claims System

By Dave Autry

The Department of Veterans Affairs has begun to deploy its new operating model to improve benefits delivery to veterans, their families and their survivors. From now until Oct. 1, the new system will be put to use at 12 regional offices and at the remaining 40 regional offices by the end of 2013.

"DAV has been working in cooperation with the VA to improve and streamline the claims system, and what we've seen so far puts them on the road to getting it right the first time," said National Service Director Garry J. Augustine.

Through a combination of technology, innovation and quality assurance measures, the VA has developed "transformation initiatives" that have been evaluated, tested and measured and are being rolled out nationwide. Meanwhile, the VA will continue to track and measure the effects the transformation plan has on reducing the backlog of disability claims and providing more timely and accurate decisions.

"This continuous tracking and measuring of effectiveness will doubtless result in some refinements along the way," Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski said. "But it's all part of the process, and DAV will remain actively engaged throughout."

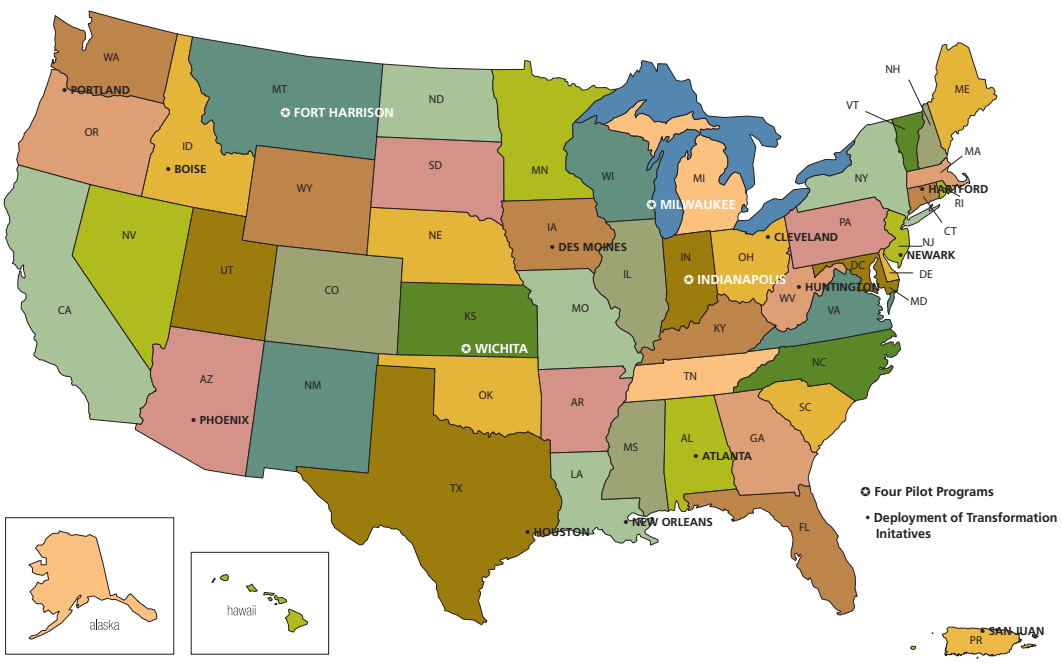
According to the VA, the major components of the transformation plan include:

- The Intake Processing Center, which adds a formalized triage process to associate claims documents and other mail with veterans' files;
- Segmented Processing Lanes will allow claims that can be more easily rated to move quickly through the system. More complex claims will be processed by more experienced and skilled employees;
- Cross-Functional Teams will support a case-management approach to claims processing that minimizes rework and reduces processing time; and
- The Veterans Benefits Management System is a new electronic claims processing system that employs rules-based technologies to improve decision speed and quality.

The VA already has implemented Quality Review Teams to evaluate station and individual employee performance and conduct in-process reviews to eliminate errors at the earliest possible stage.

Simplified and Standardized Rating Notification Letters also give veterans one letter that provides notice of the VA's decision, including a summary of the evidence considered and the reason for the decision.

The 12 regional offices to begin the deployment of the transformation initiatives are: Huntington, W.Va.; Hartford, Conn.; Portland, Ore.; Houston; Cleveland; Des Moines, Iowa; Boise, Idaho; Phoenix; New Orleans; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Atlanta; and Newark, N.J. This deployment follows four pilot programs in Indianapolis, Ind., Wichita, Kan.; Milwaukee; and Fort Harrison, Mont.





POSITIVE SPIRIT

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

By Ashleigh Bryant

The forewarning for first-timers attending the 26th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is generally the same: Prepare yourself for an emotional experience.

This is an understatement, to say the very least.

"What I've seen here has been truly miraculous," said National Commander Donald Samuels, a first-timer who tested the slopes himself in a sit-ski. "I looked around me and saw nothing but smiling veterans, smiling families. All of Snowmass Village seemed to be filled with the positive spirit these veterans brought with them."

For as profound an experience as it is known to be, there are some emotions that never seem to come into play at the clinic. Yes, there are undoubtedly moments of frustration and anger for veterans as they struggle to overcome enormous personal obstacles, but it is uncommon to see that bubble to the surface. There is no pity exchanged between veterans, but rather a spirit of camaraderie and mutual encouragement. The clinic is no place for commiseration, and participants may as well check all self-doubt at the door.

Nearly 400 veterans and service members with traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, amputations, visual impairments, neurological conditions and other disabilities made their way to the clinic to test their mettle at sports like skiing, scuba diving, hockey, rock climbing and trapshooting.

Near the center of the village, a veteran climbed from the seat of her wheelchair to the top of the rock wall. As she struggled against weakening biceps in the last few feet, the cries of support and enthusiasm from her fellow veterans carried through the air and echoed off the mountainside until she made her final push. She gave the bell at the top of the wall a loud and victorious ring, sending those veterans below into fits of cheering and applause. These men and women lend each other every fiber of support they can muster to lift each other up.

Even the most desperate stories a veteran may share at the clinic are not enough to overshadow the fact that he or she is there, taking positive steps toward a better life. The clinic is a place where real flesh-and-blood success stories are written before your eyes.

Another veteran shared his experience of having a "30-year love affair" with substance abuse before getting back on the right path to clean up his life. Is that the story we want to hear? Not exactly. But we know the realities facing our veterans. We know that no one comes home from war truly the same, and that service in the nation's military leaves scars which, no matter how small, place veterans at higher risk for things like homelessness, drug addiction and suicide. We cannnot solve those problems by tucking them away and not talking about them. So yes, in a way, a story about victory against a 30-year potentially life-ending struggle is exactly the kind of success we want to hear about.

It serves as a clear reminder that triumph against physical odds is not always the most challenging hurdle for these veterans, but overcoming those obstacles is a jumping off point for these men and women to rebuild their confidence and, ultimately, their lives.

In addition to the full schedule of sporting activities afforded to veterans, the clinic offers a wide range of group sessions dedicated to healing the emotional trauma associated with injury and illness.

Marine veteran and author of the book *Jarhead*, Anthony Swofford, hosted a session on how to craft and use creative writing workshops as part of rehabilitative therapy. Swofford explained that this can not only help with a veteran's cognitive abilities, but also serve as a form of expression to help put the past in the past.

"I like to think about it as a way for vets to slow down and find a place of quiet for themselves," said Swofford. "One man came up to me after the class and thanked me. It made him realize he could safely articulate what he had been through, and then through the act of writing he was making more sense of it and making more sense of his injuries."

Like Swofford, there are hundreds of volunteers who gave freely of their time to make the clinic possible. That includes both current and former members of the U.S. Disabled Ski Team, as well as others dedicated to making every aspect of the clinic run smoothly.

At the end of the day, the veterans themselves tell the clinic's story so much better than anyone else can.

"I've heard them talk about how this clinic brought them back from the edge of depression, how it gave others purpose and drive to exceed their own perceived limitations," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "It's amazing how one event can do so much to convince a person how much they are truly capable of, and I know these men and women will carry that with them throughout the rest of the year."





Left, A veteran scales the mobile rock wall which stood in the heart of the clinic. Even veterans who normally use wheelchairs were able to take part in this specially adapted sport, relying solely on their upper body strength to climb their way to the top.
Right, Actor Eric Stolhanske (right), member of the Broken Lizard comedy troupe responsible for movies like "Super Troopers" and "Beer-fest," spent several days meeting with veterans and taking part in clinic activities with them. Stolhanske, who began working with DAV earlier this year, is an amputee himself, having used a prosthetic device since his early childhood.



Jared Behee – Freedom Award Recipient

The 2012 Freedom Award was bestowed upon Jared Behee, a retired Army staff sergeant. Behee is one of the most familiar faces at the clinic, having attended five years in a row.

"The people here understand what I'm going through, and they don't look down on me," he explained. "I've made a lot of friends."

During Behee's second tour in Iraq in 2005, he volunteered for a security mission during which he sustained a gunshot wound through the head. It was the kind of wound soldiers are not expected to live through. But Behee is, as he puts it, "a survivor."

Usually known for sporting his trademark Superman cape, Behee sees the yearly clinic as a chance to come together with other wounded veterans and prove that limitations are merely a suggestion, not an absolute.

"I can be more positive, and it gives me a more positive outlook on life," he said. "I notice significant differences in my cognitive abilities every year I come back. And I'm more independent now, thanks to the good people at VA."

More importantly for Behee, it's about giving back. He volunteers his time at the VA hospital near his California home, where he also receives therapy. And how does he see himself, seven years after the event that changed the course of his life?

"Like I'm the old Jared Behee, before I was injured. I'm a little slower, I speak funny. But it's getting better thanks to the therapy," he said. "And I'm engaged to be married. I can't wait for next year to come around so we can get married, because she's a lovely woman."

Alexis Courneen

Alexis Courneen's family has what she calls "a different kind of normal." Her two daughters were born after her 1998 injury aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Katherine Walker*, which left her with severe nerve damage, TBI and spinal injuries.

"Sometimes I feel like my kids miss out on things, but they don't know any different because it's the way it's always been," said Courneen. "I've never taken a bike ride with my kids before. To have a six-and a nine-year-old…it's kind of a hard thing."

Courneen, her husband and two daughters attended a similar program in January near their Connecticut home, where they were able to, for the very first time, take to the slopes together as a family.

"I have a hard time because I feel like my girls don't know who I was before my injury," said Courneen. "But that day on the mountain, they got to see a little piece of me, and that was just so awesome. If it weren't for clinics like this, we wouldn't be able to do things like that."

Even with life's difficulties, Courneen contends she and her family are more resilient because of her injuries. The clinic, she explained, was another reminder of how strong they can be.

"There's no limits, none," she said. "You look around you and you see people. There's just total heart."



PROFILES

Dan O'Connor

Dan O'Connor enlisted in the Marine Corps in May 1967 and went to Vietnam just four months later, becoming part of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines in the area called the Arizona Territory. Coming home, transitioning back to civilian life was entirely different than it is today, especially for someone who had survived in the face of his unit's catastrophic casualty rate.

"I hid my wounds well. I hid them really well. Back in those days, you didn't elaborate on a job application," said O'Connor. "You didn't tell them you'd been in the Marine Corps and you didn't tell them you'd been in Vietnam. Because they wouldn't hire you."

After enjoying a successful post-military career, a motorcycle accident in 2004 took his leg below the knee, ultimately landing him at the clinic and showing him a higher purpose.

"When this happened, it happened for a reason, to give me a mission," he said. "And my mission now until the day I go is to work with these young kids.

O'Connor now coaches the team at the Wounded Warrior Regiment at Quantico, Va., taking his Marines to the Wounded Warrior Games in 2011 where they won a gold and silver medal. He explains it is events like these that bring back confidence for many injured and ill veterans.

Matthew Wade

September 11 holds a different kind of meaning for 23-year-old Navy veteran Matthew Wade. It was on that day in 2009, while serving in Korea, that he was injured in a friendly climbing competition among friends and his life changed forever.

"I got to the top and I fell 40 feet, bounced, fell another ten feet and landed on my back," said Wade. He underwent emergency surgery to treat a punctured lung and spinal injuries and was put into a medically induced coma.

"When I woke up, they pretty much told me right away that I was paralyzed from the chest down. And I just said, 'Okay.' I pretty much accepted it from the beginning," said Wade, attributing his positive attitude to a strong support network of family and friends.

At the clinic, Wade has played sled hockey, skied and visited the hot springs to try swimming. Wade said he has always taken his injury in stride and is most surprised at others' reaction to how far he has come since the accident.

"I've gone from the point where I could barely lift my iPod and not feel anything, to now where I have really strong biceps and triceps and I can move my fingers in my left hand and I have feeling everywhere except my left leg. I'd say I've come pretty far."



Nickolas Infanti



Within a four-year enlistment in the Marine Corps, Nickolas Infanti became a combat veteran of both Iraq and Afghanistan, hardly uncommon for a Marine serving this nation in the post-9/11 military.

Following his time in Iraq, Infanti's unit was assigned to some of the most hard-fought districts in Afghanistan, including Marjah and Sangin, in 2010, of the toughest years for coalition forces in the country. While out on patrol, Infanti's vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive devise. Though he experienced no immediate ailments, two months after coming home the symptoms of traumatic brain injury had set in.

"My memory is gone. I forget my own name sometimes, things like that," he explained. "I didn't start feeling anything until I came home, and I started losing it. I couldn't sleep. My ears started ringing. I couldn't write anything down anymore. I couldn't spell simple words."

For him, the clinic is a place of respite, albeit packed with snowboarding, scuba diving and snowmobiling. Respite and common ground.

"My roommate and I have pretty much the same things going on, so we get along really well. I understand where he's coming from," said Infanti. "It's definitely a good getaway and lets you just think about fun stuff instead of…everything else."

Now back on track to earning his degree, Infanti has his hopes set on a career in law enforcement.



Shanda Taylor-Boyd

Shanda Taylor-Boyd, a 23-year Army veteran, has a personality as bright and vibrant as her wardrobe, and a spirit that energizes everyone she meets. In short, she's the kind of veteran who is right at home at the clinic.

In 2004, Taylor-Boyd, a former nurse at the Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash., was heading home after her shift to see her three daughters. Ten minutes from her house, she was blindsided by an oncoming vehicle. Ever focused, she demanded to return to work the next morning, unaware she was suffering from traumatic brain injury. Numerous hospitalizations and five years later, she was officially diagnosed with TBI.

Taylor-Boyd heard about the winter sports clinic by attending the summer sports clinic in 2011, and she credits those opportunities and the immense support she has received for enabling her to rebuild her life.

"It took many years to understand the TBI does not define me. The PTSD does not define me. And thanks to DAV and the VA, I have new life and a stronger life."



Disaster Aid Helps Veteran Families

By Thom Wilborn

DAV volunteers help clear debris from the farm of George Heeger, a disabled veteran who lost his Morning View, Ky., home in a tornado.

George Heeger faced disaster by flying "Old Glory" over his wrecked home. Caroline Snyder wept in gratitude for the compassion and support shown by DAV when she lost everything. They were among the victims of late February and early March tornadoes. They also found DAV ready to offer a helping hand and relief.

Heeger and his wife ran for the safety of their basement in their Morning View, Ky., home as an early March tornado swept through. "It was noisy, but it didn't last very long," he said. "I don't think it lasted more than 30 seconds, and then it was quiet."

At first, they believed the damage was slight, but then they saw the sky was above them. "We lost the barn, the house, the equipment shed and the garage," he said. "Just everything is gone. We've got to tear down what's left of the house and rebuild."

Hundreds of miles away in Harveyville, Kan., Snyder was frozen with fear by the howling wind, the shaking of her home and the lights flickering out. "We heard the wind roar," Snyder said. "I'll never forget it. It was pulling at the door and the walls shook.

"My daughter scooped up her kids and ran to the bathtub," she said. "I was frozen in place with fear when my daughter yelled to get in the bathtub." They clung to safety as their home was ripped apart around them. "After it was over, the roof had collapsed above us," said Snyder. "We stayed in the bathtub until a neighbor found us and took us in."

Heeger, Snyder and their families were among the lucky ones when 277 tornadoes struck across the Midwest, killing 57 people and causing at least $2.3 billion in damage. Kentucky suffered the worst with 22 deaths in the West Liberty area. The tornado there was on the ground for 86 miles with a peak wind speed of 165 mph and grew to a mile wide.

"Even though the area was devastated, DAV was there immediately after the storm extending our disaster aid," said National Voluntary Services Director Ron Minter. He was among the first in the area with other DAV National Headquarters staff who helped provide disaster aid, clean up debris and remove tree limbs from property. "Our staff gave assistance to ill and injured veterans who were still stunned from the powerful storm's effects," Minter said.

"Whenever disaster strikes our veterans, DAV is among the first

to help," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "Our mission means service at a time of great economic and emotional loss. We make every effort to reach out and serve our brother and sister veterans when nature strikes."

"March 2, 2012, is a day that will be remembered by those of us who work at DAV National Headquarters," said National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess. "As with all disasters, opportunities arise for people and organizations to help neighbors in need, many of whom were disabled veterans."

"DAV has been unbelievably helpful," said Heeger after he received a disaster assistance voucher to help pay for food, clothing, housing and other items his family immediately needed. "They're doing anything they can to help us. The DAV people coming here have no idea how much we do appreciate it."

"We found a flag in a tree," he said. "My son-in-law got it, cut my flag pole off so we could use it and hung it up. It's out there just waving in the breeze because we're in good shape."

Snyder wept when Wichita National Service Office Supervisor George Jaso gave her a disaster aid voucher to cover her family's immediate needs. "I started crying that DAV was giving so generously to us," she said. "Even thinking about it now, I start crying."

Snyder's husband, Paul, a Navy veteran, died in 2011, leaving her struggling to support herself, her daughter and two grandchildren after the loss of his disability compensation.

"I am just in awe that DAV would offer all that help," said Snyder. In addition, Jaso was instrumental in obtaining her late husband's last VA disability check, which had been mistakenly returned to the government. "I would never have gotten that," she said. "He helped me so much."

"I asked the VA to expedite the month-of-death check for her late husband, which she received in early March," said Jaso. "We are also looking into death benefits that could be available to her."

Louisville, Ky., National Service Officers Jody Strachan and Timothy Duke, who led the disaster aid effort in West Liberty, Ky., provided DAV assistance to 22 veteran families in the stricken town, making a lasting impression on its citizens. "I will never forget what I saw and what DAV did as an organization," said Strachan. "The camaraderie was high there, although the people faced real hard times."

DAV National Service Officers also visited disaster areas in Michigan, Ohio, Texas and Missouri following the storms, but nowhere was the aid needed more than in Kentucky.

"I want to thank the many DAV employees and other volunteers who gave generously and anonymously by donating much-needed items to relief centers," said Burgess. "Their kindness will forever be remembered by those individuals affected by the storms.

"The compassion displayed by our employees is just one of the things that make DAV unique and special."



Louisville, Ky., National Service Officers Jody Strachan, right, and Timothy Duke, left, present a disaster aid voucher to disabled veteran Thomas Coder and his wife, whose home in the background was destroyed when a tornado struck West Liberty, Ky.

DAV Charitable Service Trust Supports Expanded Court Representation

■ For many years, DAV programs have provided disabled veterans with the best—and the most—representation at all levels of the VA claims process. The DAV pro bono program at the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims has just completed its most active year ever, providing representation to more than 700 veterans at the court. That number of cases represents a significant share of the court's docket. The expansion has been made possible by generous support from both the National Service Foundation and the Charitable Service Trust.

A small number of significant cases from the veterans court can receive further review at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Those cases, which involve only significant questions of law affecting large groups of veterans, have the potential to change the landscape of veterans benefits. Richard Marbes, Trust Board Chairman, said, "The significance of these cases is too great for us to do anything but ensure that DAV leads the pack here, just as it does at all levels of the claims process." The Trust Board of Directors backed up the Chairman's sentiments with dollars, allocating significant funds to ensure that DAV clients with significant cases have the opportunity for expert representation at the federal appeals court. "Just like all DAV representation, this advocacy will be invaluable to the veteran and yet will cost him or her nothing," Marbes added. "We are proud to provide the fuel to make DAV's engine roar loudly at the court."

DAV General Counsel Christopher Clay said, "The generosity of Charitable Service Trust will allow DAV to shape the significant issues in veterans law for decades to come." Clay added a reminder that DAV clients who have adverse outcomes at the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) may be contacted by a representative of the DAV program if initial review suggests that further appeal is warranted.

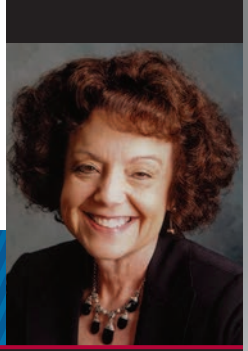
"The nature of court practice makes it impossible for DAV to provide representation in every case," said Clay. "Those selected for representation will be contacted in plenty of time.

"Nonetheless, veterans are completely within their rights to file appeals themselves or with some other advocacy organization," he said. "It is important to read the appeal rights notice included with the BVA decision and to make sure that key deadlines are not missed." ◎

Hot Or Cold: They're for Disabled Veterans...
For the third year in a row, Thompson Heating and Cooling in Cincinnati raised money for DAV. In 2011 the company raised $52,000, bringing the three-year total to $104,910. National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess (left of check) and Wesley Holm (right of check), owner of Thompson, join local veterans and the company's leadership team.



Dream a Little Dream with Me



from the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

PATRICE RAPISAND

This year has been a celebration of the Same Team, Same Dream…Serving Disabled Veterans and their Families. As my year as DAV Auxiliary National Commander comes to a close, I give you all my warmest thanks and appreciation. I feel exceptionally blessed and fortunate to have shared this year with so many members, friends and family. I am extremely grateful for the role that everyone has played throughout the year—this has been a year I will always remember.

Thank you for being part of this incredible organization and for supporting and celebrating our accomplishments throughout the year. The DAV Auxiliary has proven that team work actually works! We chose to see challenges as stepping stones—opportunities to achieve more, develop further and, ultimately, realize more of our goals. We have a kaleidoscope of volunteers who are different in so many ways. This kaleidoscope of people focused on our vision and accomplished so many objectives—we reached for those dreams that may have seemed impossible.

We have traveled 90 years together! As the Auxiliary celebrates its 90th anniversary, look back and see the history of people who have brought passion, expertise and resources needed to create a better life for disabled veterans and their families. Now, look forward and think how much we have learned and how we must keep the momentum going.

My travels as National Commander began in Pittsburgh for the Caring and Sharing Cruise of hospitalized veterans in Pennsylvania. Visiting with the veterans was just the beginning. The Auxiliary Fall Conference was a weekend of learning and fun. At Fall Conference, we introduced a new program called DAVA 4 Kids to encourage junior members to help kids go to camp by collecting change and donating to the program. I participated in a parade in Birmingham, Ala., on Veterans Day. Florida invited me to their State Mid-Winter Conference. Commander Samuels asked me to join him as he addressed the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees at the Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D.C. I will never forget the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass, Colo.

Working with National Adjutant Judy Hezlep, National Assistant Adjutant Pat Kemper and all the staff has shown me how a few accomplish a lot! Thank you for keeping us organized and reasonably controlled. And for the laughs we always managed to pull off. Thank you to DAV for all the support and guidance they have shown the Auxiliary.

Remember, we are the Same Team, Same Dream…Serving Disabled Veterans and their Families.

Compassion for Veterans

Her love for the DAV and veterans drive her the most



Outstanding Auxiliary Member of the Year Emily Hall, right, assists a veteran at the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home in Maryland.

By Thom Wilborn

Friends and colleagues will tell you that Emily Hall is enthusiastic, idealistic and patriotic. These are among the qualities that led to her being selected as the Outstanding Auxiliary Member of the Year. But it is her love for DAV and veterans that drives her the most.

"It's an honor to serve the men and women who have served our nation at great sacrifice and given us the freedom we have in our nation," Hall said. "I do what I have to do because it needs to be done. Someone has to step up to the plate."

"Emily is totally dedicated to serving our veterans in whatever capacity she can," said Auxiliary National Adjutant Judy Hezlep. "Her record of accomplishment is distinguished and expansive. She's an outstanding Auxiliary member."

"Her spirit of activism inspires us to include in our endeavors the interests of children, victims of crime and the elderly and infirm, as well as our veterans," said Unit 3 Senior Vice Commander Barbara Johnson. "She personifies the spirit and purpose of the DAVA by her outreach to all segments of the population. She's an amazing lady."

Hall visits schools to tell children how to properly treat our flag, attends Veterans Day and Memorial Day services in her home state of Maryland and the veterans events in Anne Arundel County. She places flags on the graves at a veterans cemetery and supports youth programs in her community. Add to her very busy schedule the visits and care given to patients in nursing homes and hospitals, as well as the information and resources offered to family members of veterans in hospice care, and you have only a snapshot of her service to the community.

Hall's passion for veterans stems from her father, Linwood, who served in the Army Air Corps and later the U.S. Air Force. She worked at the Department of Defense for 29

years, serving her nation as a civilian employee. "That's where I got my deep respect for the military," she said. "The concern and love I have for veterans is innately part of me."

As a member of Unit 3 in Annapolis, Md., Hall found the perfect outlet to serve the veterans she loves. "The Auxiliary gives 100 percent," Hall said. "We work with the state veterans home during holidays, and we give veterans items they need." She fondly remembers bringing tears to the eyes of a U.S. Marine Corps veteran at the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home when she gave him a T-shirt that proudly displayed the Corps emblem. "The veterans at Charlotte Hall are very appreciative when you help them," she said.

She also works in support of children, especially those who have lost family members. "The kids at our camp change from Friday night to Sunday afternoon," Hall said.



"The kids are really isolated when they get there. They get big buddies, adults like myself, to let them know what we've been through. It helps them with their loss."

Death is no stranger to Hall. In one year, she lost seven family members. She uses that personal experience with grief when she volunteers at the Hospice of Chesapeake, serving in programs such as patient care and vigil support for families. "I sit with a patient while they're dying at the hospice," said Hall. "I am more dedicated to life than I am comfortable handling death."

Hall suggests she may get the energy to do all she does from her Cherokee grandmother. "I don't know if it comes through the genes, but I work well with people," she said. "I love kids, and I love veterans. Those are the two things I will never give up."

"It's a touching and rewarding experience to know how deeply involved Emily is in caring for our veterans and young people," said Hezlep. "The amount of work she does is remarkable, and the lasting effects are truly amazing."

The Outstanding Auxiliary Member of the Year award is a great honor for Hall. "I don't think I've ever won such a prestigious award like this before," she said. "I've won a governor's award, but this is a national award—a first for me.

"I think serving veterans shows how much you can do if you put your mind and body to it," said Hall. "You know how much it takes for veterans to get the benefits they deserve. It takes each and every Auxiliary member to support them."



Above, Emily Hall, left, is welcomed to the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home by Director Sharon Mattio. Left, Emily Hall, second on left, joins her mother, Lois Hall, second on right, and Maryland Unit 3 members Barbara Johnson, left, and Teresa Shultz, right, for a visit to the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home.



PHOTO: AP PHOTO/BRYAN OLLER

A soldier leaves the Warrior Recovery Center at Fort Carson, Colo., where the process of traumatic brain injury and other problematic symptoms are determined.

Brain Injury Recovery and Coping: a Long Road

By Ashleigh Bryant

The road to recovery from traumatic brain injury (TBI) is something of a "watch and wait" process that can sideline patients from their normal, daily functions indefinitely. There is no timetable laid out to mend our most complex vital organ once it's damaged, which can be one of the more frustrating parts of recovering from this unseen injury.

The Defense and Veteran Brain Injury Center estimates that most cases of mild traumatic brain injury, or concussions, heal within one to three months. But the symptoms accompanying even the most mild head injuries are enough to alter a person's cognitive function, personality and behavior.

"Just within the last decade, we have seen hundreds of thousands of veterans come home with brain injuries of varying severity," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "It has been difficult for the VA and the civilian medical community to respond to such a high influx of TBI patients in such a short timeframe."

It has been even more challenging, it seems, to come up with definitive answers for those suffering from these injuries and for those helping them to heal.

For Veterans

For many veterans, the signs of brain injury are easy to miss. There's just something…a little off. It may be a slight disconnect between the thought process and speech, fuzzy recollection and trouble remembering simple things and, of course, the ensuing frustration with these difficulties.

"Proper screening is absolutely crucial to ensuring an accurate diagnosis," Jesinoski said. "Another key factor is that veterans must do their part in the recovery process."

Experts in the field agree that proper diet, rest, and exercise, as well as stress reduction are key to the recovery process. "Number one, I think stress reduction is very important when you're dealing with a traumatic brain injury and concussions, at least until the patient is asymptomatic." said Dr. Ricardo Komotar, Assistant Professor of Clinical Neurosurgery at the University of Miami Hospital.

But stress reduction can be a tall order for many TBI patients. Perhaps most frustrating is the lack of a clear therapy or treatment once the injury has been properly diagnosed. Army veteran Jeffrey Hummert was injured in Iraq in 2005, and after two difficult years of fighting to stay in the service, he ultimately received a medical discharge.

His advice for fellow veterans is to stay open-minded and to keep fighting for what is important. "Keep pushing through it and come to the mindset that you're not going to let it beat you, but you have to come to that decision," said Hummert. "Your family can't do it for you. Give yourself a reason, be it your family or something else. You just can't let it steal your life."

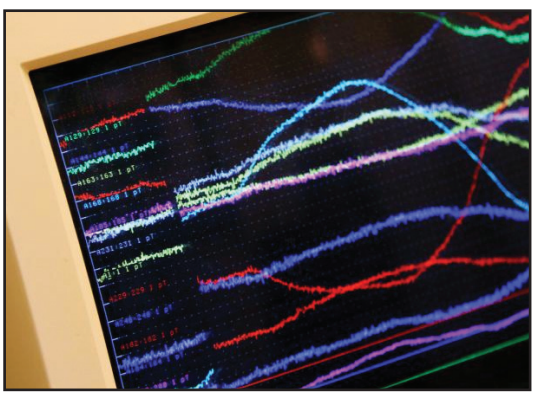
There are suggested methods for recovering or at least improving cognitive function. Incorporating the five senses (feel, sound, sight, taste and smell) into memory-making and associating, or "hooking" new

information to something already known are ways that can help patients who have difficulty with recollection.

Talk therapy is also something that, while not for every patient, can at least offer some level of stress relief. And so-called brain "exercises" that help to sharpen cognitive skills may be useful, though this has yet to be clinically verified. For other memory troubles, written reminders can be extremely useful in prompting recollection.

Today there are a number of smartphone applications that can also help keep track of family calendars, appointments, medication schedules and refill notifications. Veterans suffering from TBI may also be eligible for a personal digital assistant (PDA) from the VA, by making the request through their case manager or primary care physician.

Hummert said veterans should try to involve the whole family in the process rather than going it alone, and he advises caregivers to be understanding through the recovery. "Sometimes we do get a little angry or frustrated with everything, and sometimes it comes out at the wrong times," he explained. "There may be a time when we are dealing with something else and our priorities may not match up with yours. Know that it's not about you. Don't take it personally."



A graphical example of brain activity is displayed on a monitor at the VA medical center in Minneapolis.

For Caregivers

Any spouse, parent or other person devoted to the care of an injured or ill veteran can tell you the recovery process can be challenging and demanding, albeit a labor of love. For caregivers of veterans with cognitive impairments, the job can be particularly difficult.

Researchers at the Minneapolis VA medical center recently studied how caregivers of veterans with stigmatized conditions like TBI may experience discrimination or stigma-by-association. Veterans' caregivers were asked about their role in recovery in the months following rehabilitation.

"We found that generally inpatient treatment periods were more stressful for caregivers than at home," said Dr. Joan Griffin, Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota Department of Medicine. "Once they return home, the reality of normal life sets in, and things slow down. It helps the family to realize that the patient will never really be the same again."

This truth can either make or break a family. Heather Hummert began writing about her role as a caregiver after her husband, Jeffrey, was discharged from the Army. She is now the vice president of the non-profit Family of a Vet organization, which provides resources to help veterans and their loved ones "survive and thrive in life after combat."

"You are in a new world, and it's never going to be the same. The sooner you realize that, grieve for it and accept it, the sooner you can begin to build a new life that can be beautiful, rewarding and full of possibilities," said Hummert.

As 45 percent of caregivers report spending up to 80 hours a week performing tasks for the recipient, it is no surprise that Dr. Griffin's survey shows an emotional and physical toll on their health. The intense workload, often accompanied by the need to help the veteran cope with the emotions of polytrauma and TBI (such as anger, frustration and depression), is associated with the caregiver's risk for poor health.

Those surveyed also responded to questions about experiencing caregiver feelings of strain and stress, anxiety, social isolation and depression. The study revealed a distinct link between the onset of these symptoms and perceived caregiver discrimination and stigma. The researchers concluded that adequate mental health support services were necessary to stave off the stressors that could ultimately lead to poor mental health.

"As much as service members and veterans struggle with accepting help for brain injuries and emotional trauma, caregivers also find it difficult to admit the need for assistance," Jesinoski said.

Hummert echoed the study's findings. "You are going to quite possibly need counseling for yourself and even other members of your family," she said. "You need to be willing to accept that help and support, and let people help you."

Caregivers for Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans with polytraumatic injuries are more often parents (60 percent) than spouses (35 percent). This presents completely new challenges as parents are less likely to have access to the same resources as a spouse, particularly legal access to service-connected disability income that can help to offset caregiving costs. Dr. Griffin noted this makes it possible for some caregivers to be caught in the poverty cycle as a result of their financial struggle through the veteran's recovery.

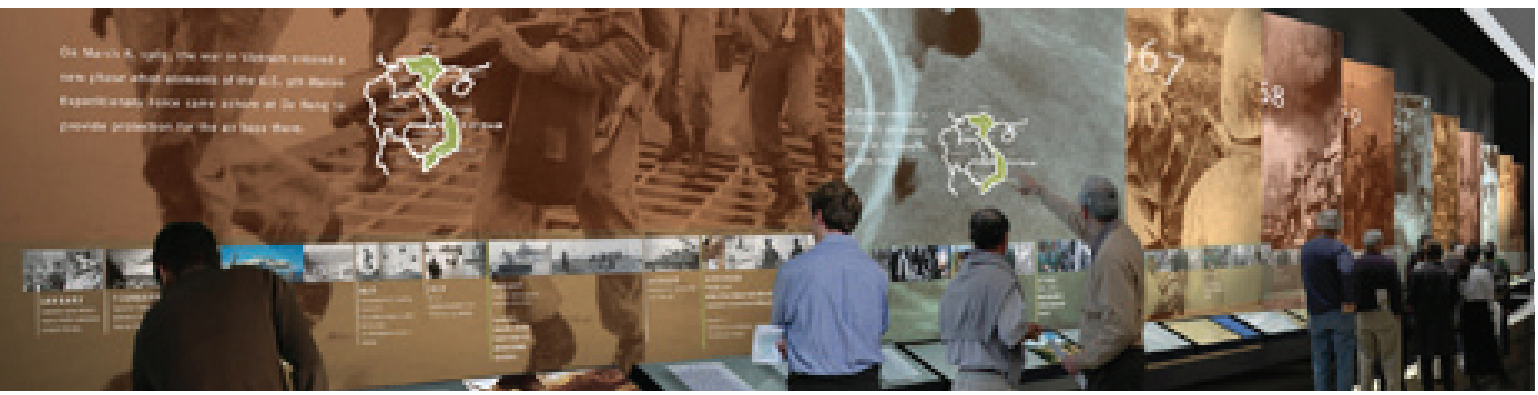
Moving Forward

In 2010, DAV applauded the passage of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, which established a wide range of new support services for certain caregivers of eligible Post-9/11 veterans. However, it's not just veterans fresh from deployment who battle with brain injuries. The VA has seen the largest increase of post-military TBI cases with patients in their 70s and 80s, resulting from everyday household falls and accidents.

DAV also expressed concern in testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs in March 2011 that the VA had not met appropriate deadlines for implementing these expanded caregiver support services. As noted in the testimony, in the absence of family caregivers, "an even greater burden of direct care would fall to VA at significantly higher cost to the government and reduced quality of life for these veterans who have sacrificed so much."

Help is available for veterans and their caregivers, but more can certainly be done to lift some of the burdens they shoulder through the recovery process. The take-away from success stories like the Hummerts' is to find solace in knowing you are not alone.

There are thousands of other veterans and caregivers learning to adapt to the same challenges, Hummert explains. "They are here to help you too, and can be your very best network of support as you travel this journey into your new life. Life after combat isn't an end; it's a whole new beginning."



Education Center Planned for Vietnam Memorial

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., commonly called The Wall, may soon have an addition that will be a place where the stories and sacrifice of those who served in our nation's military will be honored and remembered.

With a groundbreaking planned for November 2012, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation says the Education Center at the Wall will be a multi-million dollar, state-of-the-art visitor's center and learning facility to be built on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans and the Lincoln Memorials. Visitors will better understand the profound impact the Vietnam War had on their friends and family members, their home towns and the nation. The education center will feature the faces and stories of the 58,272 men and women on The Wall, honoring those who fell in Vietnam, those who fought and returned, as well as the friends and families of all who served.

Established in 1979, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., promoting healing and educating about the impact of the Vietnam War.

Support the Education Center at the Wall by visiting www.buildthecenter.org or calling 866-990-WALL.

Grace Under Fire

(Continued from page 6)

looked to my left to try to move away from the vehicle and my .50 caliber machine gun landed within three feet of me at that moment. The barrel was bent in half, which in my three years of service I have never seen anything like that happen to a barrel of a .50 caliber machine gun. I looked up and my platoon sergeant was yelling for me to come in his direction. By this time the grenades, MK-19 rounds, and .50 caliber rounds were all cooking off. I could hear the rounds coming [within] inches of my body. I got up to go in the direction of my platoon sergeant, and fell to the ground. I could not walk. He came over and picked me up and brought me to safety behind another truck.

"The entire time I heard JR yelling in the background. My platoon sergeant and a squad leader rushed to pull him from the wreckage. They tried to grab him, but his skin was sliding off of his body. Eventually, they pulled him out, and we were brought to a medevac location, where we were transported out together on a UH-60 helicopter. I remember that I was under him listening to him scream. I did my best to assure him that everything was going to be all right. I'm not sure if he heard me when I was talking with him because of the pain he was in," Hart said.

Severely burned on more than 40 percent of his body and suffering from smoke inhalation, Martinez was flown to an Army hospital in Germany, then to Walter Reed and finally Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio. He spent nearly three years at the hospital, enduring 33 surgeries and skin grafts.

The course of treatment was grueling and painful, but Martinez made the decision early on that he would not give up.

"Any self-pity I had didn't last. My mother talking to me snapped me out of it," Martinez said. "Most of all, I had a belief that there had to be more to life than what I had experienced. I had to make the choice to live to see just how much more there was for me."

Hart, who suffered a broken leg among other injuries in the blast, was eventually able to return to the fight with his fellow soldiers in Iraq. When they returned to Ft. Campbell, the soldiers had a special visitor waiting for them.

"JR was there to greet us despite the treatments he was undergoing for his injuries," Hart said. "My heart dropped when I saw him again. He was crying and hugging everyone. It was a very emotional event."

During his recovery at BAMC, Martinez was asked by a nurse to speak with a fellow burn patient whose outlook wasn't as focused and positive. Martinez soon discovered that he had a mission again—through public speaking he could motivate others to see through the fog of their circumstances and achieve greatness.

"I try to drive home motivation, realization and determination to my audiences," Martinez said.

In 2008, he was cast in ABC's "All My Children" in the role of combat-injured Iraq veteran Brot Monroe.

After his run ended on the show, Martinez was able to parlay the appearance into the role he seemed destined to star in—playing himself on the dancing-themed reality show "Dancing with the Stars," which requires hard work, grace under pressure, good looks and confidence.

Martinez and dancing partner Karina Smirnoff won the competition in rousing fashion, along the way bringing attention to those who suffer the wounds of war.

"It was thrilling to tune into 'Dancing with the Stars' and see JR, a disabled veteran, one of our very own, showing the world that there is nothing we cannot accomplish," said National Commander Donald Samuels. "It must be a tremendous amount of pressure on a young man, but he has taken the duty of role model very seriously and is doing all veterans proud."

Indeed, Martinez acknowledges the difficulties of being the face of a generation of disabled veterans for a large segment of America, but he accepts it.

"I've grown to become very comfortable in the role; I accept the challenge," Martinez said. "In my mind, I don't just represent myself. I represent all veterans. And I know that they are out there building their own lives and writing their own stories to represent me."

Hart believes the recognition for Martinez as DAV's Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year is a continuation of the story of a great soldier.

"This inspiring young man sets an example for all of us," said Wilson. "His determination to carry on despite adversity and to deliver a message of hope to others is in keeping with the highest traditions of DAV."



James Krall, DAV volunteer and Guardian Society Member

A Place to Hang My Hat

"I was looking for a place to hang my hat," James Krall stated as he thought back on how he came to find a home within the DAV family, which led to naming DAV in his will.

Krall is a disabled Vietnam veteran who sought care at the VA after his insurance would no longer cover his injuries. "I wish I would have known about DAV sooner," Krall stated. "My biggest regret is that I didn't know about DAV National Service Officers when I was claiming my disability."

While riding in the DAV Transportation Network van to his appointments at the VA medical center, James was introduced to members of the local DAV Chapter in Green Bay, Wisc., and invited to a picnic. There he met Chapter leaders and says, "That's when my interest in DAV really took off."

He soon became a DAV member and active volunteer in the Chapter's office, doing the monthly newsletter mailings and scheduling rides for veterans with the DAV Transportation Network. "Since the Chapter shared an office with the Department of Wisconsin, there was always something going on," recalled Krall. While there, he befriended state DAV leaders who further inspired him. "After seeing the interest they had, and so many others in DAV, I was so happy to be a member."

It was around this time that Krall decided to include DAV in his will. He had seen many of the programs DAV offers to help disabled veterans across the country and wanted to continue his support. "I believe this is just one more way I can give back to my disabled veteran brothers and sisters," he said.

Krall and his wife have since moved to South Carolina. He no longer coordinates rides for veterans; rather, he is now a DAV Transportation Network van driver. Krall, along with a neighbor, transports area veterans to and from the Dorn VA medical center in Columbia, S.C. for their medical appointments. "It is so rewarding for me to be able to do that for my fellow veterans, and to include DAV in my will," he concluded.

The Guardian Society extends honor to those like Krall, who go one step further by including DAV in their will or other estate plans. Their future gifts ensure DAV will continue to serve our nation's injured heroes for years and generations to come.

DAV GUARDIAN SOCIETY
PROTECTING THOSE WHO SERVED

- For more information, please call **1-800-216-9802** or email giftplanning@dav.org.
- Legal address for your will or trust: Disabled American Veterans, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250; tax identification number: 31-0263158.
- If you have included DAV in your will or other estate plans, please let us know!

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



DR. CHARLES W. EDWARDS, JR.

from the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

Farewell, A Service Commitment

My fellow disabled American veterans, let us never abandon the time-honored principle "Commitment to Service." DAV will never stop serving: service to make America strong; service to keep America free; and service to preserve America, the home of the brave.

America is a place where free men and women can hold their heads high, proud of their country and the disabled American veterans who served in the past, those who are serving at present and those who will indeed serve in the future. As a new member of this veterans service organization 20 years ago, I asked myself, why should I join DAV? After some in-depth and careful consideration, I reached the conclusion: DAV requires my service. I threw myself totally into the idea—"how best can I be of service or how best can I serve our organization?"

The greatest thing in the entire world is the opportunity to be of service to others, especially disabled veterans and their families. And so my personal commitment as a DAV member is centered around the motto: "Learning to Do, Doing to Earn, Earning to Live and Living to Serve." Service is the key. I have been privileged to serve as Chaplain for Chapter 4, Columbia, S.C.; Chapter 8, Kerrville, Texas; Chapter 5, San Antonio; District 5, Department of Texas for two years; the Department of Texas State Chaplain for 12 years; and as your National Chaplain for five years.

I would like to thank all of you for allowing me to serve you as your National Chaplain. May it be said of us all in the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson: "I am a part of all that I have met … Though much is taken, much abides. That which we are, we are—one equal temper of heroic hearts, strong in will … to strive, to seek, to find and never to yield." Let us, therefore, renew our determination, our courage, our strength, our faith and our hope—to strive, to seek, to find and never to yield as we continue to build better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families.

Let us be "first to serve" in our communities, our great states and our beloved nation. Now, for all of us who care and who have a special concern for service, I must say, "Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly, steadily, enjoying each passing moment, and the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey."

May God bless all of you, my fellow disabled American veterans and DAV Auxiliary members.

Auxiliary Fall Conference Dates Set



The 2012 Auxiliary National Fall Conference will take place Sept. 27-29 at the Lexington Downtown Hilton in Lexington, Ky. The conference will open with a National Executive Committee meeting, beginning at 10 a.m. Thursday followed by an opening session that evening. Friday's events will include business sessions in the morning, a carnival in the afternoon and a reception that evening. A business session will be held Saturday, followed by a banquet in the evening to conclude the conference. Those wishing to attend can call to make reservations at the group rate of $109 per night, with a $25 fee for the conference registration and $40 for banquet costs. The hotel offers complimentary shuttle service to and from the Blue Grass Airport (LEX), and parking is complimentary for hotel guests.

Book your room reservation through the hotel's DAVA reservation site, available until Sept. 4. Attendees may make reservations by calling 859-231-9000.





Immigrant Heritage Honored...
Ryan Nabors, a life member of Chapter 41 in Olympia, Wash., right, and Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno, center, received Ellis Island Medals of Honor in a special ceremony at Ellis Island, N.Y. Each year, the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations presents medals to U.S. citizens from various ethnic backgrounds. The medals, designed to pay homage to the immigrant experience, as well as individual achievement, are awarded to remarkable Americans who exemplify outstanding qualities in both their personal and professional lives, while continuing to preserve the richness of their particular heritage. Each year's recipients are read into the Congressional Record.

Disabled American Veterans
National Headquarters
Unaudited Statement of Financial Position • March 31, 2012

Unrestricted Assets		**Unrestricted Liabilities**	
Current Assets	$ 31,967,005	Current Liabilities	$ 100,231,421
Investments, at Market	319,648,733	Total Liabilities	100,231,421
Land, Buildings and Equipment, Net of Depreciation	6,425,541	**Unrestricted Net Assets**	
Other Assets	165,000	General and Net Assets Designated by the Board of Directors	257,974,858
		Total Unrestricted Net Assets	257,974,858
Total Unrestricted Assets	$ 358,206,279	**Total Liabilities and Unrestricted Net Assets**	$ 358,206,279
Life Membership Assets		**Life Membership Liabilities**	
Current Assets	$ 3,286,215	Current Liabilities	$ 165,169
Investments, at Market	57,278,075	Reserve for Future Distribution of Life Membership Dues	60,399,121
Total Life Membership Assets	$ 60,564,290	**Total Life Membership Liabilities and Reserve for Future Distribution of Life Membership Dues**	$ 60,564,290

Reunions - Because of increasing requests and space limitations, publications of unit reunions are limited to one time only. Send such notices at least six months in advance to: Reunions, DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301.

ARMY

1ST SQD 9TH CAV.- BULLWHIP SQD ASSN - Oct. 11-14, 2012, Fort Hood, TX, Contact: Donald Coshey, (850) 834-3328, thirstyred@earthlink.net, www.Bullwhipsquadron.org.

2ND BN, 94TH ART - Oct. 2-4, 2012, Tunica, MS, Contact: Jim Lary, (501) 834-9777, Jlary@usa.net, www.2ndbattalion94thartillery.com.

24TH INF. DIV. ASSN - Sept. 16-19, 2012, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Mike Frederick, (612) 804-9457.

35TH DIV. ASSN - Sept. 6-9, 2012, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Col. Robert Dalton, (785) 267-3295, www.35thInfDivAssoc.com.

335TH RADIO RESEARCH CO VIETNAM - Aug. 23-26, 2012, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Jim Mossman, (513) 779-7145, jmossman@fuse.net.

44TH INF. DIV. (ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD 1946-1954) - Oct. 19-21, 2012, Peoria, IL, Contact: Howard Ferrill, (817) 579-1608, hferrill44@charter.net.

503RD PARACHUTE RGT COMBAT TEAM - Sept. 12-16, 2012, Richmond, VA, Contact: Nancy Young, (804) 550-3354, wwii503rdprct@yahoo.com.

509TH ENG CO (PANEL BRIDGE) - Aug. 21-23, 2012, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Jerry Sexton, (405) 373-0354.

510TH ENG CO (HE) TOUL, FRANCE - Aug. 19-21, 2012, Columbus, OH, Contact: Al Lehne, (763) 262-3264, blehne@yahoo.com.

512TH MIL POLICE CO - Sept. 14-15, 2012, Sierra Vista, AZ, Contact: B. J. Searcy, (520) 456-1229 or (520) 249-9516, dbjsearcy@powerc.net.

68TH ANTI AIRCRAFT ART GUN BN/508TH OPERATIONS DETACHMENT - Oct. 25-28, 2012, Orange Beach, AL, Contact: Herb Waters, (251) 937-5771, waters@bellsouth.net.

69TH ENG BATALLION, A CO - Sept. 3, 2012, Palmview, TX, Contact: Oscar Garza, (956) 358-8895, ogarza004@rgv.rr.com.

999TH ARMORED FIELD ART BN - Sept. 27-29, 2012, Little Rock, AR, Contact: Aubrey Davidson, (501) 851-4999, Abe4999@aol.com.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DIV. AGENTS ASSN (CIDAA) - Sept. 26-30, 2012, Louisville, KY, Contact: William "Doc" Sautter, (770) 596-6706, leo.cidaa@yahoo.com, www.cidaa.net.

FIRST INF. DIV. BROTHERHOOD OF THE BIG RED ONE 1965-1970 - Sept. 13-15, 2012, Kokomo, IN, Contact: Robert "Turkey" Youngberg, (708) 474-5327, B1aBigRed1@aol.com, www.HCVVO.org.

FIRST INF. DIV. HHC 1/16 RECON PLATOON 1965-1970 - Sept. 13-15, 2012, Kokomo, IN, Contact: Robert "Turkey" Youngberg, (708) 474-5327, B1aBigRed1@aol.com, www.Devour29.com.

MP REUNION 2013 (21ST AND 31ST MP DETACHMENTS, 385TH MP BN) - June 21-23, 2013, Louisville, KY, Contact: Tom Briggs, (502) 295-5835, MPReunion2013@gmail.com.

NATIONAL ASSN OF THE 6TH INF. DIV. - Sept. 5-9, 2012, Dearborn, MI, Contact: Russ McLogan, (517) 437-2768, terruspress@dmci.net.

US ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND JAPAN ASSN. (1945-PRESENT) - Sept. 19-22, 2012, Niagara Falls, Canada, Contact: Charles W. S. Jezycki, (707) 257-6818, charleswsj@msn.com, www.usamcja.com.

US MIL LIAISON Mission - Sept. 14-16, 2012, Washington, D.C., Contact: Larry Schwab, (602) 242-4325, staff@usmlm.org.

MARINES

1ST BN, 4TH MARINES ASSN REUNION - Oct. 10-14, 2012, Laughlin, NV, Contact: Brad Bennett, (218) 722-4589, bradbennett@hotmail.com, www.1stbn4thmarines.com.

2ND TOPOGRAPHIC CO - Oct. 14-15, 2012, Stafford, VA, Contact: Jim Martin, (781) 572-7924, jimtrees@aol.com.

3RD MARINES SCOUT/SNIPER PLATOON (VIETNAM) - February 8-10, 2013, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Jim O'Neill, (928) 684-2309, taraniall@gmail.com.

AVIATION LOGISTICS MARINES - Sept. 27-30, 2012, Myrtle Beach, SC, Contact: Don Davis, (252) 444-1777, greyegl@ec.rr.com.

FOX 2-5-1ST MARINE DIV. KOREA - Oct. 3-7, 2012, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Arlen Hensley, (423) 245-2047, arlenhensley@charter.net.

INDIA CO 3/7, "BAND OF BROTHERS" VIETNAM 1969-70 - Nov. 8-12, 2012, Washington, D.C., Contact: Roger Villarreal, (281) 930-8161, marine.1@att.net.

MARINE AIR GROUPS REUNION (WWII TO PRESENT) - Oct. 17-21, 2012, Branson, MO, Contact: James Jordan, (417) 535-4945, james.m.jordan@hughes.net.

MARINE MEDIUM HELICOPTER SQD 265 (HMM-265) - Oct. 10-14, 2012, San Diego, CA, Contact: Deane Jensen, (858) 270-6370, wayne_lane@sbcglobal.net.

THIRD MARINE DIV. ASSN - Aug. 21-26, 2012, San Diego, CA, Contact: Jeffrey A. Dement, (815) 436-3783, jeffdement@aol.com, www.caltrap.com.

USMC OFFICER BASIC SCHOOL CLASS TBS 4-67 - Oct. 10-13, 2012, Quantico, VA, Contact: Gerard T. Smith, gtsmith2011@hotmail.com, www.usmc-thebasicschool-april1967.com.

VIETNAM 1967-69 LIMA CO 3/9 - Sept. 6-9, 2012, CO Springs, CO, Contact: Bob Citron, (248) 569-4771, bcitron155941MI@comcast.net, www.lima39.com.

YEMASSEE TRAIN DEPOT REUNION - Oct. 19-20, 2012, Yemassee, SC, Contact: Roy Hughes, (843) 589-3385.

NAVY

ASSN OF AVIATION ORDNANCEMEN - Aug. 15-19, 2012, Reno, NV, Contact: J. J. LaMaitre, (619) 562-8492, jjlsantee@cox.net, www.aaoweb.org/AAO.

NAVY CORPSMEN (AAONHC) - Sept. 19-23, 2012, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Awtrey Peace, (850) 626-1125, awtreyp@yahoo.com.

OLD ANTARCTIC EXPLORERS ASSN (OAEA) - Nov. 28-30, 2012, San Diego, CA, Contact: Bob Gaboury, (805) 322-3955, BobGaboury@gmail.com.

USNR MIDSHIPMEN'S SCHOOL, NEW YORK, NY - Sept. 23-27, 2012, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Carl Duncan, (210) 408-1766, elcid8603@sbcglobal.net.

USS AMERICA CARRIER VETERAN'S ASSN - Sept. 11-15, 2012, Baton Rouge, LA, Contact: Harry Rodriquez, (845) 661-1284, hatron10@aol.com; www.ussamerica.org.

USS ANTIETAM ASSN - Sept. 19-23, 2012, Portland, OR, Contact: Ed Booth, (253) 752-6158.

USS BENNINGTON (CV/CVA/CVS-20) - Sept. 25-29, 2012, St. Louis, MO, Contact: Michael R. Moade, (314) 540-2310, mrm5@charter.net,www.uss-bennington.org.

USS CABOT (CVL-28) - Oct. 21-25, 2012, Myrtle Beach, SC, Contact: Marie Saraceni, (484) 494-5533, Msaraceni@comcast.net.

USS CALVERT (APA-32) - Oct. 10-14, 2012, Philadelphia, PA, Contact: John L. Cole, (507) 789-6344.

USS CANOPUS (AS-34/AS-9) - Sept. 6-9, 2012, Branson, MO, Contact: Richard Retin, (503) 689-1712, retinr@mail.com, www.usscanopus.org.

USS CARTER HALL (LSD-3) - Sept. 27-30, 2012, VA Beach, VA, Contact: Don Brewer, (423) 349-6338.

USS CLAXTON (DD-571) - Nov. 1-4, 2012, Fredericksburg, TX, Contact: Captain Gene Garrett, (830) 990-0729, genegarrett@beecreek.net.

USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7) - Oct. 18-21, 2012, Charleston, SC, Contact: Jack Greeson, (972) 775-4115, jackgreeson@hotmail.com, www.ussclevelandreunionassoc.org.

USS CONCORD (AFS-5) - Sept. 26-30, 2012, Boston, MA, Contact: Lawrence Gambia, (585) 394-6424, lpg@frontiernet.net, www.ussconcord.org.

USS CURTISS (AV-4) - Sept. 5-8, 2012, Plano, TX, Contact: B. Bruce Snider, (956) 423-3314, bruceusscurtissav4@rgv.rr.com.

USS ELDORADO (AGCH) - Sept. 4-7, 2012, Oakbrook Terrace, IL, Contact: Richard or Louise Thompson, (630) 759-1148, heidiho5@comcast.net.

USS EPPING FOREST (LSD-4/MCS-7/MINE FLOT-1 AND ALL MINE PAC UNITS) - Sept. 5-8, 2012, Essington, PA, Contact: Joseph Braim, (215) 498-2224.

USS EVERETT F. LARSON (DD/DDR-830) - Sept. 16-20, 2012, Warwick, RI, Contact: Art Colson, (207) 439-2123, acollcnett@aol.com, www.uss-everett-f-larson.com.

USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD-754) - Sept. 27-30, 2012, Dallas, TX, Contact: John Coffey, (706) 335-0724, johnjudyc@gmail.com.

USS GUADALUPE (AO-32) - Sept. 21-23, 2012, St. Louis, MO, Contact: Gary Watts, (605) 629-3621, GaryW@itctel.com.

USS HARRY E. YARNELL (DLG/CG17) - Nov. 9-11, 2012, Tampa Bay, FL, Contact: Glenn Hunsberger, (757) 287-5429, Glenn_Hunsberger@yahoo.com.

USS HOEL (DDG-13) - Aug. 9-12, 2013, Everett, WA, Contact: John Peverly, (425) 335-4066, jpeverly@comcast.net.

USS HUNT (DD-674) - Oct. 10-15, 2012, Lancaster, PA, Contact: Alfred W. Bailey, 6 Marigold Lane, Little Egg Harbor, NJ 08087-4014.

USS INGERSOLL (DD-652/DD-990) - Sept. 27-30, 2012, Charleston, SC, Contact: Don Molowski, (724) 547-5573, pd-molowski@verizon.net; www.uss_ingersoll_vets.tripod.com.

USS LEARY (DD/DDR-879) - Sept. 19-23, 2012, Warwick, RI, Contact: Richard Englander, (941) 341-0770, crelibra@verizon.net, ww.usslearyddr879.orbs.com.

USS LONG BEACH (CGN-9) ASSN - Sept. 10-18, 2012, Deerfield, IL, Contact: Don Shade, (866) 352-2469 or (716) 569-2314, lbcgn9@aol.com, www.usslongbeach-assoc.org.

USS MAHAN ASSN (DD-364, DLG-11, DDG-42, DDG-72) - Oct. 10-14, 2012, San Diego, CA, Contact: Richard Hallowell, (619) 606-3173, 2dickhall@cox.net.

USS MONTRAIL (APA-213) - Oct. 4-7, 2012, Branson, MO, Contact: Don DiCoio, (973) 696-3725, dicoio44@aol.com.

USS NAVARRO (APA-215) - Oct. 1-5, 2012, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Carl Shaulis, (281) 481-9730, carlshaulis@att.net.

USS NEWPORT (LST-1179) - Sept. 20-23, 2012, Branson, MO, Contact: Ray Batiato, (540) 239-0159, Batman@swva.net.

USS OAK HILL (LSD-7) - Sept. 13-16, 2012, Denver, CO, Contact: Raylah Holm, (509) 607-9021, raylah@aol.com.

USS PERKINS (DD-26, DD-377, DDR-877) - Sept. 12-16, 2012, St. Louis, MO, Contact: Robert J. Linton, (314) 397-2388, mailinton@sbcglobal.net.

USS PIEDMONT (AD-17) - Sept. 26-30, 2012, Omaha, NE, Contact: Bill Kastens, (785) 272-2604, Bmk1930@sbcglobal.net.

USS PLYMOUTH ROCK (LSD-29) - Sept. 20-25, 2012, King of Prussia, PA, Contact: David Dortch, (870) 236-3725, tazrhondave@yahoo.com, www.ussplymouthrock.com.

USS REEVES (DLG/CG-24) - Oct. 4-7, 2012, Charleston, SC, Contact: Michael D. Robertson, (509) 315-8107, michael.d.robertson@comcast.net.

USS TRATHEN (DD-530) - Sept. 12-15, 2012, Baltimore, MD, Contact: Rosalie Schockweiler, (941) 473-1253, ronk@shentel.net.

USS TULARE (AKA/LKA-112) - Aug. 24-26, 2012, Memphis, TN, Contact: Sam & Sharon Schrock, (308) 991-8118.

USS WARRINGTON (DD-843) - Oct. 3-7, 2012, Charleston, SC, Contact: Stan Prager, (916) 791-6700, stashuman843@msn.com.

AIR FORCE

24TH WOMEN IN THE AIR FORCE (WAF) ASSN - Oct. 9-13, 2012, Charleston, SC, Contact: Geraldine "Dixie" Odom, (912) 687-4066.

317TH TROOP CARRIER VETERANS GROUP (ALL ERAS) - Oct. 11-14, 2012, Columbus, GA, Contact: Jim Timmons, (410) 255-2735, jimt0708@aol.com, www.usaf317thvet.org.

3454TH TRAINING SQD - Oct. 18-20, 2012, Branson, MO, Contact: John Kemper, (303) 775-2874, jonshirkemper@aol.com.

5TH COMMUNICATIONS GROUP/934TH SIGNAL BN (1950-54) - Sept. 30-Oct. 6, 2012, Little Rock, AR, Contact: Chuck Siegismund, (501) 985-1310, sparkyarky@comcast.net.

509TH BOMB WING VETERANS ASSN - Oct. 2-4, 2012, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Contact: George W. Colby, (505) 881-9869, prairietiger619@msn.com.

95TH BOMB GROUP (H) ASSN/MEMORIALS FOUNDATION - Aug. 29-Sept. 2, 2012, Cleveland, OH, Contact: Brad Petrella, (401) 480-8846, radpetrella872adelphia.net.

AIR FORCE POSTAL AND COURIER ASSN 22ND ANNUAL REUNION - Sept. 25-27, 2012, Williamsburg, VA, Contact: Purcell Brown, (937) 754-1848, purcellb777@sbcglobal.net.

RAF BURTONWOOD ASSN - Oct. 23-27, 2012, Destin, FL, Contact: James R. Bentley, (813) 689-0199, Jbent0214@aol.com.

REDHORSE ASSN REUNION - Sept. 22-26, 2013, Bowling Green, KY, Contact: Charlie Hogan, (270) 749-5461, chogan@scrtc.com.

TORREJON AIR BASE, SPAIN (ALL YEARS) - Aug. 30-Sept. 2, 2012, Washington, D.C., Contact: Burnethel Sanford, (951) 739-0202, mizbs3492@msn.com.

COAST GUARD

THE SPENCER ASSN REUNION - Sept. 20-23, 2012, Alexandria, VA, Contact: Bob Marzen, (570) 325-4414, marzenh@netzero.net.

ALL

TAN SON NHUT ASSN - Oct. 11-14, 2012, Dayton, OH, Contact: Rich Carvell, (870) 932-8085, rcarvell@suddenlink.net, www.tsna.org/reunion/index.html.

VIETNAM VETERANS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM REUNION - Nov. 2-3, 2012, Washington, D.C., Contact: Marcia Landau and Skip Smith, (770) 335-4896, burkland@nexet.net or ssgolf1@bellsouth.net.

INQUIRIES

- Searching for anyone stationed in the 7237th Ammo Sup Squadron, St. Mihiel, France, from 1965 through 1967. Please contact Gary Sachtjen at (360) 931-1067 or by gary6438@gmail.com, or Jim Nicola at Telephone (208) 888-4883.
- Searching for anyone who was assigned to the sheet medal shop in Bein Hoa, Vietnam, 1968-1969. Please contact Gus Johnson, 1617 "S" 123rd Drive, Avondale, AZ 85323-3245, (623) 337-4737.
- Searching for anyone who was stationed at Fort Irwin Army Hospital during April 18, 1966 thru February 29, 1967. Please contact Oscar Johnson, P.O. Box 71722, Las Vegas, NV 89170, (702) 413-2426.
- Searching for Indian Friend - Chippewa, who served at Ft. Lee, VA, 43 Fabric Repair Specialist around Feb-April 1984. Please contact me at (870) 821-2640.

Retired NSO Norman Bruce Hansen Passes

■ Retired National Service Officer Norman "Bruce" Hansen, 62, of League City, Texas, died suddenly on Jan. 31. Hanson was volunteering at the Houston VA medical center at the time of his death.


Hansen

Hansen served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1972. While in Vietnam, he suffered severe shell fragment wounds. Following his medical discharge, he joined DAV in 1973 as a National Service Officer trainee in the Providence, R.I., National Service Office. In 1974, Hansen was transferred to the Manchester, N.H., National Service Office, until his 1978 appointment as a National Appeals Officer serving at the Board of Veterans Appeals office in Washington, D.C.

In 1989, he was assigned to the National Service Office in Houston, and retired in 1997, after nearly 18 years of service, as supervisor of the National Service Office in Hartford, Conn.

"Bruce was dedicated to disabled veterans and served them with passion and commitment," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "He was a staunch advocate for the disabled who relied on the expertise he offered over his career.

"While he suffered nearly constant pain from his injuries, Bruce was always active on behalf of our nation's veterans," said Wilson. "His career at DAV was one of superb achievement in the role of advocate for ill and injured veterans." After his retirement from DAV, he continued serving veterans as a volunteer in the hematology and oncology units at the Houston VA medical center performing mostly administrative work. Dr. Teresa Haynes said he was efficient and energetic. "Mr. Hansen was a pleasant, outgoing person to work with and to be around," she said.

Hansen is survived by his wife, Elaine; a daughter, Kelsea; and two sons, Erik and Kris. He was buried Feb. 6 at the Houston National Cemetery.

Retired NSO Donald Cox Passes

■ Retired National Service Officer Donald Cox passed away Sept. 6, 2011, at the Baptist Health Medical Center in his hometown of Heber Springs, Ark.

Born in Tulsa, Okla., in 1936, Cox served for more than 20 years in the Air Force before retiring as a master sergeant in 1974. He joined DAV on March 23, 1987, serving as a National Service Officer in the North Little Rock National Service Office until his retirement on Feb. 1, 1998.


Cox

"Donald believed in serving his fellow veterans," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "His service to build better lives for disabled veterans and their families was unsurpassed as was his commitment to providing his best for veterans helping veterans."

Cox was a gifted singer and served as music director for several churches in the Heber Springs area.

He is survived by his wife, Carolyn, three sons and two daughters. Cox had nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He was buried in the Magness Cemetery in Heber Springs.



Overdue Honor...
Rodney Cress, left, a life member of Chapter 96, Salisbury, N.C., was recently awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor device for heroism in Vietnam more than 40 years ago. Cress, who has been a DAV member for nearly a quarter of a century, was credited for his leadership under fire on March 7, 1971, when members of Charlie Company, 2nd of the 7th, 1st Cavalry Division found themselves surrounded. On that date, he singlehandedly destroyed an enemy bunker and evacuated his fellow soldiers to safety.

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