THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY
JULY | AUGUST 2016

DAV® MAGAZINE



Powering through adversity

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Osseointegration

New clinical trial could change the lives of amputees

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ATLANTA

to host DAV National Convention

July 31 – August 3, 2016
Hyatt Regency Atlanta on Peachtree Street

The city's rich history combines with inspiration-inducing attractions to create a city with southern charm and world-class sophistication. It's easy to see why Atlanta is one of the most popular destinations in the nation to visit.

Atlanta offers tons of fun for everyone—from family-friendly attractions and history to outdoor adventures and award-winning culture.

Beyond meeting fellow veterans and influencing DAV's future, convention attendees can experience a multitude of adventures in the city. Atlanta is known for its fine dining, premier shopping and unique museums and galleries. A beautiful, historic city, it offers boutiques, spas and shops, amusement parks, a renowned aquarium and plenty of outdoor recreation.

Pioneering attendees will have every chance to advocate for veterans with disabling injuries while enjoying everything the Peach State has to offer.

Returning attendees should be aware that the convention will be held from Sunday to Wednesday this year, rather than the traditional Saturday through Tuesday. The schedule for events will change accordingly.

Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band is slated to play Monday night.

Our special room rate is $125 per night for a single or double. Additional hotel reservation information is available at bit.ly/AtlantaReservations or by calling 888-421-1442 or 404-577-1234. Be sure to tell them you are reserving under the "Disabled American Veterans" room block if making reservations by phone. ■

Learn More Online

Visit dav.org/events/2016-national-convention for more information.



Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band will perform during Fun Night.

Travel Assistance

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

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER
MOSES A. MCINTOSH JR.



Leaving with a heavy heart

During my tenure serving as your National Commander, I've had the opportunity to communicate with many of you through a variety of forums. None have made my heart as heavy as I prepare this column knowing it is my last. It's been the greatest honor and privilege to serve our organization.

I told you during the 2015 National Convention that DAV was very busy. I also promised you, in no uncertain terms, we would get busier. I told you I couldn't do it alone and asked for your help.

Saying you stepped up and took on that challenge is a huge understatement.

This year, we once again took our many voices and powerful message directly to Congress' door and told our lawmakers we expected them to pass the Veterans Affairs Family Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act. This bill would open the VA Family Caregiver program to all eligible veterans of any era who were severely injured during their military service.

The Family Caregiver program provides peer-to-peer support, home health training and financial support to caregivers of injured veterans. Providing equitable provisions for family caregivers of ill or injured veterans for the many years of service before 9/11 is simply the right thing to do and just plain common sense.

DAV's Transportation Network continues to provide this important service to our fellow veterans, but we're seeing a shortage of drivers. If you have the time, I encourage you to consider taking part in this rewarding program, or encourage someone you know to do so. Our volunteer drivers, as well as our volunteers at VA hospitals and those who participate in our Local Veterans Assistance Program, consistently tell us that their own lives have been enriched by taking part in these noteworthy volunteer initiatives.

> Thank you for **placing your sacred trust** in me by electing me your National Commander.

I'm very proud of the strides our National Employment Program has made since its inception in 2014. As I write this, more than 44,000 veterans and spouses have attended DAV All Veterans Career Fairs with over 14,000 jobs offered by employers actively recruiting veteran talent.

DAV came into my life after military service when I needed it most. Thanks to the lifetime of support our organization provides, life for my family and me has been enhanced for the better. Because of this, I wanted to become active within the group that has given me so much. Thank you for placing your sacred trust in me by electing me your National Commander. I continue to be inspired by all of you and your commitment to veterans and their families.

I plan to remain busy on DAV's behalf and hope you will as well. Farewell, and may God bless you and your family.

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(Photo courtesy of The Salt Lake Tribune)

Moses A. McIntosh Jr. National Commander
J. Marc Burgess National Adjutant/Publisher

Daniel J. Clare National Director of Communications
Ashleigh Byrnes Deputy National Director of Communications
Steven Wilson Assistant National Director of Communications
Charity A. Edgar Assistant National Director of Communications
M. Todd Hunter Assistant National Director of Communications
Mary Dever Associate National Director of Communications
Bryan Lett Associate National Director of Communications
Doreen Briones Production Manager
Shannan Archer Senior Graphic Designer

From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT
J. MARC BURGESS



Strength in numbers

You've likely heard it time and time again, but I believe it warrants repeating: When we stand up as one, with the unified voice of our 1.3 million veterans, Congress and the president have to listen.

With the 2016 election cycle heating up, our unity couldn't be more important. The entire House of Representatives, one-third of the Senate and the presidency are up for grabs. As these campaigns pick up steam, for the first time in many years, we—veterans—are one of the critical pillars of support that candidates will need if they hope to be successful.

Given the concentrated media and political focus on the challenges facing veterans over the past two years, this will be one of the most pivotal elections in our lifetimes for determining the future of the VA system of health care and benefits.

There is no doubt that VA health care must be reformed and strengthened. We know the VA can't be everywhere at all times, but we also understand that most of the specialized services ill and injured veterans rely on don't exist in the private sector.

That's why we worked with our *Independent Budget* partners to develop a comprehensive plan to expand access by developing local veteran-centric health care networks that integrate the best of community care into VA health care. Our plan would rebuild and expand the VA while utilizing high-quality private providers to increase access wherever and whenever needed.

Already, the VA has incorporated many of our ideas as part of its system wide MyVA initiative focused on meeting veterans' needs and preferences. We're also working closely with congressional leaders as they are considering new legislation to reform the VA.

At the same time, there have been some truly disturbing statements from candidates, elected officials, commissions and political organizations calling for hundreds of VA hospitals and clinics to be closed and our earned benefits to be scaled back.

As Congress and candidates deliberate these and other VA reform proposals, it will be essential for DAV members to be involved in this debate.

We are at a crossroads and need the voices of our members to be heard.

So, with all of this in mind, I urge all of you to help one another stay informed on legislation impacting veterans and their families. We need to constantly remind Congress, the Administration and prospective future leaders that we will not sit idly by and let our health care and benefits be abolished or diminished.

We have much work ahead of us, but I am confident that by standing together and relying on the strength and power of our grassroots members, we can and will continue to empower veterans to live high-quality lives with respect and dignity.

LETTERS

The future of veterans health care

Your efforts on behalf of veterans, especially those of us who suffered some disability in the service, are much appreciated. Therefore, the alarm you are sounding over talk of cutting back on health care for all veterans should be taken seriously. Unfortunately, the politics of the moment are clouding the issue, relegating veterans in the minds of many legislators to another budget item to be trimmed. Constituent service, especially in the House of Representatives, was an essential duty that was independent of party affiliation and kept many in Congress for decades and helped many veterans. Maybe voters should be asking their congressional representatives, "What are you doing for me?" ***Robert J. Salgado, New Hope, Pa.***

A lifetime of service

During the Vietnam War, I volunteered to serve my country. When my stint was over, I was honorably discharged with a serious service-connected disability. Shortly after returning home, I received a letter from DAV stating that I had earned many VA benefits. Because I've been getting VA benefits for 40 years, now I felt it was time to give back. The VA and DAV put the call out for volunteers, so I signed up. Now, I am a cemetery walker at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis County, Mo. I walk through the over 206,000 headstones and graves of veterans looking for any that are in need of repair. I feel good about honoring all the veterans who went before me and showing to their families that they are still respected and always will be. ***Dennis L. Adair, Wright City, Mo.***

For all veterans

As a veteran working for a private employer who does not recognize Veterans Day, I urge all veterans to join me and write their state and congressional representatives to mandate that private companies employing at least one honorably discharged veteran give those veterans a paid day off for Veterans Day without the veteran having to use accumulated vacation or sick leave. ***Scott Rogers, Everett, Wash.***

VA travel pay system is useless

We've been going to the Nashville VA for more than 20 years. We weren't pleased with the new payment procedure they implemented. As of today, we're up to a four- or five-month period before any money appears in our account. The paper receipts you receive from the kiosk only document that you applied for the travel pay at the end of your visit. What is the holdup? The VA travel situation is quickly becoming the replacement for the veterans waiting to be acknowledged for service-related disabilities. Take it back to a more efficient, immediate payout. Give the veterans their travel pay at the time of the appointment. This current process is a joke. ***Sharon Cavanaugh, Cadiz, Ky.***

Toxic training grounds

In 1978, I was sent to Fort McClellan, near Anniston, Ala., for military police training. This military reservation was home to chemical warfare training for World War I, World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam. The same source of water that the city of Anniston and Fort McClellan both drank from was, and is, highly toxic. Monsanto paid the city of Anniston more than $700 million; the people all moved away after getting this award. The city of Anniston got their payoff amount, but what about the vets who got sent there? ***Raymond Richmond, North Highlands, Calif.***

Women in the military

I read an article in the March/April 2016 edition of *DAV Magazine*—"Vietnam-era women veterans: the unknown trauma"—about Carmen Bennett who was raped in the U.S. Army in 1968, got pregnant and was discharged. The rapist most likely got a promotion. Not much has changed in the military since. Female troops are not treated equally, but all of us need to keep pushing changes in the military and with the VA so that women will join to serve our country and not fear the system. ***Bob Mulholland, Chico, Calif.***

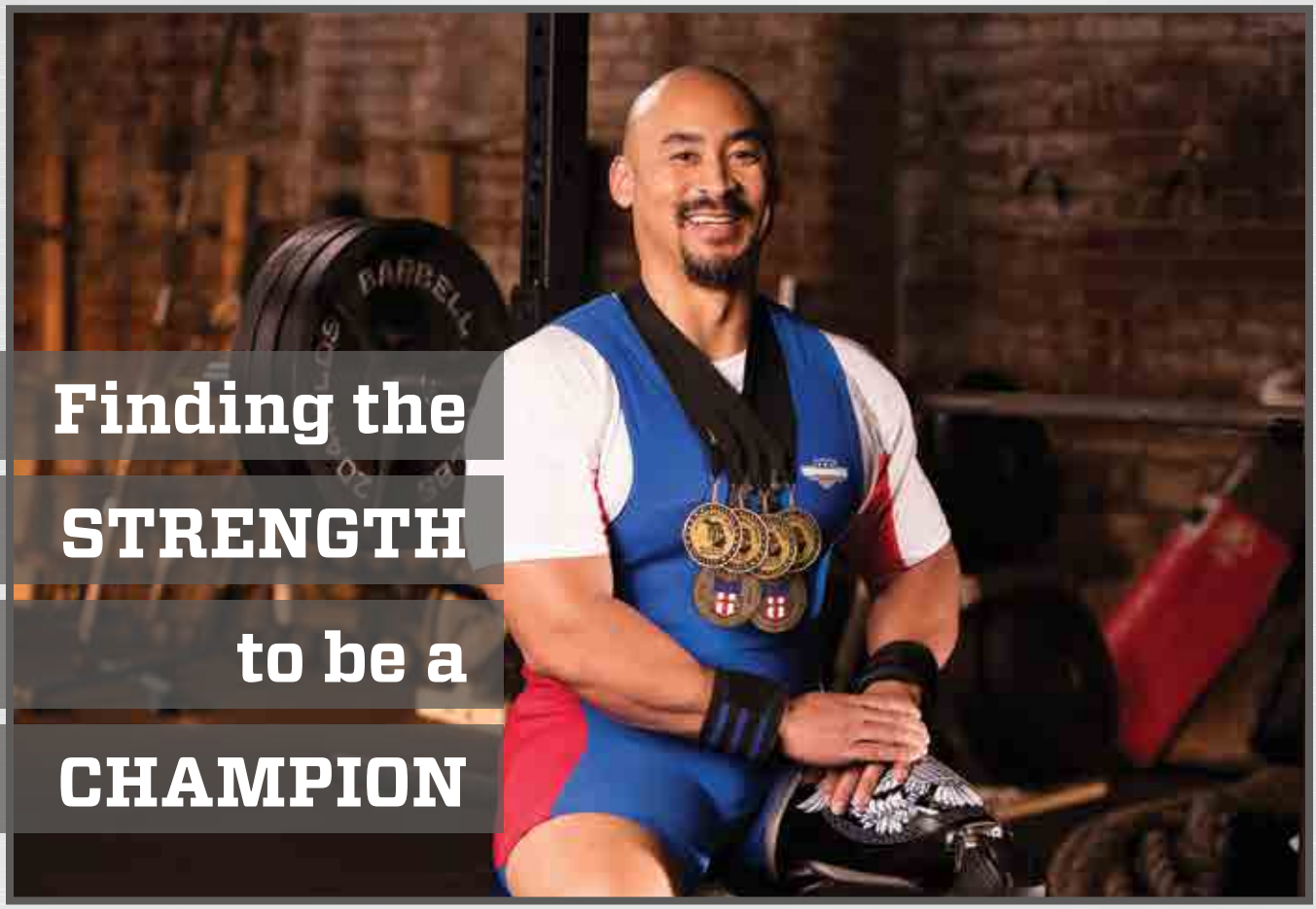
@DAVHQ on Twitter

Our nation needs to keep the most important promise of all: make good on benefits promised to their #survivors. #DIC #offset #widow ***@AndreaLynneCory***

I totally agree that veterans should get the benefits that they deserve. ***@KeithSi66065989***

I agree veterans should also be a priority when they need a job and housing. They should get the best benefits. #veterans heroes ***@THEFLOURISHING2***

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



Finding the STRENGTH to be a CHAMPION

Veteran of the Year leaves personal hardships behind to lift others from despair

By M. Todd Hunter

What's past is prologue. Or is it? Talk to DAV's 2016 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year, Bobby Body, and he'll likely scoff at that notion.

"All I can do is look at the past and laugh," said Body, a single-leg amputee. "But I laugh at the adversity and the fact that I overcame the odds and proved people wrong."

His mother walked out on him when he was 5 years old. Now 42, he hasn't seen her since. His dad was sent to prison just five years later, leaving Body to live in an orphanage until he graduated from high school. But despite the hardships these events presented, Body felt called to serve his fellow citizens as a police officer. To that end, he went to college immediately out of high school and earned a degree in criminal justice.

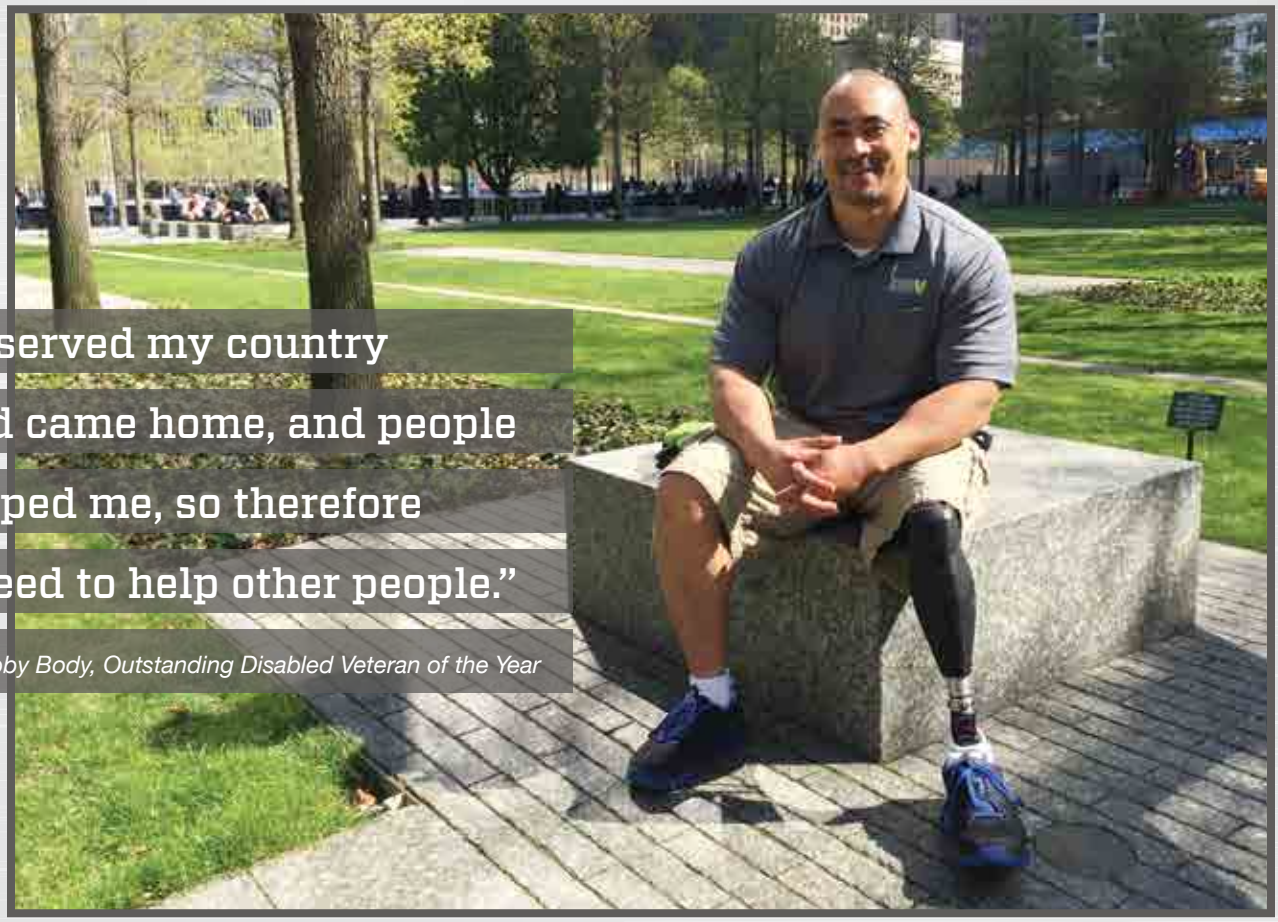
At 22, Body joined the Marine Corps and became an infantryman. A knee injury, however, forced him to be medically discharged before his enlistment was complete, in spite of his efforts to be retained.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Body began working for a security firm in southern California. Then 9/11 happened.

"I couldn't just sit at my cushy job and do nothing," Body explained. "I kept trying to re-enlist in the Marines, but they wouldn't let me because of my injury. But an Army prior service recruiter overheard one of the telephone conversations I was having and said he could get me in, so I went."

He knew where he would most likely be going when he re-enlisted.

After completing infantry training and Airborne School, Body deployed with his unit to Habbaniyah, Iraq, in the summer of 2005. There, he participated in dismounted patrols and improvised explosive device (IED) clearing missions. He also pulled sniper security and volunteered to help an armored unit, where he



"I served my country and came home, and people helped me, so therefore I need to help other people."

—Bobby Body, Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year

learned how to drive and load an M1A1 Abrams tank.

In February 2006, while en route to search for a high-ranking insurgent, an IED blew the door of the Humvee he was riding in into his left side, injuring his arm and leg and resulting in his evacuation back to the States. He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) shortly after the first procedure on his arm and put on medications to help with depression and sleep.

After a year of rehab, Body was ordered to change his military occupation in order to stay in the Army, so he became a tank mechanic. However, in 2007, the injury to his leg began to progress rapidly. After his first leg surgery, he was sent to the Army's Warriors Transition Unit where he endured four additional procedures on the injured limb. He was medically retired in 2009.

Though not the outcome he was hoping for, Body saw the setback as another opportunity to serve. He enrolled at Michigan State University to pursue his master's degree in social work with the ultimate goal of helping veterans with PTSD.

All the while, though, his leg injury continued to progress. After four additional years of various leg surgeries and out of options for a full recovery, surgeons at the Ann Arbor VA told Body he could either keep his leg until it gave out completely or have it amputated above the knee. He opted for the amputation in September 2013.

While recovering at the amputee rehab clinic, Body learned that most of the other recovering amputees had already been there for months—some with no clear end in sight. With a wife and four children at home, he didn't want to be an absent father and husband. True to form, Body found another opportunity in hardship.

"It was extremely painful and brought tears to my eyes, but I told the doctors that I wanted to be up and walking three times a day," he said. "I had to bear the pain and I had to walk, because I didn't want to be there Monday through Friday learning how to walk again and having to wait and wait and wait before I got my permanent leg."

While most people can take anywhere from three to five months to walk away with a new leg, Body did it in less than seven weeks—surprising his family a day before Thanksgiving.

"I was just determined to prove the doctors and physical therapists wrong," he said.

Those same doctors and therapists took notice.

A few weeks after being discharged, officials at the Ann Arbor VA contacted Body to ask him to come back and talk to veterans who recently either had amputations or PTSD, or both in some cases. For Body, it was a no-brainer.

"I look at it like this … I served my country and came home, and people helped me," Body said, "so therefore I need to help other people."

After becoming certified as a peer support specialist by the State of Michigan, Body began conducting group PTSD and amputee counseling. His central message: overcoming the odds.

"I tell them it's power of the mind," Body explained. "It's overcoming and adapting."

All the while, though, Body had been going to his local gym, which happened to be owned by a couple of powerlifting competitors who kept trying to convince him to get involved with the sport. Initially hesitant, Body found powerlifting to be a source that could help him deal with the psychological and physiological effects that often spiral individuals to hit rock bottom. Since that wasn't an option for him, Body propelled himself into the world of powerlifting.

It didn't take long for him to succeed in that endeavor, either.

Body won a gold medal in his weight class in his first appearance at the U.S. Nationals for the American Powerlifting Federation (APF), an affiliate of the World Powerlifting Congress (WPC). From there he was invited to the World Powerlifting Championships in Florida. With the support of DAV's Department of Michigan, Body attended and placed fifth in his weight class.

"We were shocked at how humble he was and how he was using his participation in sports to bring more awareness to the needs of veterans," said Rolly Lee, Treasurer and Judge Advocate for DAV Department of Michigan. "He's going up against able-bodied athletes who've been competing for years—and more often than not, he's beating them."

In May, Body attended another iteration of the APF/WPC U.S. Nationals. This time, he brought home two gold medals—one in his age division and another in an open-age division. He even broke a national record in his age group by using his 5-foot-8-inch, 178-pound frame to lift 424.39 pounds.





Left: *Then-Pvt. Body conducts pre-deployment training at Fort Drum, N.Y., in July 2005.* ***Below:*** *Body stands with his wife, Terri, and children (from left) Adrianna, Isaac, Madalynn and Jayden.*

But ask Body and he will tell you that his biggest accomplishment is serving his fellow veterans. He enjoys it so much that he's in the midst of becoming a DAV Service Officer.

"Anything they want me to do," he said, referring to DAV in his community. "As long as I'm able to get out there and talk to veterans to help them get where they need to be, I'll do anything if I can just help one person."

"Bobby Body is a shining example of everything that is good about our nation and its veterans," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "Through his positive attitude and dedication to hard work, he has truly shown those around him that a disability can be transformed into an ability."

"I can't look at life and think, 'Well I had a rough upbringing, so I'm just going to be this kind of person,'" Body explained. "That's an excuse I'm not going to use."

It's that very outlook that proves no weight is too heavy for Bobby Body.

"I don't let my past determine who I'm supposed to be." ■



Assistant National Service Director Scott Hope demonstrates the 3-D imaging capability of DAV's new iTRAK system to his fellow staff members at National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

STAYING ON THE RIGHT TRAK

DAV uses new technology to revolutionize claims representation

By Joseph R. Chenelly

A new system has launched that will revolutionize how DAV serves veterans, trains National Service Officers (NSOs), and researches and collaborates to represent veterans in their claims for benefits.

The Interactive Training, Research, Advocacy and Knowledge system, known as iTRAK, will make the institutional knowledge of DAV's NSO program accessible nationwide, according to National Service Director Jim Marszalek.

"This is the product of tireless work from the most experienced, dedicated minds in veterans service. It was made possible by the National Service Foundation," said Marszalek. "And it is all clearly worth it."

The system provides structured and continuing training while giving NSOs an ever-evolving resource they can use to assist veterans with their claims and appeals.

By providing state-of-the-art, 3-D representations, NSOs are given a resource that allows them to better understand the full implications of a service-connected injury. Interactive images give NSOs a visual representation of different muscle groups, invaluable for determining such things as muscles damaged via the track of bullet and shrapnel wounds. The image can be manipulated by using a mouse to change the perspective from anterior to lateral and from lateral to posterior views. Each muscle is annotated with the rating schedule diagnostic code under which it is evaluated.

For example, the shoulder girdle is a complicated joint; with one click, the user can visualize a 3-D image of the deep muscles that ordinarily are hidden from view.

"A user could almost literally follow the path a gunshot could take through the musculoskeletal system to help substantiate a claim for benefits," said the late John Maki, who helped produce and design the program during his tenure as Assistant National Service Director. "You don't have to juggle six different resources if you are learning or have a question. It makes all the tools you need available at the click of a mouse."

DAV's renowned, though previously dated, Structured and Continuing Training (SCT) program is digitally incorporated into the system. The Code of Federal Regulations sections from Title 38 are also accessible, as is a library of multimedia resources to give trainees and tenured NSOs further insight into historical information pertinent to the many issues veterans face.

Another area of the system provides users with searchable access to all Board of Veterans' Appeals decisions made in the last three years. All the while, registered users can connect to a forum where they can ask questions and interact with NSOs throughout the country.

"DAV's institutional know-how and reputation are unmatched, but this is going to spread the wealth of knowledge we've accumulated across the nation. It's going to make us more efficient," said Marszalek. "As changes come and new information becomes available, the system will evolve and continuously be updated."

According to Marszalek, the program will keep up with changes in the field and grow to enhance its role in the day-to-day operations of NSOs.

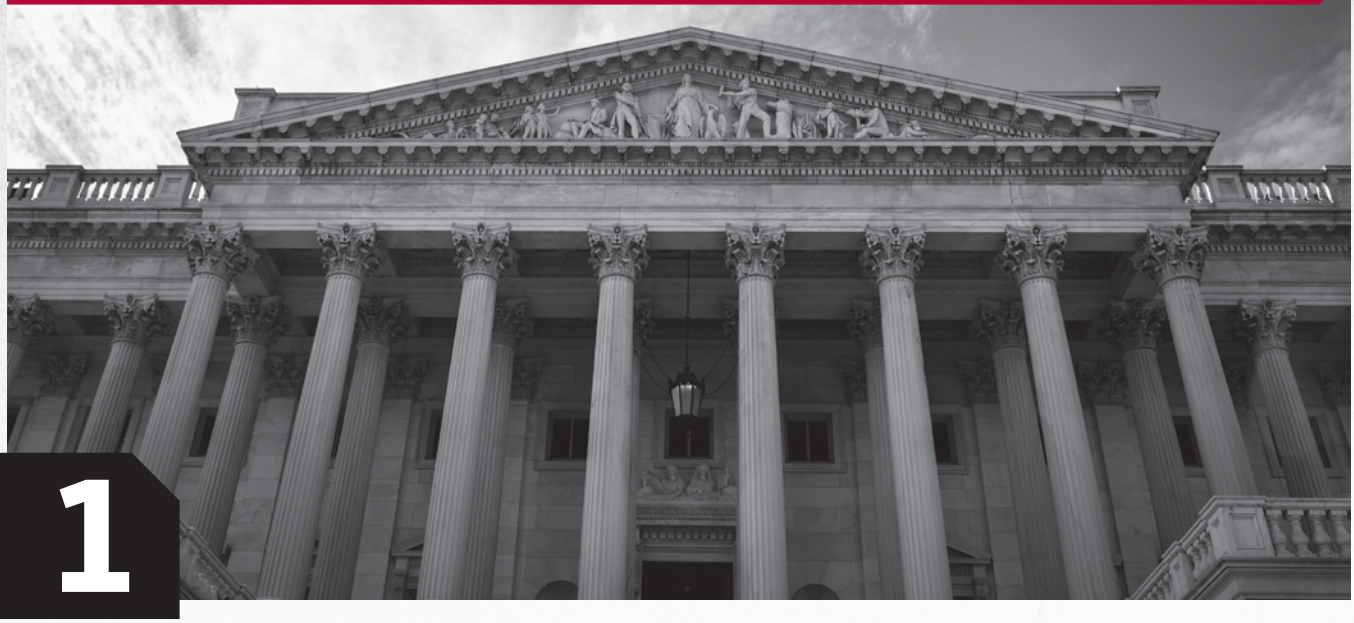
DAV® iTRAK

"DAV's institutional know-how and reputation are **unmatched**, but this is going to spread the wealth of knowledge we've accumulated across the nation. It's going to make us more efficient."

—Jim Marszalek, National Service Director

"iTRAK is enabling us to not only maintain DAV as having the best trained, most knowledgeable National Service Officers in the world," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "It also provides them with a platform of unique digital resources for advocacy on behalf of veterans, their dependents and survivors."

The value of iTRAK for DAV's training was recently reviewed by the American Council on Education (ACE), the nation's most influential higher education institution. ACE's College Credit Recommendation Service certified the iTRAK SCT program for 14 hours of college credits, the most credit hours the program has ever attained. ■



1

Appeals reform moving forward in Congress

Over the last several years, the doubling of disability claims being filed with the Department of Veterans Affairs has led to a proportionate increase in appeals and, thus, more lengthy decision times and backlogs. DAV, in a joint effort with multiple veterans service organizations (VSOs), helped broker a breakthrough with VA officials this spring that could lead to major reform of the claims and appeals process.

"Over a very compressed but intensive couple of months that included a number of closed-door, all-day sessions, we were able to reach general consensus on principles and features of a new appeals system," said DAV National Service Director Jim Marszalek. "We were able to build on similar efforts from an earlier workgroup that put together the 'fully developed appeals' legislation that passed the full House and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees."

A workgroup that included leaders from DAV, other major VSOs, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) was convened in March to modernize the claims and appeals process. The goal was to create a simpler and more efficient system to provide veterans with timely, transparent and fair resolution of their claims and appeals.

The core principle of the new framework is providing veterans with multiple options, or "lanes," to challenge an initial decision on a claim, each designed for different circumstances. One lane would be for a quick review of a claim based on the same evidence but by a higher-level VBA claims adjudicator; a second lane would be for submitting additional evidence and having the entire claim readjudicated as a supplemental claim by VBA; and a third lane would be for filing formal appeals to be reviewed at the Board by a veterans law judge.

To ensure veterans have the maximum opportunity to receive the correct decision in a fair and timely manner, a veteran not fully satisfied with the result of a decision from one lane would have one year to seek another review in a different lane, while still preserving an effective date for benefits based upon the original filing of the claim. For example, a veteran could go straight from an initial decision on a claim to an appeal to the Board. If that decision were unfavorable—but it helped the veteran understand what evidence was needed to support the claim—the veteran would then have the option to submit that evidence as a supplemental claim without fearing an effective-date penalty for choosing to go to the Board first.

"Enactment of this appeals reform legislation would not only improve the experience of veterans and deliver more timely results, but it could also improve quality," said Marszalek. A hearing on comprehensive appeals reform legislation was held in May by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and further legislative action is possible this fall.

2 Legislation proposed to increase specialized care for women veterans

Rep. Corrine Brown, ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced H.R. 2054, a bill that would provide increased access to VA health care for women veterans.

The bill would require the VA to ensure continuous availability of gender-specific services at every VA health care facility, including community-based clinics.

As documented in DAV's September 2014 report, "Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home," women veterans are the fastest growing demographic in the VA's current treatment population, but VA has struggled to keep pace with the rate of growth. DAV made a series of recommendations both to the VA and Congress to improve services and programs to ensure they meet the unique needs of women veterans. The Brown bill is a direct outgrowth of DAV's efforts.

In addition to Brown's bill, Rep. Julia Brownley introduced H.R. 2915, the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act. If enacted, this bill would identify mental health and suicide prevention programs that are the most effective with the best outcomes among at-risk women veterans. The bill would require the VA to report the results of this analysis to the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees.

"According to VA, the suicide rate is six times higher for women veterans compared to civilian women," DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "Increased suicide rates are also reported among women who have experienced military sexual trauma."

VA experts are examining the many reasons suicide rates among women veterans are higher, including military sexual trauma. Ilem noted, "It was interesting to learn that women veterans who used VA health services were 75 percent less likely to die by suicide than women veterans who did not use VA, suggesting timely access to care is essential for suicide prevention.

"We do, however, suggest that there be improved access for women veterans to specialized inpatient and residential mental health programs to ensure recovery and effective reintegration," added Ilem. "VA must ensure all its mental health programs meet the unique needs of women veterans, including safety and privacy concerns."

3 Homeless veterans in need of support

Sen. Richard Blumenthal introduced S. 1885, the Veteran Housing Stability Act of 2015. This bill would expand service and assistance to include veterans who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless and with very low incomes. This expansion would also assist veterans moving into transitional housing with eventually gaining permanent residential occupancy. In addition, this bill would expand the current definition of "covered veteran" to include a veteran who is enrolled in the VA homeless registry.

According to the DAV 2015 Veterans Pulse Survey, 25 percent of veterans see homelessness as one of the biggest challenges facing veterans today.

"That is a significant number," said DAV Assistant National Legislative Director Shurhonda Love. "That tells us that a quarter of our veteran population have seen or experienced this sad epidemic. The law needs to change to protect our nation's heroes. The Veteran Housing Stability Act can do just that."

This legislation would require the VA to implement case management oversight for veterans enrolled in the homeless registry and participating in programs falling under the homeless veteran category. The bill would also designate intense case-management sites in three locations with the highest homeless veteran populations, plus three in suburban or rural areas. It would also permanently authorize the National Center for Homelessness Among Veterans.

The bill would require the VA to conduct outreach, educating housing authorities and others with housing resources about the needs of veterans and the benefits of having veterans as tenants, while building upon community relationships. It would establish criteria to use for determining success or failure of the services provided and would require related reports.



From left: Retired New York firefighter Danny Prince, retired Marine Steve Danyluk, DAV member Bobby Body and many more veterans, active-duty service members and firefighters gathered to present the Spartan Sword to the "FDNY Ten House" in New York. Held across the street from the 9/11 Memorial, the ceremony honored those who have lost their lives in sacrifice for our nation. (Photo courtesy of FDNY Photo Unit)

Spartan Pledge

To fight the suicide epidemic, veterans vow to serve and be there for one another

By Mary Dever

It started with a conversation about veteran suicide and what is causing the "22 a day" epidemic.

It continued with a promise, which became the Spartan Pledge.

The Spartan Pledge is a commitment among veterans to not take their own lives but rather stand for their fellow soldiers in times of despair. It was created almost accidentally by an Iraq veteran, Boone Cutler, when he spoke with another veteran, his friend "Nacho," about a mutual friend's suicide.

"I said to him, 'Have you ever thought about it?'" Cutler remembered. "And he said, 'Yeah, I think about it every day.' And it blew me away. We'd never discussed that—and we were tight. We covered each other."

Off the cuff, Cutler and his buddy made a promise.

"You really can't think too far ahead when you're in that state of mind, so I said, 'Just call. Just call me first. Don't punk out. Don't go without saying goodbye,'" Cutler told his friend. "And then we made an agreement to at least call each other first."

Other veterans helped that evolve into what Cutler started calling the Spartan Pledge, which he said around a thousand veterans have made. It's just two lines, meant to give vets a pause before they hurt themselves:

"I will not take my own life by my own hand until I talk to my battle buddy first. My mission is to find a mission to help my warfighter family."

Veterans commit suicide at a 50-percent higher rate than those who did not serve in the military, according to a study published last year from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The 2015 DAV Veterans Pulse Survey found that 1 in 4 veterans see suicide as one of the biggest challenges facing those who have served.

"You don't have to be suicidal to take the pledge," said Steve "Luker" Danyluk, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel who's also taken up the cause. "It's finding a mission: Help your buddy. It's reconnecting, re-establishing those relationships that seem to vanish once you leave the military."



The Spartan Sword was forged from steel that was part of the World Trade Center when it came down on 9/11. It was created to inspire veterans to take the Spartan Pledge—a promise made between veterans not to commit suicide.

When Danyluk and retired New York City Fire Department firefighter Danny Prince started talking about 25 pounds of steel recovered from the World Trade Center and the aftermath of the tragedy on 9/11, their conversation became about how they could use that powerful symbolism to bring attention to the terrible epidemic of veteran suicide as well.

Prince, a Coast Guard veteran, visited injured veterans at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center last fall. With him, he carried the 25 pounds of scrap metal.

"It's remarkable, the pieces of steel that we have. They're so important, and you don't want to waste anything," said Prince.

Danyluk had an idea to turn the steel remnants into a symbol for veterans and first responders everywhere that could potentially open up the conversation and save veterans' lives. What evolved was nothing short of powerful. They started moving on a plan to gather veterans and first responders together and forge the steel into a "Spartan Sword."

"The pure, almost religious nature of the steel from the World Trade Center was transformed into something about healing," said Danyluk.

The 9/11 attacks motivated a lot of people to join the military, Danyluk said, so the symbolism of the sword is important. "It's about transformation—taking this twisted steel that was part of our nation's greatest tragedy and turning it into something beautiful: a weapon of healing rather than a weapon of destruction."

Danyluk helped organize the Spartan Alliance, a collaboration of nonprofit veteran organizations, and joined forces with Prince to create Spartan Weekend. DAV got on board early, realizing the impact such an event could have for our nation's ill and injured veterans.

"DAV proactively fights this epidemic by providing services that connect veterans with care and address their quality of life, but this was a chance for us to become involved in a way where we could directly see an impact," said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "It was a new idea—nothing like this had been done before—so we knew we were in for something truly special."

Hundreds of veterans, their families and caregivers attended the Spartan Weekend, held in Washington, D.C., in May. They gathered to raise awareness about veteran suicide, a struggle many of them have faced head on.

"I know too many people who have chosen suicide over life, including my own supervisor," Air Force veteran Sarah Bonner said. "That's why I came. I will do anything—absolutely anything—to make sure other veterans don't choose that option. This weekend reminds us that we are not alone. We have our veteran family. I could've been one of the 22, but I wasn't because of support. So now I'm here to show other veterans I support them."

The weekend included a bike ride, a concert at the Hard Rock Cafe headlined by Kristy Lee Cook and other events designed to bond participating veterans and family members. It culminated on Mother's Day with a nondenominational service at the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.



"To solve this problem, we need to make a commitment as a community to be there for one another," said Vietnam veteran and DAV Past National Commander Bobby Barrera (center), who helped lead the pledge during the Mother's Day ceremony at the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial. Also in attendance was DAV Past National Commander and Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation President Dennis Joyner (second from left).

The Rev. Matt Pawlikowski, an Army chaplain from West Point, officiated a Mother's Day service honoring Gold Star and Blue Star Mothers who have sons or daughters who are actively serving or have lost their lives in service.

Margie Miller, from New York, came to the event eight months and seven days after her son, a 22-year-old Marine, fatally shot himself. She talked about how they spoke on the phone most days and how she had just heard all about his plans, seemingly happy as ever, to go boating with friends. Two days later, her husband told her, "There are three Marines in the living room."

"You took a solemn pledge to protect our country," Miller told the audience of veterans. "Take that same pledge, the Spartan Pledge, and protect yourself. Say, 'I will reach out for help.'"

The ceremony closed with dozens of veterans taking an oath against suicide.

Leading the pledge was Miller and DAV Past National Commander and Marine Vietnam veteran Roberto "Bobby" Barrera.

"Come over here," Barrera said while reaching out to the sword with his prosthetic arm. "Gather around the sword with me; touch it. If you can't touch the sword, grab ahold of someone who is touching it, so we can form an unbreakable connection. You are not alone. We are here. Your family, your veteran family."

Everyone in attendance gathered around the sword and each other in an emotionally charged circle while they repeated the pledge.

The evening before the pledge at the memorial, Barrera shared his personal story and told his fellow veterans that, even recently, he himself had contemplated suicide after moving and experiencing a setback to his physical health. The fight against the epidemic is something that requires constant vigilance, he said. Nearly a half-century after being severely burned in combat, and after years of counseling and mentoring others, he was only recently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I realized I needed help. I thought about what it would mean to my family and my fellow veterans if I had made that choice. I thought of all the people who had supported me, and that's what got me through a very dark period," said Barrera. "It's not just recent-era veterans who contribute to these statistics. To solve this problem, we need to make a commitment as a community to be there for one another."

The event also featured DAV Past National Commander Dennis Joyner, a Vietnam veteran and triple amputee, who is the president of Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation. "When the last bullet is fired, when the last man or woman steps off the plane or ship and comes home, for disabled veterans, their struggles—those that are visible and the ones we can't see—remain an everyday part of life," said Joyner. "We as a community of veterans and survivors must band together and ensure none of our own are left behind or forgotten." ■

2016 National Commander Awards

By Bryan Lett

When it comes to keeping our promises to the men and women who've served, DAV has some of the most thoughtful and compassionate professionals and care providers in the world working alongside them to ensure mission accomplishment. With this in mind, each year DAV recognizes some of the top contributors with an award from DAV's National Commander, presented at the National Convention. This year's honorees will receive their awards from DAV National Commander Moses A. McIntosh Jr. at the 95th National Convention in Atlanta.



Veterans Benefits Administration

Bobby Hall

The 2016 DAV National Commander's Award for Outstanding Department of Veterans Affairs employee within the Veterans Benefits Administration is Bobby Hall, of the VA Regional Office in Louisville, Ky.

Hall, a decorated combat veteran, retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2007 after 20 years of honorable service. He began his career with the VA in January 2014, serving as a veterans service representative. Hall would remain in that position until taking over his current role as terminal veterans coordinator in June 2015.

As the Louisville VA Regional Office's terminal veterans coordinator, Hall has visited veterans in the local VA medical centers, sometimes on his own time, to ensure a claim has been properly filled out. He also works with veterans' families and physicians in developing the facts necessary for proper adjudication of claims.

"Once the appropriate paperwork has been secured, he works ceaselessly with his peers in the VA to get a fast and accurate decision," said Richard Vaccari, National Service Officer Supervisor.

There is one case in particular that represents the passion and dedication Hall shows toward veterans daily. Hall received a notification on a Friday afternoon of a terminally ill veteran. He was able to determine that the veteran was located at the Hospice unit at the Louisville VAMC. On his own time, he drove over to the hospital to meet the veteran and his family. He explained what documentation would be needed to complete a claim. The family stated they had the paperwork at home, so Hall returned to the hospital Saturday morning to collect the paperwork and walked the veteran through to the final processing of benefits within just three hours.

"The National Service Officers in Louisville know if you bring one of these cases to Mr. Hall, it will be completed quickly," said Vaccari. "It is agreed upon by all here in the Louisville VA Regional Office who have worked with Mr. Hall that he is a person who will go over and above to provide assistance to local veterans."



Veterans Health Administration

Dr. Murray Altose

The Outstanding Veterans Health Administration Employee this year is Dr. Murray Altose, chief of staff at the Cleveland VA Medical Center.

Altose has devoted his life to veterans for nearly 30 years, and he has served them in virtually every capacity possible for a physician in academic medicine: leadership in administration, education, research and clinical practice.

His systemic implementation of 131 Patient Aligned Care Teams at 14 locations was nationally recognized and had provided a seamless patient experience for more than 112,000 veterans. Altose also developed the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Program to include care for combat-injured veterans with polytrauma and traumatic brain injury. Further, he established the 16-bed inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Center, a 28,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility that serves veterans throughout the region, and instituted the 30-bed Long-Term Spinal Cord Injury Care Unit, dedicated to veterans with spinal cord injuries who need long-term nonacute medical care.

The Cleveland VAMC also currently houses 10 Clinical Centers of Excellence, which is more than any other VA medical center in the country. Altose has led the medical center to exceed the VHA's inpatient satisfaction goal and has led them to be one of only two VHA facilities to maintain a five-star quality rating for the past five years.

"He is the consummate health care professional in his role as hospital leader, perpetual educator and practiced researcher, continually improving the lives of all veterans entrusted with his care," said Cleveland VAMC Director Susan M. Fuehrer. "He is an asset not only to the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center and the VA but to the entire practice of medicine in the United States. Many of the sophisticated programs and new models of care offered to veterans in VHA would not exist without his leadership."



National Cemetery Administration

Srey M. Austin

DAV member and Army veteran Srey M. Austin is this year's VA National Cemetery Administration Employee of the Year.

She serves veterans, their families and survivors as director of Black Hills National Cemetery in Sturgis, S.D., where she is responsible for all burial, maintenance and administrative operations.

Austin took over as the cemetery's director in May 2014 and has daily contact with her local community. She addresses their concerns, resolves complaints and assists visitors to ensure a high level of customer service and satisfaction is not only achieved but also maintained.

She is directly involved with the oversight of several current and upcoming construction and service contracts, including the millennium Raise and Realignment project at Black Hills and Hot Springs national cemeteries, including more than 14,000 headstones, new turf and renovation of well over 75 acres. She is simultaneously creating and establishing the budget for Yellowstone National Cemetery, the first rural national cemetery, in Laurel, Mont.

"DAV is an organization of veterans serving veterans, and DAV member Srey Austin is a perfect example of this motto," said McIntosh. "It's comforting for all of us here at DAV and the veteran community to know that a fellow veteran is there and can be counted on during a family's time of need."



Local Veterans Employment Representative

Robert Hetzel

The 2016 DAV National Commander's Award for the Outstanding Local Veterans Employment Representative goes to Robert Hetzel, of Temple, Texas.

Hetzel is a 23-year Army veteran and is assigned to the Central Texas region, which encompasses Austin and surrounding areas.

Hetzel contacted more than 192 employers to advocate for veteran job-seekers and averages 29 employment referrals each month. Last year alone, Hetzel helped nearly 100 veterans, almost half of whom are disabled, secure meaningful employment.

"Robert has a very tangible passion for his work," said McIntosh. "He has built invaluable partnerships and networks in his region that allow him to connect with employers seeking the unique talents of veterans."

Hetzel also developed six workshops, including a Public Employers Information Session for veterans given by multiple cities, counties and federal government entities regarding their employment opportunities. This provided veterans in attendance with direct access to extensive tips, information, job opportunities and guidance on the application process for each employer present.

"Robert makes a real difference for disabled veterans looking for work," said Jeff Hall, DAV National Director of Employment. "He is a staunch advocate for the capabilities veterans bring to the workforce, largely because he's a veteran himself. We're very proud of his noble work and honored to recognize what he does."

"When these individuals' alarm clocks sound and they rise for the day, **they are answering the call** to service and support to our nation's veterans, and nobody did it better this year. I am truly in awe of what these motivated, hardworking professionals were able to accomplish."

—Moses A. McIntosh Jr., DAV National Commander



Outstanding Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist

Robert Singer

Robert Singer, of Fredericksburg, Va., was awarded the 2016 DAV National Commander's Award for Outstanding Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist.

Singer is a disabled veteran outreach specialist with the Virginia Employment Commission. He is responsible for developing numerous unique programs designed to assist veterans in finding fulfilling employment, including a resume training aid, and is actively involved in eradicating veteran homelessness in his area.

"Robert's hardworking reputation makes him a sought-after commodity in his community, especially at military transition centers and with employers seeking veteran talent," said McIntosh.

The Virginia Employment Commission stated that in 2015 alone, Singer provided 268 veterans with nearly 3,000 documented services.

"Robert has tackled issues unique to veterans head-on," said DAV Employment Director Hall. "He serves in some capacity on just about every local or civic-related group in his community and uses this network to widen his net in the referrals and services he can provide veterans and their families."

Singer spent 30 years serving in the Marine Corps before retiring as a sergeant major. His career included two tours of duty in Vietnam, where he was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds sustained in combat.



Small Employer of the Year

Kevin Barber, President
Veteran Energy

Veteran Energy, a Houston-based company that makes it a part of their business strategy to hire veterans, received the 2016 DAV Small Employer of the Year award.

Veteran Energy is a commercial industrial and residential electricity provider and was selected from more than a dozen other businesses nationally with fewer than 200 employees.

"The transition to civilian life isn't complete until veterans who are able to work are employed," said McIntosh. "Veteran Energy knows that hiring veterans isn't an act of charity. It's good for a company's bottom line and the right thing to do."

More than 9 in 10 employees at Veteran Energy served in the military. The company provides a comprehensive training program to ensure their veteran hires have all of the essential skills to be successful in the Texas electricity market. Veteran Energy has partnered with local VA offices and the city leadership of Houston to ensure transitioning veterans and veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless do not have their electricity turned off.

"My company and personal mission have become much more than selling power since 2010," said Veteran Energy founder and President Kevin Barber, who is himself an Army veteran. "It is truly a social enterprise, and our mission is vital to this community.

"It's about assisting that combat Army veteran and mother of two children who has her lights turned off and can't pay the bill. We are the ones who turn them on and get her immediate needs assistance utilizing our network. It's about the Navy veteran who needed a car; we utilized our resources to assist and get her a car for transporting her and her children to school. These are just a few of the successes we have experienced since I started this company, and we have many more to come."



Medium Employer of the Year

Michael McCoy, CEO
Z Systems Corp.

DAV's Medium Employer of the Year is Z Systems Corp., a company that specializes in logistics engineering, information technology and international development. The company supports the Department of Defense.

Based out of Killeen, Texas, Z Systems' workforce is made up of 63 percent veterans, and 25 percent of their total employees are disabled veterans.

"Z Systems Corp. routinely executes large recruiting efforts for add-on missions to current contracts," said CEO Michael McCoy. "During these efforts, Z Systems expedites veteran resumes through the application process when their military occupational specialty from their military years aligns with the open positions. We recognize that these individuals require less training, less clearance effort and an expedited ability to perform job functions faster than civilian personnel who are not veterans."

The abundant veteran presence in the organization contributes to a culture of camaraderie and teamwork that is not only advantageous to the company but directly benefits the veteran employees as well. Further, when promotion opportunities become available within the organization, they conduct internal boards where each individual's military skills and company experience factor into the career advancement decisions.

"This company illustrates what we already know," said McIntosh. "Veterans and disabled veterans have experience and capabilities that any company would find valuable. Z Systems is ensured for continued success largely because of their veteran workforce."

First Data, a Dallas-based financial technology and merchant services company, was named DAV's Large Employer of the Year.

According to the company, First Data hired 29 disabled veterans in 2015 and 99 women veterans. Since the establishment of First Data's Military and Veterans Affairs team in 2014, veteran and spouse hires have risen from 2 percent to 15 percent.

"The [First Data] Military and Veteran Affairs team had dedicated recruiters focused on military-affiliated candidate recruiting, retention and education for owner associates, as well as resources to aid veteran entrepreneurs and business owners," said Melissa Bird, First Data military project manager. "Military recruiters are specifically focused on veterans, Guard [and] Reserve members and military spouses."

"First Data has a competitive edge in their business because they strive to include candidates who are able to handle adversity and contribute to the success of their team," said McIntosh. "Veterans and disabled veterans alike come to the workforce with experience in management, leadership, discipline and a commitment to mission success.

"I'm grateful for what First Data has done for the men and women who served," McIntosh added. "These employers know when you hire veterans, you hire some very skilled and sought-after talent."



Large Employer of the Year

Frank Bisignano, Chairman/CEO First Data

2016 ALL VETERANS CAREER FAIRS

Date	City
July 7	Hartford, CT
July 14	St. Louis, MO
July 21	Sacramento, CA
July 21	Tampa, FL
August 4	Raleigh, NC
August 11	New Orleans, LA
August 16	**Virtual event**
August 25	Dallas, TX
August 25	Denver, CO
August 31	Boston, MA
September 1	San Antonio, TX
September 8	Miami, FL
September 8	Houston, TX
September 8	**Virtual event**
September 15	New York, NY
September 22	Phoenix, AZ
September 22	Columbia, SC
September 29	Cincinnati, OH
October 6	Atlanta, GA

Visit **jobs.dav.org** for details on venue locations.

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2016 George H. Seal Awards

Honoring dedicated volunteers

The Seal Awards are conferred each year in memory of George H. Seal, who was DAV's Director of Voluntary Services and a leading organizer and administrator of the VA Voluntary Services program from 1952 until his death in 1977. The presentations will be made at the 95th National Convention, held July 31–Aug. 3 in Atlanta.

DAV RECIPIENT

Horace Scott Jr.

When Horace Scott Jr. exited the Navy in 1963, it did not represent the end of his service. He continued to dedicate his time, leadership and energy for over a quarter of a century to the VA Connecticut Healthcare System as a volunteer.

Scott, a life member of DAV Chapter 12 in Hartford, Conn., took his first turn as a volunteer driver 26 years ago and never slowed down on his way to accumulating over 24,000 volunteer hours.

"Horace accepts any assignment given without question or hesitation," said Mark Frazee, chief of voluntary service at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System. "His attitude toward the assignment is one of enthusiasm and care. His attitude is infectious, often helping us to gain more volunteers based on their experiences with him. He is a tremendous asset, and I truly wish there were more like him in this world."



"I could not be prouder of our George H. Seal Award recipients," said National Commander Moses A. McIntosh Jr. "They are selfless, dedicated people who are very deserving of this award. It is a small way for us to thank them for all that they have done and all that they continue to do. DAV is blessed to have a fleet of outstanding volunteers. People like Horace throughout the country are honoring the sacrifices of veterans in meaningful ways, and they deserve our utmost praise and respect." ■

AUXILIARY RECIPIENT

Jeannie Kyle

Jeannie Kyle is renowned among her fellow volunteers as a thoughtful, caring and passionate volunteer at the VA medical center in Spokane, Wash.

Kyle began her distinguished DAV Auxiliary adventure in 1987, first volunteering at the DAV "Forget Me Not" donation table. It was then she found her life's passion: interacting with an organization that supports our nation's veterans. A quarter-century of service later, she hasn't looked back.

"I couldn't do the job I do without her," said Thomas Marshall, chief of voluntary service at the Spokane VAMC. "Jeannie's impact on the DAV program is unmatchable; she carries the weight of a tough job for anyone to handle."

Kyle was actively involved in her unit's community service projects, such as providing food baskets for needy families and hosting events for Auxiliary members' children. For many years, she also helped cook and serve at the unit's monthly veteran luncheons.



Kyle has been the Hospital Service Coordinator at the Spokane VAMC for the past 11 years and has amassed more than 13,000 volunteer hours.

With a husband, brother and stepson who are veterans, Kyle stays extremely motivated in her work and makes sure veterans receive the support DAV and the Auxiliary offer.

"Jeannie is the kind of person who people know they can count on and who seems to derive her energy by helping people. When new challenges and opportunities are presenting themselves, she goes above and beyond the call of duty," said Auxiliary National Commander Linda Stake. "She has not only taken on a role of great responsibility that veterans count on but, for over a decade, has performed this role brilliantly, and we thank her for all that she has done in representing our cause." ■



More than 1,000 WASPs—Women Airforce Service Pilots—provided essential military air support during World War II. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force)



WASP Elizabeth L. Gardner, of Rockford, Ill., at the Harlingen Army Air Field in Texas. (National Archives)



Dorothy Olsen, seen on a P-38 Lightning, during her time with the WASPs. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

Honors restored to WASPs

President signs legislation opening Arlington to women vets' remains

By M. Todd Hunter

In their youth, a little-known group of women answered the nation's call to service by enlisting in the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs)—a group of more than 1,000 female pilots who worked stateside ferrying planes, towing targets for gunnery training and serving as flight instrument instructors for male pilots during World War II. In May, President Obama signed a bill into law ensuring these female aviation pioneers are properly honored in death.

By signing H.R. 4336, the president and Congress righted a wrong for the nearly 100 remaining WASPs, their families and their many sisters-in-arms who passed away before them. The move came after Army officials ruled last year that—despite approving these measures in 2002—WASP members could no longer receive military honors or have their ashes buried at Arlington National Cemetery under then-existing rules, even though the women earned veteran status under Public Law 95-202 nearly 40 years earlier.

The ruling led family members of WASPs to start an online petition to change the law. The petition, which gathered more than 178,000 signatures, notes that 38 WASPs died in service to their country and, according to Arlington, "Service to country is the common thread that binds all who are remembered and honored at Arlington."

"This decision just doesn't make sense," said Rep. Martha McSally, sponsor of H.R. 4336, which had more than 177 co-sponsors. "At a time when we are opening all positions to women, the Army is closing Arlington to the pioneers who paved the way."

Congress unanimously passed the measure in both chambers in May.

"Today we have righted a terrible wrong so Women Airforce Service Pilots can once and for all be laid to rest alongside our nation's patriots at Arlington National Cemetery," said Sen. Barbara Mikulski, who introduced companion legislation in the Senate. "If they were good enough to fly for our country, risk their lives and earn the Congressional Gold Medal, they should be good enough to be laid to rest at Arlington."

"The Women Airforce Service Pilots courageously answered their country's call in a time of need while blazing a trail for the brave women who have given and continue to give so much in service to this nation since," said President Obama after signing the legislation. "Every American should be grateful for their service, and I am honored to sign this bill to finally give them some of the hard-earned recognition they deserve." ■



Gulf War Illness is REAL

Research consortium publishes main causes of illnesses impacting Persian Gulf War veterans

By Steven Wilson

As the nation marks the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait and Operation Desert Storm, it's important to remember that while the operation was a stunning military victory, an estimated 30 percent of the 700,000 deployed U.S. forces contracted a debilitating illness after the conflict.

Soon after returning home from the desert, many service members reported symptoms of unexplained and widespread pain, fatigue, cognitive problems, skin rashes, and gastrointestinal and respiratory issues among other ailments. Initially referred to as "Gulf War Syndrome," this chronic multisymptom disorder is now called "Gulf War Illnesses" (GWI) by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

What causes Gulf War Illnesses?

A team of researchers from several academic and professional disciplines recently published new findings related to GWI, including the main causes.

"The most significant finding in this review paper is that we have confirmed that Gulf War Illness is a real disorder caused by chemical exposures that veterans experienced during the war, including pesticides and pyridostigmine bromide (PB) anti-nerve gas pills and possibly also sarin nerve gas exposure," said Dr. Kimberly Sullivan, research assistant professor at the Boston University School of Public Health and researcher with the Gulf War Illness Consortium (GWIC).

"Recent studies showed that Gulf War-related chemicals caused chronic inflammation in the

brain in animal models by releasing hundreds-fold higher chemical messengers called cytokines. Preliminary studies with Gulf War veterans also show increased signaling of these cytokine chemical messengers that were associated with their GWI symptoms," she said.

> "The most significant finding in this review paper is that we have confirmed that Gulf War Illness is a **real disorder caused by chemical exposures** that veterans experienced during the war."
>
> *— Dr. Kimberly Sullivan, Research Assistant Professor, Boston University School of Public Health and Researcher with GWIC*

Treatment progress

Another finding is how progress is being made regarding treatment of GWI.

"It became clear during our review of the studies on GWI that the animal models and clinical work with Gulf War veterans is now converging in a way that we haven't seen in the past," said Sullivan. "This indicates that our animal studies have now focused in a way that more accurately reflects what is happening with our veterans, including using animal models that show chronic effects versus short-term effects from Gulf War exposures."

Sullivan said knowing more about chronic effects and short-term effects of the illness allows researchers combatting GWI to develop specific, targeted treatments in animal models before choosing the best treatments in clinical studies to provide to veterans suffering from GWI.

"This will save time and expense by targeting only the most promising treatments for our ill Gulf War veterans," Sullivan said.

Why does GWI affect some, but not all, Gulf War veterans?

Genetics may be a major factor in GWI, according to the new research.

"GWI impacts some veterans but not others because of individual genetic abilities to process these deployment-related chemical exposures," Sullivan said.

Researchers with the GWIC concluded gene-exposure studies prove people who are genetically predisposed to be better than others at processing things like PB anti-nerve agent pill chemicals are 40 times more likely to develop GWI than those with a different genetic makeup. This was not widely known prior to the publishing of the new study because precise data had not been collected regarding specific, individual genetic makeups coupled with chemical exposures encountered by Gulf War veterans. This aspect of the study by GWIC revealed the pattern.

What's next?

Sullivan said the next waypoint in treating GWI is continued research and further study to ratify these promising developments.

"The next steps in combatting GWI [are] to confirm these cytokine and other biomarkers of illness using brain imaging and blood markers and to target the most promising treatments for GWI," she said.

According to the VA, between 175,000 and 210,000 Gulf War veterans suffer from symptoms associated with GWI.

"This study by the Gulf War Illness Consortium sheds new light on issues affecting many men and women who served in the Persian Gulf region," said DAV National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "DAV will continue to advocate on behalf of veterans and their families who were exposed to neurotoxicants, nerve agents and medications that altered their lives.

"While this conflict is now a quarter-century old, we can never forget the sacrifice made by these men and women who reminded the entire world freedom comes at a price, which is often shouldered by very few," Jesinoski said. ■



From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER
LINDA S. STAKE

Goodbye and Godspeed

Words cannot express the emotions I am feeling as I sit down to write my final column as your DAV Auxiliary National Commander. It has been an absolute privilege to serve our members, and I wouldn't trade the experience for the world.

The Auxiliary made a concentrated effort during my tenure to keep the spotlight on military families and caregivers.

No one knows better than us that service members don't deploy in harm's way alone. The whole family is affected by the sacrifice required of military life. Individuals don't go to war; families do.

When that service rendered to our country has life-changing effects on military members, it's often the families who are left to pick up the pieces. A spouse, parent or sometimes even children rapidly transition into the role of caregivers when this occurs. They don't do it for tangible rewards or benefits, yet so many care for our veterans with no support from our government.

I submit to you that caregivers do what they do out of love. Indeed, there is no greater love in this world than a caregiver giving freely of themselves to enhance the quality of life of an ill or injured veteran.

It's why I believe our focus on caregivers and their roles in veteran families is a very worthy cause and a fight we should continue. We should never forget that DAV and the Auxiliary exist to provide a lifetime of support to veterans and their families.

The founders of this great nation promised we would take care of our veterans. Part of that social contract should extend to the amazing men and women who put their lives on hold to care for a veteran every day. I've had the opportunity this year to meet many of you, and I will forever cherish the stories, trials and tribulations you shared with me.

It has been an honor to serve as your DAV Auxiliary National Commander. May God continue to bless America, DAV and the Auxiliary.



Auxiliary Fall Conference dates set

The 2016 DAV Auxiliary Fall Conference will take place Sept. 29–Oct. 1 at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel. The conference will open that Thursday with a health and wellness fair at 1 p.m., will include a banquet dinner Friday (for an extra fee) and will close with a reception on Saturday.

Conference registration is $35; the fee for the optional banquet is $40. To make hotel reservations, call 513-421-9100 or toll-free at 1-800-HILTONS, or visit resweb.passkey.com/go/DAVA1016. Reservations must be secured by Aug. 28. Rooms are $129 for a single or double.

Parking is $28 per night. Overnight guests receive a 20-percent discount. Shuttle service from the airport is available through Executive Transportation. Taxi service is available from Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport, which is approximately 12 miles from the hotel.

For more information, visit davauxiliary.org/news/Events.aspx.



Matilda Brooks

Firefighter, volunteer

By Steven Wilson

A former firefighter and lifelong volunteer to veterans and her community has been named DAV Auxiliary Member of the Year.

Matilda Brooks, Commander of Unit 144, Wappingers Falls, N.Y., will receive the honor at DAV's 95th Annual Convention in Atlanta.

"A long time ago, my friends asked me to volunteer, and since then I have found that I love it," she said, describing her more than 40 years of volunteer work.

Brooks is described as "simply an amazing woman" by DAV Auxiliary Adjutant Pat Kemper.

"She's a very driven person," Kemper said. "The impact of someone giving of themselves to their community for more than four decades is almost immeasurable."

> "It's a special someone who is **brave enough** to fight fires but **tender enough** to keep enriching the lives of her community's veterans."
>
> —*Linda Stake, DAV Auxiliary National Commander*

Brooks has contributed more than 83,000 hours over her lifetime at VA hospitals. She also served her community as a firefighter for more than 20 years. Today, she faithfully spends eight hours a day, Monday through Friday, volunteering as a DAV Transportation Network driver, a VA hospital volunteer and with clerical duties at her beloved fire department.

She also spreads the word about DAV and the Auxiliary's mission.

"Matilda actively seeks new members while she is transporting patients and working [volunteer events]," said Cheryl Connors, DAV Auxiliary State Commander of New York. "She spends every moment she can doing for others."

Connors said Brooks can, at any given time, be found in her community volunteering, baking, cooking, working fire or accident scenes and being an endless comfort to everyone around her.

Brooks' DAV Auxiliary membership is through her brother, a disabled veteran who served in Korea and Vietnam.

She has held every office of DAV Auxiliary leadership and committee chair within her state. Currently, she serves as the state conductress, whose duties include assisting with ceremonies, unit meetings and state conventions, among others.

Brooks' awards for service to her community include Volunteer of the Year at the Castle Point Campus of the VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, numerous plaques of honor from the Chelsea Fire Company and several certificates of merit from the mayor's office in Wappingers Falls.

"Matilda's accomplishments are plainly outstanding," said DAV Auxiliary Commander Linda Stake. "It's a special someone who is brave enough to fight fires but tender enough to keep enriching the lives of her community's veterans. She is truly a blessing."

Brooks said she was "very happy" to have been selected as the award recipient, but she didn't have time for a longer interview. She was on her way to volunteer at the local VA hospital for bingo night. ■

Clinical trial aims to **change the lives of amputees**



Ed Salau grins while standing after receiving a Percutaneous Osseointegrated Prosthesis, or POP, implant. The procedure was part of a VA-funded clinical trial and was the first operation of its kind in the United States. (Photo courtesy of the VA)

Through VA-funded research, veterans become first Americans to undergo new prosthetic limb operation

By Bryan G. Lett

After a decade of preliminary research, two veterans are participating in an important and cutting-edge clinical trial that could change the lives of veteran amputees and reinvent the way we think about prosthetics.

In December 2015, Army veterans and amputees Bryant Jacobs and Ed Salau were the very first Americans to receive Percutaneous Osseointegrated Prosthesis, or POP, implants at the Salt Lake City VA Health Care System.

Typically, amputees cap their truncated limbs with a latex sock and put it straight into a socket. The POP implant removes the need for a socket by surgically inserting a titanium rod into the patient's femur before attaching a docking station for the new limb. This offers more comfort and range of movement.

For many amputees, the socket attachment is difficult to wear for more than a few hours a day. It also oftentimes causes sweating, pain and frequent trips to the doctor for refitting if the wearer's weight fluctuates.

"Every problem with my prosthetic limb is related to my prosthetic," said Salau, who lost his left leg in Iraq in November 2004 when a rocket-propelled grenade hit the vehicle in which he was riding.

"I've had open sores this whole time," agreed Jacobs, whose right leg was amputated two years ago after a decade of complications from the injury he received from a roadside bomb in Iraq. "Its just stuff like that that impedes life, like putting on jeans. The IED blew most of my inner thigh out, so I have a lot of bone



As seen in this X-ray, a POP implant would essentially act as an extension of the patient's limb. The titanium rod will attach itself to human bone and become stronger over time. This eliminates many of the issues amputees endure, while providing more range of motion and feeling, and reducing the amount of energy expended to use the prosthetic limb. (Photo courtesy of Ed Salau)

> "I can feel the ground. I haven't had that sensation in 11 years. ... It's a big **GAME-CHANGER**."
>
> —Ed Salau

growth in that area, so a socket fit is really hard. Every 20 minutes I'd be dripping in sweat."

"Over half of the people that have amputations from blast injuries—that means all of our veterans—have bone in their muscle and their soft tissue," said Dr. Laurence Meyer, director of research at the Salt Lake City VA. "And when we get that socket pressing on that, it limits the amount of time they can wear the socket, or it means they can't move at all."

The new POP implant surgery is a part of a VA-funded clinical trial approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to determine the safety and function of the new implant. The Salt Lake City doctors had special permission to perform the procedure, which has been done in other countries but never legally in the U.S.

"The big advantage with osseointegrated prosthesis is getting rid of the socket, as 50 percent of them have problems," said Dr. Rickard Branemark, associate professor at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine.

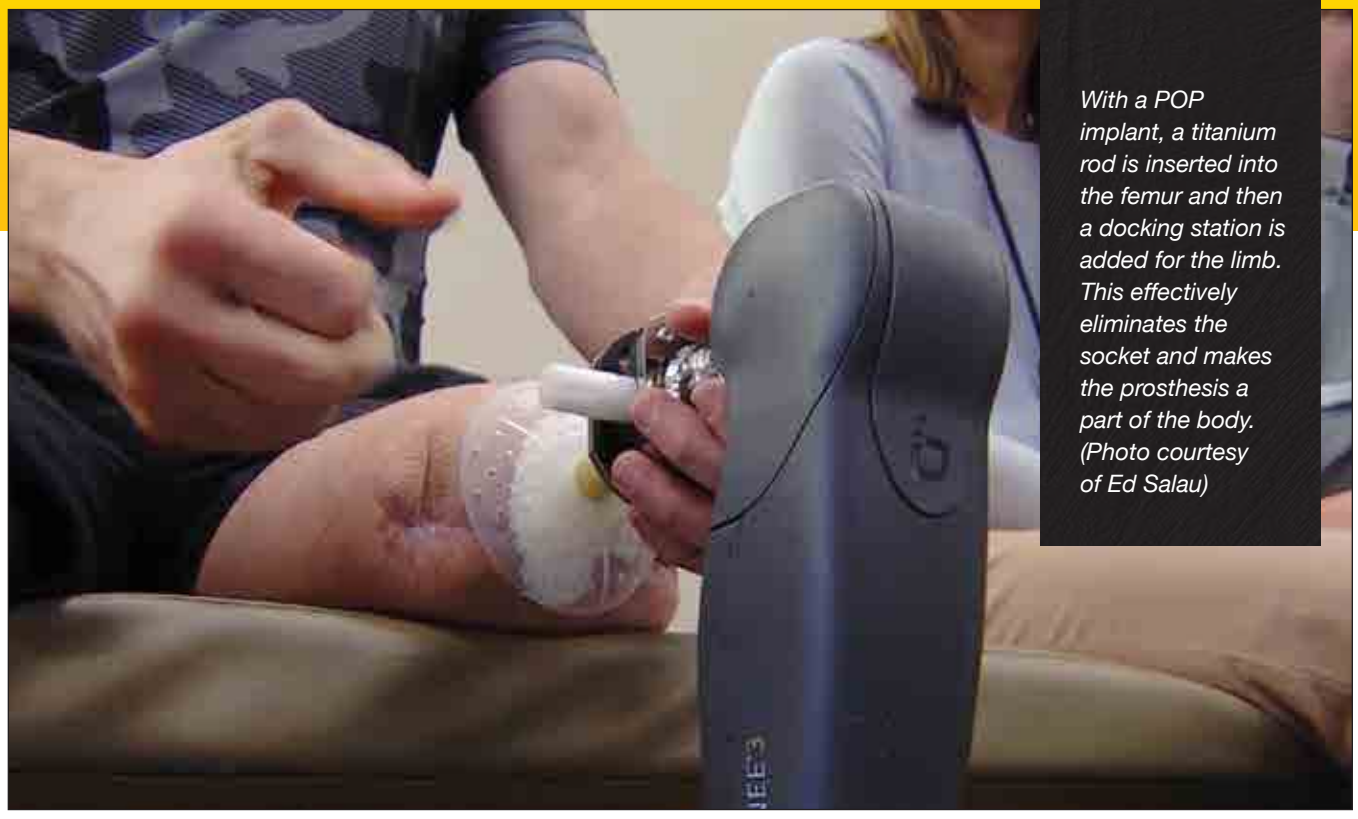
Branemark's father, Swedish bioengineer Per-Ingvar Branemark, discovered osseointegration in the 1950s. While implanting titanium cylinders into rabbit femurs, he found he couldn't extract the titanium without destroying the surrounding bone.

"What seems to be happening is titanium fuses with live human bone," said Branemark. "The difference is in the way it connects to bone tissue—rare that it fades over time, as it's a robust connection to the bone. With osseointegrated prosthesis they can be much more mobile—no socket means they can sit down and rotate their leg. They cannot do that with a socket because their leg would fall off."

The experimental surgery is a two-phase operation. Salau and Jacobs underwent surgery Dec. 7, 2015, to implant titanium rods into the base of their femurs. Then on Feb. 8, the surgeons attached a docking mechanism for a prosthetic leg to the titanium rod.

In April, Salau and Jacobs attached their new legs and stood up.

"I can feel the ground," said Salau. "I haven't had that sensation in 11 years. I wanted everything better, faster, smoother—that's what I think I have now. It's a



With a POP implant, a titanium rod is inserted into the femur and then a docking station is added for the limb. This effectively eliminates the socket and makes the prosthesis a part of the body. (Photo courtesy of Ed Salau)

big game-changer. I found there were no more blisters. There was no more skin irritation. I just walked around."

"I have a leg again," said Jacobs. "As soon as the stitches came out, it was easy. There was nothing going on. There was no pain. It was almost like you couldn't tell you have it. Everything is 100-percent different, but better."

There are even more potential upsides to a POP implant than the current latex sock and socket prosthesis, including "osseoperception," the adjustment of the mind to an osseointegrated prosthesis.

"The implication is that bone-integrated prosthetic fixtures communicate with the mind, via numerous neural pathways, to promote near-normal function and improved psychological acceptance," said Dr. Robert Myers, professor emeritus of anesthesiology and neuropathology at the University of California, San Diego. "A patient may be able to sense, through their artificial leg, what type of subfloor was beneath a carpet."

Salau acknowledges a greater sense of feel and believes the surgery could make a huge difference in the way newly amputated veterans cope with their new lives.

"Sitting here, I can feel the slightest indentations in the tile beneath my feet," he said. "In the future, because of this, we will wake up from an accident or a trauma in combat and we will have a rod inserted and we will be told in a few weeks, we will connect your limb and you can start walking again."

Over time, the muscles in Jacobs' and Salau's legs will grow stronger as the titanium rod fuses with their bone, ultimately making it possible for them to move with relative ease.

"We're excited to see the progress these veterans are making," said Meyer. "These first steps are amazing for the patients and our team. This is a long-term study that will (eventually) cover 10 veterans over multiple years, and if successful, we hope it will be expanded to a larger number of patients."

Although this is an exciting step forward, there are still many more phases of the research that will need to be conducted before FDA approval can be granted.

"This is a very exciting start to a very exciting process, and I am proud of our friends at the VA for funding such a trial," said DAV National Commander Moses A. McIntosh Jr. "In the near future, we may be able to reduce some of the physical and mental stress, while speeding up the recovery for veterans forced to endure amputations. … However, for now we just want to continue to monitor the situation and hope for more progress and more good news coming back to the medical staff."

Columbia Trust provides value, utility for DAV

By sharing and distributing funds, the Trust ensures promises are kept nationwide

By M. Todd Hunter

Chapters and Departments sometimes lack the funds needed to provide direct service initiatives for ill and injured veterans in their communities. When they do, they can contact the Columbia Trust—a resource to ensure DAV's many invaluable, no-cost services remain available to veterans and their families across the country.

As a "restricted fund" within DAV's National Service Foundation, the Trust exists solely to support DAV service programs at Department and local levels where funding might not otherwise be available. Additionally, Chapters and Departments that have excess funds can "spread the wealth" to other DAV entities by contributing to the Trust.

"The Columbia Trust is all about providing the means to help others," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "Our members and leaders need to look out for each other the same way we did while wearing the uniform."

Chapters and Departments that need a grant from the Trust to initiate or maintain programs should apply. To ensure funds go where they are needed most, however, these grants are not awarded to Chapters and Departments that demonstrate an ongoing ability to meet their proposed service obligations.

"One of the most successful functions of the Trust is its role in bridging resources from well-populated areas to those in need," said National Service Foundation President Arthur H. Wilson. "Funds contributed to the Trust are then used for service initiatives that other Chapters and Departments simply couldn't afford to offer veterans in their communities."

The Foundation's Board of Directors acts as a fiduciary of the Trust, with guidance from an advisory committee. The committee was established to advise the board on the merit of each grant request and consists of one member from each district of DAV's national organization. This provides each geographical area with equal representation and a voice in the decision-making process.



"One of the most successful functions of the Trust is its role in bridging resources...."

Arthur H. Wilson, President, DAV National Service Foundation

"The Columbia Trust makes service initiatives possible where they are most needed," Burgess said. "It enables us to both give and receive. It provides the means for our leaders at the local level to keep our promises to America's ill and injured veterans and their families." ■

Learn More Online

More information about the Trust, including a grant application and steps on how to contribute, is available at nsf.dav.org/trust. Current annual financial reports must be on file and approved at DAV National Headquarters in accordance with Articles 8 and 9 of the DAV National Bylaws before an application will be considered.



Help America's heroes

Leave a legacy gift to DAV

We would love the opportunity to thank you and to welcome you to the DAV Guardian Society now for remembering America's disabled veterans in your future plans.

As a member of the DAV Guardian Society, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are standing beside great men and women like Jim Roman by ensuring that DAV continues to be here to meet the ever-growing needs of the ill and injured veterans we serve.

As a member, you will also receive:

- A distinctive lapel pin
- An engraved Certificate of Appreciation
- A window decal
- Recognition in the DAV Guardian Society Newsletter *(unless anonymity is preferred)*

TO LEARN MORE

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

DAV Guardian Society

A legacy of HOPE

Veteran includes DAV in estate plans to aid future generations of ill and injured veterans

Jim and Mildred Roman understood all too well what DAV means to the thousands of ill and injured veterans it serves. A disabled veteran himself, Jim experienced firsthand the life-changing benefits of DAV's programs and services, and he developed an appreciation for the impact they can have on an injured veteran's quality of life.



Jim and Mildred Roman

After breaking both legs and hips while serving in Guam and spending a year recovering in the hospital, Jim dedicated his life to taking care of Mildred while also ensuring he could continue helping his fellow veterans. Deeply appreciative of all the help he had received during his recovery, Jim wanted to pay it forward to ensure other disabled veterans would not be forgotten in their times of need, just as he had not been forgotten in his.

Jim hoped to leave a lasting legacy that would help DAV serve all the future generations of ill and injured veterans. He wanted to continue to make an impact in the lives of his fellow veterans long after he was gone. By naming DAV in his will, Jim was able to make a contribution toward the DAV programs and services that he was so grateful to receive when his future was filled with uncertainty.

Naming DAV in your estate plans is an easy way to ensure that DAV will still be here to help future generations of veterans. You can designate DAV as a beneficiary of your financial accounts or your life insurance policy, or you can name DAV to receive a portion of your assets through your will or trust.

By letting us know we were in his estate plans, DAV was able to properly thank and honor Jim through the DAV Guardian Society while he was still living. Jim has been gone for nearly a year, but his legacy of hope and compassion lives on through the gift he left to DAV, which he established with the vision of helping the organization carry on the important work of serving the men and women who deserve our help. ■

From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN
MICHAEL P. DOVER



Volunteerism

Greetings, everyone! Throughout history, DAV volunteers have played an integral role in the life of veterans and their families. In the early years of our country, volunteers mended uniforms, cared for the sick and wounded, and comforted families of fallen veterans. Today, our DAV volunteers are found throughout our communities, providing services in schools, hospitals, on sports fields and in many other capacities and offices. DAV is looking for a few good volunteers who understand there is more to be done. We are not finished impacting our communities.

Interested in dedicating time to helping others? Not sure what path you need to take? DAV is the largest veterans service organization whose sole mission is service to veterans and their families. This service is provided by members who volunteer their time, money and energy, benefiting the DAV organization, local communities at large and individual volunteers by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among its members, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.

Volunteering can enhance your career. Volunteer work, whether in addition to a current job or an activity between jobs, shows an employer that you are willing to try new experiences. Being involved usually demonstrates a willingness to take initiative and make things happen. Our dedicated members donate countless hours in support of ensuring veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

DAV volunteers bring their time, voice, talent and sometimes even money to help meet the mission of our organization. DAV volunteers are investments, and contributing your skills, knowledge, experience, tools and community relationships to our overall efforts can make our organization more adaptable, resourceful and sustainable.

Whether it is important to you to solve a veteran issue, assist a veteran with benefits, drive a van or develop as a person, volunteering offers many benefits in appreciation for the gift of your time and expertise. Volunteering can help you:

- Meet new people.
- Make important networking contacts.
- Build self-esteem.
- Improve your health.
- Build self-worth.
- Communicate to others that you care.
- Make a difference in a veteran's life.

Giving of ourselves—regardless of culture, creed, religious affiliation or lack thereof—is a remarkable gift, the benefits of which cannot be calculated, and the impact affects generations of veterans and their families for years to come.

If you're thinking of volunteering, begin with the knowledge of possibilities that empower you to reach beyond yourself in helping others. When you do, you will be changed forever and for the better.

In His Service for You.

Memorial dedicated for 25 U.S. servicemen lost in Italian lake during World War II

A trio of U.S. Army veterans teamed up to establish a memorial in Italy to the 25 American soldiers who drowned in an Alpine lake when their amphibious vehicle sank during World War II.

According to the Associated Press, the marble monument was dedicated this spring in the northern Italian village of Torbole, on the 71st anniversary of the sinking. The dead included 24 soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division and a 25th soldier from another unit. A 26th soldier survived.

The vehicle sank on the night of April 30, 1945, while crossing Lake Garda during the last days of fighting in Europe. Their bodies were never recovered.

The monument bears the names of the 25 soldiers, along with the insignia of the 10th Mountain Division, currently based in northern New York.



Nebraska company supports DAV Transportation Network... *Ariens Co. in Auburn, Neb., conducted multiple fundraising events to support the DAV Department of Nebraska. In total, Ariens raised $3,213 for the DAV Transportation Network Program. Department Adjutant Jim Shuey (center left) and Department Commander Roger Franklin (center right) visited the facility and spoke with veteran employees about DAV services.*



Financial support grows in the Garden State... *The Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey Military Affinity Group presented Nicholas Bernardi (far right) a donation of $1,500 for the DAV National Service Foundation. Bernardi is the DAV National Service Officer Supervisor in Newark, N.J.*



Getting a sneak peek... *DAV National Commander Moses A. McIntosh Jr. (second from right) and National 1st Junior Vice Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster (fourth from right) visited the VA Palo Alto Health Care System and the San Francisco VA Medical Center during a walk-through and planning session with department leaders.*



Recognizing Vietnam veterans...
At a stakeholder meeting at the VA in St. Cloud, Minn., this spring, VA Secretary Robert McDonald (far right) recognized the service of Vietnam veterans (from left) Jim Kellogg, American Legion Department of Minnesota Commander; Rick Miller, Mayor of Waite Park, Minn.; Mick Aguirre, DAV Department of Minnesota Senior Vice Commander; Barry Bahl, St. Cloud VA Health Care System Director; and Ken Klein, Paralyzed Veterans of America Department of Minnesota President.

Passing on patriotism...
DAV Auxiliary Unit 86 Commander Claudia Parker gave a presentation on Americanism to second-graders at Old Kings Elementary in Flagler Beach, Fla. The program included a discussion of patriotic symbols, the U.S. flag and the Pledge. "The flag is a major, major symbol of the United States," Parker told the students. "It makes us think of freedom."





Battleship!
Retired Army Col. Gregory D. Gadson (right) recently joined DAV Chapter 11 in Alexandria, Va. Gadson, a bilateral above-the-knee amputee who lost his legs in Iraq, is best known for starring in the movie "Battleship" as Lt. Col. Mick Canales. His military career is far more noteworthy. After playing football at West Point, he led a distinguished career as a field artillery officer, serving in the Gulf War, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Following his injury, he directed the Army Wounded Warrior Program and finished his military career commanding Fort Belvoir, Va. He founded and is managing director of Patriot Strategies LLC, a company that consults and assists companies with rapid staffing on matters related to security. The colonel is flanked by Chapter 11 Commander Stan Ashford.



Dedicated to the cause...
National Commander Moses A. McIntosh Jr. (standing right of sign) attended the dedication of a highway named for DAV in his home state of Georgia on April 29. National Adjutant Marc Burgess (standing left of sign) gave remarks at the ceremony and noted the impressive amount of hours the Department of Georgia has accumulated in voluntary services to fellow veterans.

Getting by with some help from our friends...
Melton Sales Inc. raised $1,210 to support DAV Chapter 44, Claremore, Okla. Robert Melton (center) presented the check to Commander C.J. Masters (right) and Johnny Messimore. "This [donation] is one that has been the most important to us, and we look forward to helping next year, or anytime throughout the year, if they need it," Melton said.



Share Your News! Send your latest DAV or Auxiliary news and photos to feedback@dav.org.



Mahalo for your service...
DAV Chapter 1 in Honolulu welcomed 359 attendees to Keehi Lagoon Memorial Park for an information seminar intended to provide veterans with a better understanding of services available to them from DAV. "Overall, this event was a huge success," said National Service Officer Supervisor Ryan Burgos. "We are looking forward to the next chance we have to meet with our veterans out in the public."

DAV mourns passing of John L. Maki

Staunch veterans advocate for 29 years, played pivotal role in development of DAV's new iTRAK system



Maki

Assistant National Service Director John L. Maki passed away June 3, shortly after his medical retirement. He was 63.

Maki will be remembered as one of our nation's foremost experts on veterans representation. Most recently, his efforts to ensure the completion and efficacy of DAV's iTRAK (Interactive Training, Research, Advocacy and Knowledge) system have been lauded as a capstone project for generations of National Service Officers to come. In addition to enhancing the preparedness of the Service Officer corps, Maki provided coordination and logistical support for 100 offices throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

Maki's DAV career began in 1987 as a National Service Officer trainee at the Denver DAV National Service Office. He served as an NSO and NSO Supervisor in multiple locations across the country until his promotion in 2000 to the position of Supervisor at the DAV National Appeals Office at the Board of Veterans' Appeals in Washington, D.C. While serving in that capacity, he was appointed in 2005 as a DAV National Area Supervisor of Area 3, comprised of National Service Offices in Pennsylvania, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky.

In June 2008, he was appointed as Assistant National Service Director at DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 2013, then-Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki appointed him to be a member of the Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation.

Maki joined the U.S. Army in 1971 and was injured while assigned as a Sheridan light tank crewman in the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment as a reconnaissance scout. He was honorably discharged from the Army in 1974. He held a bachelor's degree in broadcasting and communications and a master's degree in journalism from the University of Wyoming. A DAV Life Member, Maki was interred at Quantico National Cemetery in Triangle, Va.

"Our deepest sympathies are with his beloved wife, Lena, whose support contributed immeasurably to the impact his work will continue to make in the lives of John's fellow veterans, their families and survivors," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "DAV and his family have lost a gentle, unforgettable soul."

DAV forces rollback of Thailand rule change

By Chris Clay, DAV General Counsel

Since 2010, the VA has recognized the challenges veterans face in proving that certain disabilities result from herbicide (Agent Orange) exposure during the Vietnam era. To assist these veterans, the VA created special rules and presumptions for Agent Orange claims. Veterans exposed at certain bases in Thailand have benefited from these rules.

Last year, without warning or explanation, VA effectively eliminated this assistance for countless veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange in Thailand. It did so by inserting a change into its Adjudication Manual, a lesser-known publication that is not monitored as carefully as statutes and regulations.

DAV was not asleep at the switch. With outstanding assistance from attorney Zach Stolz, of Rhode Island-based Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick LTD, DAV quickly filed a complaint in federal court in Washington, D.C. The law requires that veterans get notice of significant changes to regulations. That's just common sense. This was a big change, potentially affecting many thousands of veterans, and it took place with no fanfare and no opportunity for objection.

To its credit, the VA responded quickly with an offer to restore the status quo. The affected Thailand veterans once again will enjoy the advantages of an easier path in proving their claims. "DAV is there to help veterans, one by one or by the thousands," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "It doesn't matter who, what, where or when. Disabled veterans and their families are our only priority." DAV is grateful to Stolz for his fine work and to the VA for recognizing an error and setting things right. That is the way the "system" is supposed to work. ■

REUNIONS

ARMY

2ND SQUADRON 1ST CAVALRY REGIMENT Aug. 25–28, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Tom Fey, Ph: 303-619-7571, Email: tomefey@gmail.com, Web: 2-1cavalry.com.

4TH BATTALION 9TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (MANCHUS) Sept.14–18, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Bob Lannon, Ph: 317-745-4287, Email: bobl99@hotmail.com.

7TH SQUADRON 17TH AIR CAVALRY RUTHLESS RIDERS & PALE HORSE Aug. 11–15, Dearborn, MI, Contact: Don Schoenemann, Ph: 248-887-6093, Email: shaned26@yahoo.com.

18TH & 54TH AVIATION COMPANY "OTTERNEST" Sept. 22–25, Arlington, VA, Contact: Jeff Bickerton, Ph: 404-663-1820, Email: 18.54Aviation@gmail.com, Web: 18thand54thaviationcompanyotternest.com.

24TH INFANTRY DIVISION ASSN. Sept. 11–15, San Antonio, TX, Contact: George Vlasic, Ph: 910-287-5618, Email: geonanvlasic@atmc.net.

25TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 3122ND INFANTRY CO. E, RECON/SNIPER PLATOON AND VIETNAM VETERANS Sept. 15–18, Marriot Springfield Suites, Alexandria, VA, RSVP by Email: trojanal11b@reagan.com.

27TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (THE WOLFHOUNDS) HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC. Aug. 21–28, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Sal and Phylis Pesta, Ph: 210-264-7107, Email: p.pesta@sbcglobal.net, Web: wolfhoundpack.org.

32ND INFANTRY REGIMENT ASSN., ALL WARS Sept. 20–23, Watertown, NY, Contact: Rod Ramsey, Ph: 281-497-4054, Email: wyoark@sbcglobal.net.

87TH INFANTRY DIVISION (WWII) Sept. 16–18, Providence, RI, Contact: Karen Lilley or Tim Higgins, Ph: 978-563-1477 or 651-455-2181, Email: lilley71@comcast.net or timdhiggins@comcast.net, Web: 87thinfantrydivision.com.

101ST AIRBORNE VIETNAM VETERANS ORGANIZATION 22ND REUNION Sept. 8–11, Norfolk, VA, Contact: Dave Nesbitt, Ph: 803-506-3120, Web: 101namvet.com or www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/VETS101.

106TH INFANTRY DIVISION Sept. 7–11, Arlington, VA, Contact: Wayne Dunn, Ph: 410-409-1141, Email: WayneDunn@comcast.net, Web: 106thinfdivassn.org/events.html#annual.

148TH INFANTRY REGIMENT 37TH DIVISION Aug. 26–27, Port Clinton, OH, Contact: Steve Whitcraft, Ph: 419-203-8340.

335TH RADIO RESEARCH COMPANY VIETNAM Aug. 26–28, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Jim Mossman, Ph: 513-779-7145 (H) or 513-520-3915 (C), Email: jmossman@fuse.net.

352ND CIVIL AFFAIRS COMMAND, 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF DESERT STORM/PROVIDE COMFORT Sept. 24, Joint Base Andrews, MD, Contact: Col. Lilia M. (Lee) Vannett, Email lmvannett@aol.com, or Col. George Padar, Email: gpadar2009@yahoo.com, or Lt. Col. Fernand "Frenchie" Verrier, Email: FRVerrier43@aol.com.

630TH ENGINEER REUNION CO L.E., VIETNAM Sept. 15–18, Contact: Cecil Brown, Ph: 731-415-6460, Email: ceclinbrown@charter.net.

630TH MILITARY POLICE COMPANY VIETNAM 2016 REUNION Oct. 5–8, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Roger Merillat, Email: rkmerillat@gmail.com, Web: 630thmilitarypolicecompanyvietnam.org.

864TH ENGINEER BATTALION (PACEMAKERS) ALUMNI ASSN. Oct. 12–16, Norfolk, VA, Contact: Ralph Willing, Ph: 860-977-9937, Email: willingrvw@gmail.com.

ABU CO 1-327 INF BN, 101 ABD Sept. 8–11, Oak Grove, KY, Contact: Billy R. Robbins, Ph: 252-382-2300, Email: abuonezero@gmail.com.

AZ ARMY SECURITY ASSOCIATION Aug. 19–21, Mesa, AZ, Contact: Doug Cook, Ph: 520-603-0247, Web: azasaa.org.

MACV ADVISORY TEAM 162 (SOCIETY OF THE VN AIRBORNE) Sept. 22–26, Fort Walton Beach, FL, Contact: Mike Flynn, Ph: 919-847-9695, Email: mjf162@mindspring.com.

MARS TASK FORCE & DESCENDANTS Aug. 25–27, Philadelphia, PA, Contact: Jerrie Daly, Ph: 651-204-5002, Email: mmpdtreas@gmail.com.

RAF BURTONWOOD ASSOCIATION (41-93) Oct. 4–8, St. Louis, MO, Contact: Jim Bentley, Ph: 813-689-0199, Email: jbent0214@aol.com.

VETERANS OF THE FIRST ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION Sept. 11–14, St. Robert, MO, Contact: Ron Labinski, Ph: 913-362-6468, Email: ron.labinski@gmail.com, Web: diehardengineer.com.

VINH LONG OUTLAWS ASSN. Sept. 15–19, Branson, MO, Contact: Jim Donnelly, Email: jcdonnelly1@cox.net, Web: vinhlongoutlaws.com.

MARINES

1ST BATTALION 3RD MARINES (ALL ERAS) Aug. 23–28, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Don Bumgarner, Ph: 562-897-2437, Email: dbumc13usmc@verizon.net.

1ST MARINE DIVISION ASSN. REUNION Aug. 1–8, Houston, TX, Contact: Heidi, Ph: 760-763-3268, Email: heidi.oldbreed@fmda.us.

2ND BATTALION, 4TH MARINES ASSN. (MARINES, NAVY CHAPLAINS & CORPSMEN) July 27–31, Wisconsin Dells, WI, Contact: Donald Greengrass, Ph: 608-799-0406, Email: donald.greengrass@ho.chunk.com, Web: 2-4Association.org.

2ND BATTALION, 9TH MARINES Nov. 8–12, Arlington, VA, Contact: Danny Schuster, Ph: 978-667-4762, Email: ditson35@verizon.net, Web: 2ndbattalion9thmarines.org.

BRAVO COMPANY, 7TH MOTOR TRANSPORT BATTALION, 1ST MARINE DIVISION/FLC (VIETNAM) Sept. 30–Oct. 3, Philadelphia, PA, Contact: Tim Weddington, Ph: 816-808-2357, Email: timweddington@comcast.net.

HMM-261 (VIETNAM) 50TH ANNIVERSARY Aug. 24–28, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Rich "Hip" Hippner, Ph: 480-883-9393, Email: hipexec@yahoo.com.

MARINE AIR GROUPS REUNION Oct. 5–8, Branson, MO, Contact: Jerry Gipe, Ph: 660-909-4144, Email: jgipe@hotmail.com or Joseph Mowry, Ph: 816-229-2437, Email: josephmowry@att.net.

PLATOON 290 BOOT CAMP Aug. 17–21, Stafford/Quantico, VA, Contact: John Blake, Ph: 716-774-8208, Email: kwblake48@verizon.net.

NAVY

FLEET HOSPITAL Sept. 23–25, Lancaster, PA, Contact: Ted Bowers, Ph: 717-259-1047, Email: tolobo@comcast.net.

NAVAL TRAINING CENTER BAINBRIDGE ASSN. (42–76) Sept. 29–Oct. 2, Aberdeen, MD, Contact: Walter Alexander, P.O. Box 2444, Glen Allen, VA 23058-2444, Email: alexanderaye@aol.com, Web: usntcb.org.

RECRUIT TRAINING COMMAND ORLANDO Oct. 12–16, Orlando, FL, Contact: Renata Marie, Ph: 407-630-8940, Email: renatahere@gmail.com, Web: rtcorlandoreunion.com.

THE AMERICAN ASSN. OF NAVY HOSPITAL CORPSMEN (AAONHC) Sept. 20–24, San Diego, CA, Contact: Chuck Kraut, Ph: 817-229-5194, Web: aaonhc.org.

USS BAUSELL (DD-845) July 16–21, 2017, Harvey, LA, Contact: Dave Reasons, Ph: 256-415-7721, Email: ussbausellreunionplanner@gmail.com.

USS BENNER (DD/DDR-807) Oct. 3–7, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Tony Sawyer, Ph: 916-768-1162, Email: tahoesawyer@aol.com.

USS BONHOMME RICHARD (CV/CVA-31)/USS BONHOMME RICHARD (LHD-6) Aug. 31–Sept. 4, Nashville, TN, Contact: Ray King, Ph: 715-456-5933.

USS DENNIS J. BUCKLEY (DD/DDR-808) Sept. 25–28, Beach Haven, NJ, Contact: John Ivan, Ph: 609-597-7642, Email: johnivan50@gmail.com, Web: djbuckley.com.

USS ELOKOMIN (AO-55) Sept. 22–25, Lisle (Chicago), IL, Contact: Ron Finet, Ph: 262-742-4269, Email: finet@hotmail.com.

USS FOSS 59/SILVERSTEIN 534/WALTON 361/WHITEHURST 634 Sept. 15–19, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Mary Hudson, Ph: 573-291-1922, Email: marjer67@centurylink.net.

USS FORT SNELLING (LST-30) Sept.14–16, Charleston, SC, Contact: Ted Lawson, Ph: 513-752-0478, Email: lawson8178@roadrunner.com.

USS FRANK KNOX (DDR-742) Sept. 21–24, Portland, OR, Contact: Vaughan Kruger, Ph: 206-466-6094 or Stephen Cross, Ph: 619-992-9449.

USS HOLLISTER (DD-788) Sept. 21–25, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Casey or Chris Orr, Ph: 319-431-1581, Email: cworr78@gmail.com, Web: USSHollister.org.

USS KRETCHMER (DE/DER-329) Sept. 14–18, Covington, KY, Contact: Jim Strong, Ph: 937-436-1245, Email: jimstrong@usskretchmer.org.

USS MONTRAIL (APA-213) Sept. 22–25, Myrtle Beach, SC, Contact: Don DiCoio, Ph: 973-725-1974, Email: dicoio44@aol.com

USS PERKINS (DD-26/DD-377/DDR-877) Sept. 14–17, San Pedro, CA, Contact: George H. Melgarejo, Ph: 310-831-5417, Email: melgarejogeorge@yahoo.com.

USS SEAWOLF (SSN-575) Oct. 9–12, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Joe Jones, Ph: 619-379-3100, Email: janrow@pacbell.net, Web: SSN575.com.

USS VOGE (DE/FF-1047) Oct. 5–9, Warwick, RI, Contact: Tom Anderson, Ph: 501-259-1369, Email: ussvogegroup@gmail.com, Web: facebook.com/groups/USSVOGE.

USS WALKE (DD-723) Sept. 25–30, Asheville, NC, Contact: Gene Hanson, Ph: 828-883-7231, Email: gene@ha1040.com.

VQ-1, 2, 3, 5, 6 AND SUPPORT GROUP Sept. 22–25, Grapevine, TX, Contact: Mike Chicvara, Ph: 480-313-4661, Email: amcsret@cox.net.

AIR FORCE

20TH SOS "GREEN HORNETS" DEDICATION CEREMONY–ALL VIETNAM ERA MEMBERS Sept.15, Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, OH, Contact: Jim Burns, Email: eastbayjim@earthlink.net.

28TH WING ASSOCIATION STATIONED AT ELLSWORTH AFB Aug. 31–Sept. 4, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Bob Regets, Ph: 315-406-9002, Web: 28thwingassociation.org.

45TH MISSILE SECURITY SQUADRON June 12–15, 2017, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Steve Sehi, Ph: 402-310-4326, Email: hsolo44@hotmail.com.

526TH FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR/TACTICAL FIGHTER SQUADRON Oct. 5–8, Branson, MO, Contact: Bobby Gunter, Ph: 479-650-7437, Email: bwgunter@cox.net.

AC-119 GUNSHIP REUNION XVII Oct. 25–31, Fort Walton Beach, FL, Contact: Gus Sininger, Ph: 850-863-9649, Email: Stinger7172@cox.net, Web: www.ac-119gunships.com.

AIR FORCE OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS Sept. 7–11, Sand Diego, CA, Contact: John Perryman, Email: muffin@olg.com, Web: AFOSISA.org.

AIR FORCE POSTAL AND COURIER ASSOCIATION Sept. 6–8, Reno, NV, Contact: Jim Faulkner, Ph: 361-746-8460, Email: jim1c21@aol.com.

DRRI GRADS/INSTRUCTORS, 1972–78 Sept. 23–24, Fairfield, IA, Contact: John Miller, Ph: 641-209-1039, Email: jcmiller69@msn.com.

LORING AFB OPEN HOUSE Aug. 19–21, Loring AFB, ME, Contact: Cuppy Johndro, Ph: 207-551-3439, Email: redcuppy@hotmail.com.

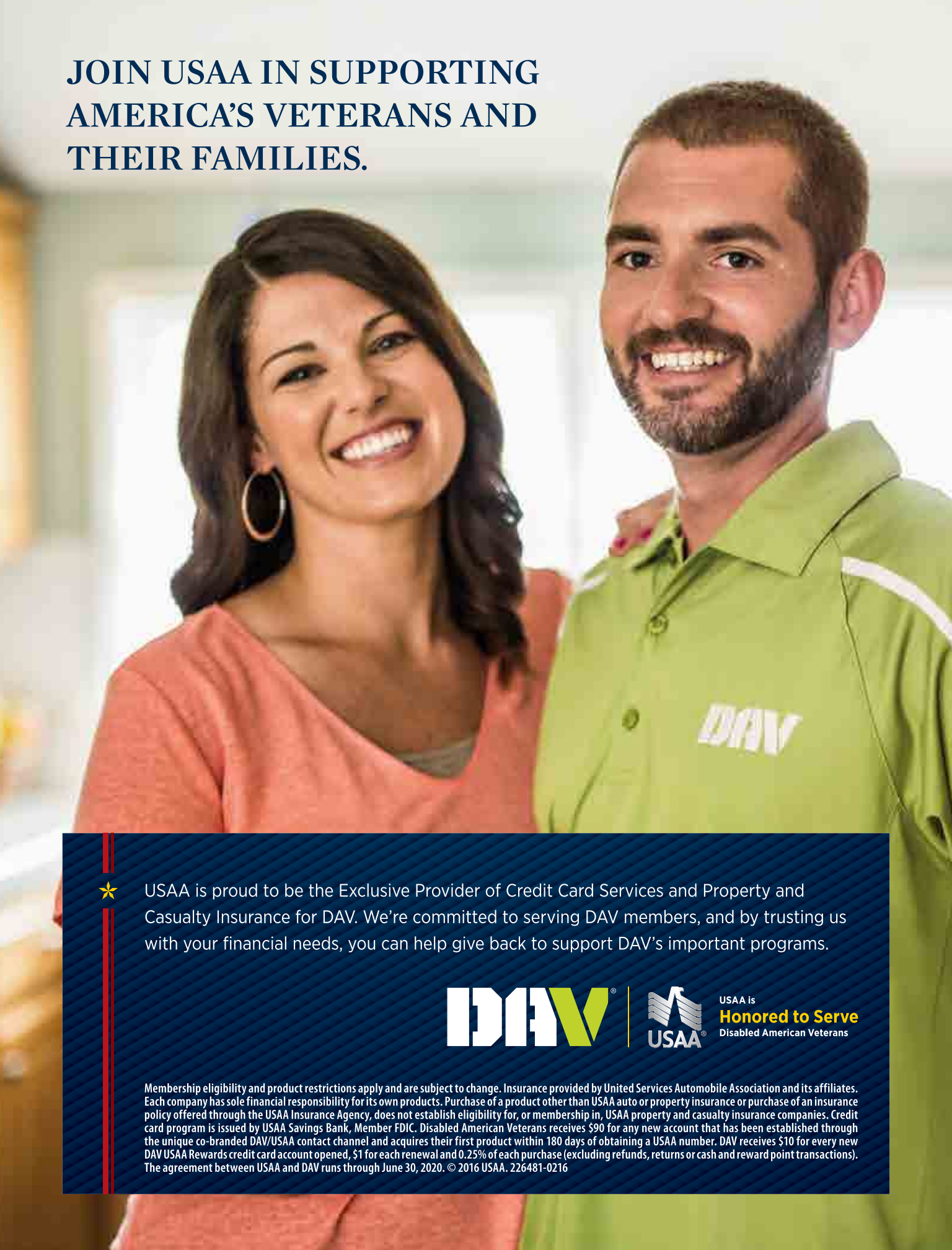
ALL SERVICES

WELCOME HOME VETERANS RALLY Aug. 19–21, Clay City, KY, Contact: Eric Wolf, Ph: 606-272-1107.

INQUIRIES

- Searching for anyone who remembers me and also who was a Tunnel Rat in Vietnam, USMC 1969, and had rabies shots. Please contact Burl Bilyeu #D46650, HDSP P.O. Box 3030, Susanville, CA 96127.
- Searching for Pvts. Green, Ford, Bledsoe, Johnson or others who took fieldwireman training, Fort Leonard Wood, MO, 1976 with me. Please contact Myron Hayes at Ph: 870-413-8620, Email: myronhayes870@gmail.com.
- Searching for anyone who took photos when we were in the Yokosuka Naval Hospital in June and July of 1970. Also searching for anyone who knows the location of 1st Lt. L.D. Roth who was my CO when I was wounded in the June 11th Baren bloodbath in Quang Tri Provence in 1970. Please contact Dave Kern, 5721 Lancelot Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464, Ph: 757-424-7857.
- Searching for anyone with information about a program conducted by the CIA from 1950 to 1973 called Maultra. Nixon stopped the program in 1973. I was on the USS John F. Kennedy (CVA-67). Please contact Wendell Stuckman, 6027 N. Lindbergh #50, Hazelwood, MO 63042, Ph: 314-479-4857.

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