BVA Honors Joe Parker for His Service to Blinded Veterans.

See page 5 for details.
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Cover Photo: Joe Parker addressing BVA members at the 2018 National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

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As we reflect back on March 28, 1945, a group of 100 young men who had lost their sight during World War II met at Avon Old Farms Army Convalescent Hospital near Avon, Connecticut. They discussed forming an organization to assist their fellow veterans in recovery and assimilation back to civilian life. These young men became the founders of the Blinded Veterans Association, representing a cross-section of heroes and pioneers who shaped the rich history, philosophy, and knowledge of education and techniques rehabilitating the blind. These same men also provided insight into current and future challenges facing the blind and engaged in continual advocacy efforts to ensure that services for all blinded persons would be specialized for their unique life circumstances.

On March 28, 2019, seventy-four years later, we stand on their shoulders living up to the ideals they all shared that this Association would serve and support all blinded veterans and their families as they cope with their blindness.

Since 1945, we have carried out the mission and achieved a number of significant wins on behalf of America’s blinded veterans and their families. This has included working in close partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to assure high-quality, comprehensive medical and rehabilitative services/benefits for blinded veterans. The creation of Operation Peer Support (OPS) in 2006 has benefited many returning blinded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. OPS provides mentorship and enables the development of new bonds among fellow blinded veterans through adaptive sports and other comradeship building experiences.

I was fortunate as the Director of Government Relations for BVA to have been able to work with our Board and membership to push for Public Law 111-156, enacted in March 2010, by the 111th Congress. That very special law designates March 28 as National Blinded Veterans Day. I was and remain proud of our association, our accomplishments, and look positively to the future. BVA, like all associations, is going through changes with a new generation of leaders stepping up to help move us forward.

As your new national president, I want to especially thank “Chief Joe Parker” for his dedication, commitment, and sacrifice to BVA. First, serving as a district director through his service as President for the past 18 months, Joe spent countless volunteer hours addressing the needs of other blinded veterans and their families. Joe has moved to the Immediate Past President board position and we wish him the best as he and his family deal with his health issues. Together, we as BVA members must continue the work of the founding members and cooperate and collaborate to institute and embrace changes and new initiatives that will benefit our association for years to come. Please join us on March 28 by celebrating our rich history of “Blinded Veterans Helping Other Blinded Veterans and their Families.”
In March of 1945, Blinded World War II Veterans came together to found our magnificent association. And this March 28th I hope every one of our members has a chance to join with fellow blinded servicemembers and celebrate Blinded Veterans Day! This is a day to celebrate all the great accomplishments of our members and our organization. We face down the challenges of vision loss each day of our lives working to be successful members of our community and our country.

As we pull out all the stops to live life fully each day, Father Time alters our intended path with his agenda. Children are born, couples marry, leaders step down and others step up. A year ago, I was your newly hired Executive Director, and recently retired from the U.S. Army. Last August, the membership assembly re-elected Joe Parker to his second term. And last month, Mr. Parker tendered his resignation of office and Dr. Thomas Zampieri stepped up from his role as BVA Vice-President to fill the vacancy. We thank Mr. Parker for his service to the nation and BVA, and we welcome Dr. Tom Zampieri and know he’ll serve our organization well.

And speaking of changes driven by Father Time, here at headquarters, we are developing more modern communications techniques, expanding our programs and focusing on cost effectiveness. Our new website is nearly ready, social media is ramping up and we have a spring fundraising concert planned to celebrate Blinded Veterans Day. Inspired by our own successes overcoming the adversity of vision loss, we call it “Light up the Darkness!”

While time drives changes and evolution, we also remain steadfast to the core of what we do. BVA always retains the focus of serving, advocating for and supporting our nation’s blinded veterans. Our modernizations show promise for us to become more efficient, sustain services, and increase public awareness.

And if you wonder how you can do your part, it’s easy. Follow us on social media and share the link to our website and our Facebook page. Talk with your friends, neighbors and relatives about the Blinded Veterans Association and the wonderful work we do. Get fellow members of your regional group to do an activity together like fishing, walking, socializing, seasonal sports, meeting for a meal, or meeting with other veterans at your local VA Medical Center. At the VA you can offer to volunteer for a few hours as a greeter, guide, mentor, or just be there to support our fellow Americans.

This issue of the Bulletin has many inspiring stories, events, and opportunities. I cherish my continued service as YOUR Executive Director, and am forever thankful for your service and sacrifices.
Joe Parker, President of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) submitted his resignation effective 25 January. Dr. Thomas Zampieri, Ph. D., in accordance with the bylaws of BVA, will assume the position as the President of BVA.

“All of us at BVA wish to thank Joe for his dedication and hard work on behalf of BVA and for all blinded veterans everywhere,” said Joe Bogart, Executive Director. “I know you will all agree that Joe Parker is an inspiring leader and a highly regarded friend. We wish Joe well as he begins a new chapter as our Immediate Past President. We know BVA can still call upon him for guidance and wisdom going forward.”

A native of Transylvania County, North Carolina, and a current resident of the city of Pisgah Forest, Parker was elected in 2010 as Director of District 3 and three years later was elected as BVA’s National Secretary. The latter action became official at Joe’s swearing-in at the BVA 68th National Convention on August 23, 2013 in Spokane, Washington.

Joe became legally blind in 1998 as a result of an acute exposure to Agent Orange as a Chief Construction Electrician in the northern regions of South Vietnam decades earlier. The exposure affected his pancreas and developed into diabetes and diabetic retinopathy. Parker retired from the Navy in 1989 as a chief petty officer after 30 years of service and then worked as a civil servant for 12 years for the Department of Labor.

“My fear is that other veterans will suffer the catastrophic total loss of their sight as I have,” he said. “I have dedicated myself to other veterans and to blinded veterans in particular in the hope that my blindness will not be in vain—that I can prevent others from suffering the pitfalls that I have suffered and help them retain or regain their independence.”

Replacing Parker as President of BVA is Dr. Thomas Zampieri, a graduate of Hahnemann University’s (Hahnemann became Drexel University College of Medicine in 2002) Physician Assistant Program, receiving his degree in 1978. As a PA in the Army National Guard, Zampieri was an activist for PA educational opportunities and scholarships for veterans. As a PA, he worked extensively with the Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association (VAPAA). He eventually became the president of the organization in 1991.

After losing his sight to a genetic, degenerative eye disease in 2001, Zampieri went back to school to receive his Master’s in Political Science in 2003 from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, and then his Ph.D. from Lacrosse University in 2005. After receiving his doctorate, Dr. Zampieri became employed as the National Director of Government Relations for the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA). Zampieri was elected Vice President of BVA in August 2018.
What’s New on the Legislative Front In 2019?

Breaking News – Stay Tuned

The first item I’d like to share with you comes from a source we don’t mention very often in our articles; the United States Court of Appeals. On February 5, the Court of Appeals for the federal circuit handed down a decision in a case that could have a significant impact on Vietnam-era Navy veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam and have medical conditions that have been linked to exposure to Agent Orange or other toxic chemicals.

The court ruled that the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot deny disability benefits to such veterans who claim exposure to cancer-causing chemical defoliants simply because those veterans served in the waters off the country’s coastline, and not inland. The Dept. of Veterans’ Affairs has 90 days to appeal this decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court can choose whether or not to take the case if an appeal is filed.

Veterans who may be entitled to disability benefits as a result of this court decision will have to wait a bit longer to find out if that decision will stand. However, if the decision is upheld, these veterans could be eligible for thousands of dollars in disability benefits before the end of 2019. We will keep a close watch on this case as it unfolds, and inform you of any developments. But for now, we caution patience, at least for 90 days.

On the Horizon

A number of bills of interest to veterans have already been introduced by the 116th Congress. The BVA Government Relations office received word that the House of Representatives just passed the first of these bills, H.R. 840, the Veterans’ Access to Child Care Act. This bill requires the VA to offer child care assistance to veterans who are parents or grandparents with young children in their care, while they undergo treatment at a VA facility. The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.

The following bills are also of interest, and are being supported by BVA:

H.R.96, introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA), expands eligibility for dental care provided by the VA to all veterans who are enrolled in the VA healthcare system;

H.R.663, The Burn Pits Accountability Act, introduced by Reps. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) and Brian Mast (R-FL) calls for an evaluation of the exposure of U.S. servicemembers and veterans to open burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals.

As always, we will report in future articles here on any developments with regard to these and other pieces of legislation that might impact you. If you have questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact us at BVA national headquarters.
Operation Peer Support (OPS) News

Operation Peer Support (OPS) is a program designed to support the hundreds of men and women who are returning to the U.S. blinded, or experiencing significant visual impairment in connection with their service fighting the Global War on Terror; Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

Blinded Veterans Participate in Adaptive Skiing
by Danielle Petty

Seven BVA members took advantage of BVA’s OPS Committee partnership with STARS (Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports) to host a 5-day skiing event for our blinded veteran members. At Steamboat Springs, Colorado, Raquel Welch, Lawrence Harrison, William Murphy, Adrian Mohammed, Amanda Garoutte-Mohammed, and Lonnie Bedwell were taken to the top of Colorado’s snowy mountains for a week full of activities. For most of our members, it was their first time skiing, and the STARS
volunteers were extremely supportive, attentive, and encouraging.

“This event was extremely well planned and executed. It was a privilege to be in attendance. The staff performed at a top-notch level and it was a pleasure to spend time with my fellow blinded veterans. I highly recommend STARS to any and every one, and want to encourage them to keep up the remarkable work,” says Daniel Wallace.

“I would like to thank STARS in Steamboat Springs, Colorado for the awesome opportunity and experience of a lifetime! The staff was always positive and supportive. I will share my experience to encourage others to visit your facility and program!” says Sgt. Carlos Pere’.

“I want to start off by saying this STARS ski trip was epic. Most of the participants were first time skiers and they enjoyed the event. The staff went above and beyond the call of duty to meet our needs. We had a census wrap up after the event and the participants were amazed and looking forward to next year’s ski event. I will highly recommend the STARS ski event to all blinded veterans from youngest to oldest because it meets their needs!” says Brian Harris.

“Amazing trip. I would recommend this to anyone. Spending time with my fellow vets was priceless. Thank you so much,” says Raquel Welch.

“We agree that recreation can positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities,” said Joe Bogart, Executive Director, Blinded Veterans Association. “Programs like the STARS program help individuals with disabilities to discover the outdoors, learn new skills to overcome health challenges, as well as develop stronger interpersonal skills.”
STARS’ objective is to empower, encourage, and enrich the lives of all participants through adaptive sports. BVA shares their belief that these kinds of inclusive recreational sports positively impact the lives of persons with disabilities, and their families and friends. They can explore the outdoors and learn coping skills to help them push through obstacles, while developing the self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive self-image necessary to promote comfortability with being independent. Being in social settings that promote working together with others and developing a healthy level of codependence helps to reduce depression encouraged by isolation, while increasing their physical activity, regardless of their disability.

Upcoming OPS Events

Congressional Advocacy Vision Research Conference

Operation Peer Support will take part in the Congressional Advocacy Vision Research Conference in Washington, D.C. from March 27, 2019 through March 30, 2019. Three members of the Association, Dr. Thomas Zampieri, Marlene Davis-Lilly, and Russell Nelson, will advocate for the Blinded Veterans Association and Department of Defense Vision Research with members of Congress.

Contact person for interview: Dr. Thomas Zampieri, (301) 204-3291.

Heroes New Hope Foundation Turkey Hunt

Operation Peer Support partners with Heroes New Hope Foundation to sponsor an organized and all-inclusive turkey hunting trip for blinded veterans from April 23, 2019 thru April 28, 2019, in Sullivan, Indiana. This event will host two members of the Blinded Veterans Association for the hunt which includes travel, lodging, license fees, tags, and meals. All attendees will have professional guides to assist them in all aspects of this event. The Blinded Veteran Association members to participant consist of Kijuan Amey, North Carolina and Elizabeth Holmes, Georgia.

Contact person for interview: Scott Goodman, (812) 243-4276.

National Disabled Veterans Tee Tournament

Each year, the TEE Tournament uses a therapeutic format to promote rehabilitation, fellowship and camaraderie among participants. The event provides eligible veterans with an opportunity to participate in therapeutic adaptive sporting activities which demonstrate that having a visual or physical disability need not be an obstacle to an active, rewarding life.

Registration: December 1, 2018 – May 1, 2019

Where and when: Iowa City, IA - September 8 - 13, 2019

Contact: Kirt Sickels, (319) 358-5963 kirt.sickels@va.gov
World War II Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient Alfred Birdwell completed a mile-walk at Lake Madison Park to help raise funds for two veteran charities one day before his 100th birthday.

The charities benefited were the Brazos Valley Veterans Memorial in College Station, which commemorates Birdwell’s service, as well as the Blinded Veterans Association. Birdwell suffers from a severe case of macular degeneration and is almost completely blind himself.

“You never know how much you miss your eyes until you lose them,” said Birdwell after he crossed the finish line to complete his walk. “I know that all blind veterans will appreciate the help.”

The City of Madisonville was represented by Mayor Bill Parten, City Manager Camilla Viator along with Councilmen Jerry Harper and Dale Kovacs. Mayor Parten presented Birdwell with a proclamation on behalf of the city.

“I do proclaim November 17, 2018, as Mr. Alfred Preston Birdwell Day,” said Parten. “We not only thank you for 100 years of service, but the dedication that you have given to many people. We thank you for your service in World War II so that today we might gather together and honor you.”

Also in attendance for the event was the American Legion who made a presentation to Birdwell on behalf of State Representative Trent Ashby. They presented him with an American flag as well as a certificate stating that it was flown in front of the Texas State Capital.

Upon learning that a flag was flown in honor of his birthday, Mr. Birdwell admitted “you never what is going to happen.”

On top of city officials and local well-wishers, Birdwell was supported by multiple family members in attendance, as well as Rae Kubiak, Madisonville Assisted Living Executive Director. Kubiak was the first to hear Birdwell’s birthday wish and helped coordinate the event with his family and the community.

“It means a lot to everyone, especially (Birdwell), for all of you to come out, walk with him and honor his service,” said Kubiak following the presentations. “He is a real special guy. When the weather is good, you can find him out on the front porch at Assisted Living. He always loves to visit, talk and tell stories.”
A celebration for Birdwell’s birthday was held for family members at Assisted Living following the morning’s events. Included on the cake were an American flag and a Purple Heart. Alfred Birdwell officially turned 100 years old on 18 November.

Guitar for Veterans
by Darryl Goldsmith

"Instructor, Professor Douglas Morgan, and Emerald Coast regional group, President Darryl Goldsmith, with his new program Sunburst Yamaha guitar that was presented to him after completing 12 lessons at the Pensacola veteran’s outpatient clinic. “This music therapy program is a blessing. I’ve learned to play about 15 songs after just nine months,” said Darryl. “I never played a guitar before in my life, and now I’m in the graduate program.”

Davis Ensures Care for Our Blinded Veterans
by Danielle Petty

Statistically, there are over 130,000 legally blind veterans in the United States, and every year, another several thousand are added due to combat injuries, age, illness, or other factors. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) offers Blind Rehabilitation Programs at their residential and outpatient centers, where they support blind and low-vision veterans and active-duty service members in regaining their independence, getting integrated back into family and community, and leading productive lives. They also support family and significant others to better understand visual impairment in order to foster the provision of appropriate support, to assist in enhancing home environments, and to reduce caregiver burden.

To ensure an enhanced quality of life for veterans and service members experiencing vision loss, the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) works with the VA to help keep these places up to par and running efficiently. Our Training Coordinator, Wade Davis, conducts comprehensive and individualized Veteran’s Care Reviews at each of the 13 Blind Rehabilitation Centers nationwide. He is currently doing the same with the Visor programs.

Over several days, Davis visits each facility in order to meet separately with staff and veterans involved.

He considers various aspects of the programs: orientation and mobility, living skills, manual skills, low-vision therapy, computer access training, low-vision clinic, optometry, eye clinic, ophthalmology, recreation therapy, social work, psychology, nursing, diabetic education, and pharmacy. Davis also talks to the Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinators individually in order to get a full understanding of the quality being offered at each location.

What is a routine visit like for you?
“First off, I meet with the VA Hospital Leadership team, (Medical Center Director, Chief of Staff, Associate Directors, Department Supervisors, and..."
Blind Rehabilitation Chief) to give an overview of what to expect from our visit. This is called an entrance meeting.

Next, I tour the entire medical center to look at check-in procedures and areas that may not be accessible for blind veterans,” says Davis. “Next, I go back to the Blind Rehabilitation Center and meet for about 45 minutes each with the chief of the department, each department of the BRC, then meetings with support areas such as nursing, psychology, social worker, pharmacy, and prosthetics. This takes 3 days.

I have a final meeting with the Chief of the BRC and an exit meeting with the hospital leadership team again. At the exit meeting, I give a summary report of my findings and a full report follows which is supplied to the BRC Chief, the Medical Center Director, BVA, the Blind Rehabilitation Services and the VA Central Office in Washington, D.C.”

When you meet with staff, what is a normal conversation like? “I ask a lot of questions about their job, how they do their job, major accomplishments, and challenges. I always let them know I am not only an advocate for the blinded veterans, but I am also an advocate for the BRC and its staff,” says Davis.

Davis also holds informational sessions for the veterans and provides literature for all those interested in learning more about BVA. His evaluations have brought about several improvements to the VA’s blind rehabilitation services, such as ensuring each facility is equipped with the proper training and equipment necessary.

This is just one way that BVA fulfills the mission it’s pursued since the end of World War II: to promote the welfare of blinded veterans so that, notwithstanding their disabilities, they may take their rightful place in the community and work with their fellow citizens toward the creation of a peaceful world.

BVA advocates for all blinded veterans, whether they are members or not. Regardless of how their visual impairment occurred, veterans old and young who experience vision loss can contact BVA at (800) 669-7079, or visit www.bva.org to get connected with the rehabilitative services they may need and have earned. For more about VA health care, visit www.va.gov/health.

**Renee Feldman Scholarships**

The Auxiliary of the BVA awards 3 scholarships for the academic year. There will be 2 scholarships in the amount of $2,000 each, and 1 scholarship of $1,000, to the children or spouses of blinded veterans whose blindness is either service or non-service connected. Please contact Marilyn O’Connell at either 516-328-3438 or via email navy2vet@optonline.net. Deadline for receiving completed applications is June 1, 2019.
Valencia Resident, Former Air Force Medic, Continues Service to Veterans
Reprinted courtesy of Bill Reynolds - KHTS Director of Veteran Affairs

BVA Connection
My good friends, Jim and Pam Hogan, alerted me to Larry Bustetter and then my pal, Max Morgan, introduced me to him. Jim and Larry are fellow blind veterans and members of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA).

Several months ago, Pam asked me if I knew any bicycling veterans because Larry needed a partner. I reached out to Max Morgan, a U.S. Navy Seal Vietnam Veteran, and he immediately contacted Larry.

Strong Work Ethic
Dr. Larry Alan Bustetter was born August 22, 1946 in Yakima, Washington, where he grew up, graduating from A.C. Davis High School on June 19, 1964.

In high school, Bustetter juggled school and track as he worked in the cherry picking industry, delivered newspapers, and as a bottle boy in a grocery store that his dad managed. While pursuing his education, Bustetter also learned a strong work ethic, which served him very well going forward.

Biology Degree
Following high school, Bustetter attended West Texas’ Abilene Christian College where he earned his Bachelor’s in Science degree in biology in June 1968. While attending college, he worked as an embryology lab instructor, cafeteria dishwasher, part time gardener, and room monitor of his 300 student dormitory.

With a 10 p.m. curfew, he became incredibly unpopular while attempting to silence the rowdies.

Late one evening, Bustetter found it necessary to shut down loud behavior by turning off a circuit breaker causing an immediate blackout. Moments later, to his great dismay, he received an uninvited visit and retaliation from several very large West Texas cowboys. His visitors threw him fully clothed into a nearby lake, prompting him to prudently idle down his room-monitoring gig.

After earning his degree, he returned to the great northwest and attended Washington State University to pursue his Master’s in microbiology.

Larry with Jim Hogan - both are blind veterans.
Scorching Hot

Under threat of Uncle Sam’s draft board, Bustetter enlisted in the U.S. Air Force on June 24, 1969, and was sent to the Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Growing up with a mild climate in the great northwest, he was not prepared for South Texas’ incredible scorching heat and humidity.

With six weeks of basic training under his belt, since he was on track to become a medic, Bustetter was sent to Sheppard Air Force Base near Wichita Falls, Texas, where he attended the School of Healthcare Sciences. However, his head officer, Colonel Jack Bashaw, determined that college graduates with teaching experience were needed to become medic instructors.

Of approximately 1,000 airmen, Bustetter was one of 30 selected. That selection resulted in a major career change. Bustetter moved from being a medic overseas, most likely in Vietnam, to his entire Air Force service training medics at Sheppard.

“It may sound peculiar, but throughout my entire Air Force service, I never once flew on a military aircraft,” said Bustetter. “But more importantly, we were churning out approximately 5,000 medics annually.”

Red Measles Epidemic

In the early 1970’s at Sheppard Air Force Base, a horrific red measles outbreak occurred and, perplexingly, vaccinations to ward off this dreadful virus were not given. Before the outbreak was known, a stricken airman with a serious rash all over his body came in contact with Bustetter. Two weeks later, Bustetter became ill. For the next several weeks Bustetter was out of commission fighting high fevers until he finally recovered. He continued training medics and, on his off-time, he pursued his Master’s degree in biology at nearby Midwestern State University, graduating in May 1973.

Honorable Discharge

On June 22, 1973, Bustetter received his honorable discharge after four years of service to the U.S. Air Force as Staff Sergeant E-5, Sheppard Air Force Base.

He soon returned home to Yakima, Washington determined to put his education to good use by landing a respectable job.

One month later, Bustetter was automatically hired after a telephone interview with the Sepulveda Veterans Administration. He packed his belongings and drove to the San Fernando Valley. After living temporarily with an aunt, he moved into a rented studio apartment and joined Lassen Street Church of Christ. It just so happened that a young beautiful woman named Kay Erickson and her family attended this same church. When the Erickson’s spotted young, tall and handsome Larry Bustetter, they intuitively went into cupid mode.

Love Story

In late August 1973, Kay’s sister Susan arranged a “set-up.” She invited Bustetter to a small party to introduce him to Kay. When Bustetter, unaware of the set-up, said he would bring a lady friend, Susan said absolutely not. After the party, Susan, sensing Bustetter was
oblivious to her covert plot, phoned him and invited him to a family dinner, and that was the beginning of Larry and Kay’s budding romance.

His first date with Kay was to Ming’s Chinese Restaurant in Bellflower. They continued dating for the next six months learning among other things, that they shared their birthdates: August 22! In October 1973, he bought Kay a beautiful necklace in Long Beach, and while in his car at a parking lot, Larry eagerly asked, “Would you marry me?” Kay said yes and they were married April 5, 1974, at the Church of Christ in Long Beach. They have one beautiful daughter, Emily, and four outstanding grandchildren.

Veterans Administration

Bustetter continued his 34-year career with the VA, but unbeknownst to him until the late 1970’s, that the red measles virus from years earlier had settled in both eyes. He began noticing night vision and double vision issues. Even as that despicable virus slowly devastated the retina in both eyes, Bustetter earned his 2nd Master’s degree via the G.I. Bill in 1980.

In December 1989, his ophthalmologist sadly advised him to stop driving. Following the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, which destroyed the VA’s laboratories, and with his vision eroding, Bustetter’s responsibilities fully shifted from lab work to classroom and administrative.

Dr. Larry A. Bustetter retired from the VA in 2008 as chief learning officer and chief of workforce development in the greater Los Angeles Healthcare System.

“The VA was really good for me and I’m very proud to have been part of a major effort improving the VA’s effectiveness,” said Bustetter. “Our VA’s vision care is second to none.”

Invaluable Lifeline

Bustetter proudly demonstrated his remarkable computer video vision magnifiers provided by the VA that enable him to read; an invaluable lifeline to his work and his quality of life. In 2002, he and Kay moved to Valencia near their daughter and grandchildren where he also pursued his Doctoral degree through Nova Southeastern University classes held at Newhall’s Masters University.

While with the VA, Bustetter tirelessly worked part-time for Nova.

A Great American

Larry, it was a sincere pleasure meeting you and your lovely wife Kay. I admire your positive outlook on life, your energy, your service to our country, and especially your outstanding support to our veterans. You are truly a great American!
After the gluttony of Thanksgiving, the excitement of Christmas and New Years and the disappointment of the Saints being kept out of the Superbowl because of the “no call”, we are now preparing for our annual banquet.

This year our annual banquet will be held in Gulfport, MS, on April 26, 2019. One of our members, Tracy Ferro, has been searching the Gulf Coast of Mississippi for a suitable restaurant for our banquet, and his wife says that he has gained at least 10 pounds in the process. The sacrifices one must make for the good of the organization! We are now recruiting speakers and special guests for the occasion.

March 28 is the 74th Anniversary of BVA and has been proclaimed nationally as BLINDED VETERANS DAY. The Louisiana and Mississippi governors have also proclaimed March 28 as BLINDED VETERANS DAY honoring all blinded veterans and BVA. A number of cities in both Louisiana and Mississippi have either issued or will issue the proclamations and we are hoping to get pictures with either the mayors or their deputy. We hope to have pictures with the proclamations in the next issue and more information on our annual banquet. Everyone is invited! The food will be delicious and the weather should be in the lower 80’s.

Kaitlin Borri, the Recreation Therapist at the Biloxi BRC, has been busy keeping our brother and sister veterans entertained with trips to a horse ranch in Wiggins, MS. (she didn’t say if they rode or cleaned stalls), and to the Rees’ Senior Bowl in Mobile, AL. Ms. Borri also has plans for the vets to attend one of the Biloxi Mardi Gras parades, (we hope they don’t get hit by too many beads). She also has an invite to the Ingalls Shipyard pavilion, with free food and beverages, at the PGA Golf Tournament to be held March 25 to 31. Blinded veterans and BVA will be recognized on March 28.

Florida RG Donates Bronze Braille Flag

The Florida Regional Group (FRG) donated a bronze braille flag and it is a must see. Wednesday, January 16, 2019 was the official opening of the Sergeant Ernest I. “Boots” Thomas VA Clinic, Tallahassee, Florida. Walt Peters, who is also a BVA member, presented the Flag. Walt was inducted into the Independent Musicians
Walt Peters, who donated a bronze American flag portraying the Pledge of Allegiance in Braille, speaks to why it is important that all veterans are able to experience the feeling of the flag in some way, including blind veterans, during a ceremony to dedicate the flag at Sergeant Ernest I. “Boots” Thomas Veterans Affairs Clinic in Tallahassee.

Hall of Fame several years ago and he plays a mean country guitar. The Flag is meant to give awareness to the sighted community the tactile world blind veterans are associated with and to the blind veteran community a respected symbol they can recognize by touch.

This is the third Bronze Braille Flag dedicated in Florida and the FRG membership has pledged to donate 10 total to each VA facility having a VIST Coordinator and the West Palm BRC.

Did you know: In 2008, following the unanimous vote of the 110th U.S. Congress, a bronze replica of the flag was placed within the Arlington National Cemetery as a tribute to blind veterans of all wars and other blind Americans.

Alabama RG Supports Southeast Blind Rehab Center Alumni

Many Blind Rehab Centers have Alumni Associations that assist not only the centers but individuals who have attended the centers. Of all the Alumni Associations, probably the Southeast BRC Alumni Association (SBRCAA) is one of the most active. Every year they hold a Golf Tournament to raise funds to support their efforts. This year once again the 2019 Charley Boswell Golf Classic Tournament is in its planning stage. Proceeds benefit the SBRCAA for the blinded veterans of the Southeast BRC. The tournament will be held at the Robert Trent Jones Oxmoor Valley Course.

Registration information is as follows:

May 2, 2019 (Tee-Off Time TBD)

Fees:
$500 for 4 players – 3 sighted players paired with 1 blinded veteran
$170 single player

Package Includes:
Green fees for 18 holes
Golf Cart
Beverage Cart
Light Breakfast
Buffet

For More Information contact:
Jack Ferrante (205) 902-5946
Mike Pistacchio (253) 677-2089
or visit https://sbrcaa.com/

Registration, donations, and hole sponsorship information can be found by visiting https://sbrcaa.com/

Buffet, prizes and awards ceremony will be following the tournament.
Also, the following Saturday, May 4th, the SBRCAA will be holding their annual banquet in Birmingham with an auction, live band, dancing and a steak dinner. For more information on how to support Blind Rehab Centers that may be in your local area contact Mike Pistacchio, President Alabama Regional Group either via phone (253) 677-2089 or email mrpistacchio@gmail.com.

The SBRCAA is a 501(c)(3) Charitable Organization established to support the Southeastern BRC whose members are mostly BVA members, but is not affiliated with the Blinded Veterans Association.

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Get ready to celebrate BVA’s 74th National Convention in Tulsa, Oklahoma!

You are invited to join friends new and old at BVA’s convention August 12-16, 2019 in the “Oil Capital of the World”!

Registration Packets: Coming in May!

Hotel Reservations: Marriott Tulsa Southern Hills, 1902 East 71st Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74136

Call 1-800-228-9290 before July 24, 2019 and use code BVA2019 for special BVA rates. The room rate is $94 per night, plus tax of 13.517%. Marriott Southern Hills offers complimentary standard Wi-Fi in guest rooms, self-parking, as well as use of our pool and fitness center.

Book your flight to Tulsa on Southwest Airlines at www.swabiz.com using Corporate ID 99867703, for special BVA rates. Southwest is offering 8% off anytime and business select fares and 2% off wanna-get-away fares. Also, offers 50% bonus Rapid Rewards points. We anticipate it’s ready for booking date to be March 1st for travel dates August 10 - 18. Last day to book is 27 July, 2019.

Travel Reservations: Flying? The Tulsa International Airport code is (TUL). The Marriott Tulsa Southern Hills has a shuttle that will take you to and from the airport/hotel, reservation required. Call 918-289-5661 to make a complimentary airport shuttle service reservation request.

Need Travel Assistance? Contact Brenda McDaniel, daughter of a BVA member and an Independent Travel Agent, (915) 204-0101 (Mountain Time Zone), or email Brenda_mcdaniel@sbcglobal.net.

Don’t miss out! We hope to see you there!
Greetings and blessings to all of you today. I am once again honored to be able to share what God puts in my heart to share with you in this Chaplain’s Corner. It is always a pleasure to serve and deliver to you this article.

As we head into the spring it brings us into the time of beautiful spring flowers and love in the air. But these are challenging times. In the news we see lots of hatred and short fused actions popping up all over the nation. People shooting each other over road rage incidents and for other reasons that make no sense. Racial tensions seem to be at an all new high level. Seniors and physically challenged individuals being robbed and targeted. Children getting sold into slavery at an alarming rate. It seems this world has gone mad. Well today, I offer you a suggestion of peace and love. Let’s get back to the basic principles of just being the men and women who served our great nation with honor and integrity. The greatest example of love was given to us in the bible found in the book of John and it reads as follows:

For God So Loved the World

*John 3:16*  For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

*John 3:17*  For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

All throughout the Bible we see great examples of the perfect love. Jesus teaches this over and over. We need not do anything but follow His examples. While we go through our day, let’s take that extra second to speak a kind word or two when passing by someone on the street or in a phone conversation. In Las Vegas I get around and talk to many homeless veterans and other homeless folk. We engage in getting the BVA name out there as often as possible doing our best to encourage those with visual issues to reach out. We are actively seeking locations to set up tables and provide our locals and those visiting our city with the national address and contact info. Take every opportunity to speak with as many people as you can about the positive things about BVA and also spread love and hope. Stay safe and be encouraged in the Lord.

A Full Moon on the Equinox

Spring officially occurs on 20 March this year. For the first time in nearly 40 years, the spring equinox will occur on the same day as March’s Full Worm Moon. The last time these two events landed on the same date was on March 20, 1981, though they did come close again in March 2000, separated by a span of only four hours.

But that’s not all: March’s full Moon will also be a supermoon, meaning that it will be slightly larger and brighter than most of the other full Moons this year.
News from the BVAA

Oh, I am so excited… I just met with our Vice President, Pat Stancliff and she told me what the program is that she has planned for our convention in August. You are making plans to be with us in Tulsa, Oklahoma aren’t you? The theme this year: Step Outside of Yourself.” Sometimes we feel as though our life is just a big bubble and we go round and round and do the same thing over and over. This year the program will feature speakers who can give us ideas on how to reach outside the bubble and renew ourselves. Isn’t that something we all want?

Pat is busy selecting speakers for the four workshops. Check this newsletter for future news on topics and speakers. This is really going to be exciting. We ladies hold each other in great respect and our meetings and programs are informative, pleasant and inspiring. I come away from every convention having made new friends, learned useful information AND bought some beautiful items from the silent auction.

So don’t forget our silent auction – you may bring your items to convention or mail them directly to me. Since I drive to convention it is easy for me to transport your gifts for our scholarship fund. We have several members who order items and have them shipped directly to me. When the item arrives, I will call or email you and let you know the gift has been received. This was a great idea, thanks Val Duffy. This year our Silent Auction Chair, Lottie Davis has added a new feature. There will be items on a separate table that can be bought and carried with you. These items will not be part of the auction but will be “pickup, pay and go.”

My topic for inspirational notes this month: PRAYER… if ever our country needed prayer it is now. What can we do for our country? Pray – pray for our leaders and all those in positions of authority. Pray for the abortion issue. Pray for the safety of our borders.

I offer this prayer for our country and its leaders:

Dear Father God, I am so weary of the bickering in our nation. It disturbs me to see people attempting to remove You from schools, courtrooms, and anywhere else they think of. They distort history and deny that this nation was founded with You as her leader. Heal us, Lord. Help us return to you! Amen.

“An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others.” A. W. Tozer
Understanding the Paired Organ Regulation

The Paired Organ regulation can be found at 38 CFR 3.383 – special consideration for paired organs and extremities. The regulation states the following criteria for receiving service-connection for the non-service connected organ or extremity:

(a) Entitlement criteria. Compensation is payable for the combinations of service-connected and nonservice-connected disabilities specified in paragraphs (a)(1) through (a)(5) of this section as if both disabilities were service-connected, provided the nonservice-connected disability is not the result of the veteran’s own willful misconduct.

1. Impairment of vision in one eye as a result of service-connected disability and impairment of vision in the other eye as a result of non-service-connected disability and
   (i) The impairment of vision in each eye is rated at a visual acuity of 20/200 or less; or
   (ii) The peripheral field of vision for each eye is 20 degrees or less.

2. Loss or loss of use of one kidney as a result of service-connected disability and involvement of the other kidney as a result of nonservice-connected disability.

3. Hearing impairment in one ear compensable to a degree of 10 percent or more as a result of service-connected disability and hearing impairment as a result of nonservice-connected disability that meets the provisions of § 3.385 in the other ear.

4. Loss or loss of use of one hand or one foot as a result of service-connected disability and loss or loss of use of the other hand or foot as a result of nonservice-connected disability.

5. Permanent service-connected disability of one lung, rated 50 percent or more disabling, in combination with a nonservice-connected disability of the other lung.

So, what does this mean? If a veteran had an injury in one eye from serving in the military from trauma, injury, or even disease, and later, after being released

New emoji represent people with disabilities

A person with a white cane, an individual sitting in a motorized wheelchair, a prosthetic arm, someone signing the word “deaf.” These are among the 13 variants of emoji to represent people with disabilities that were proposed last March by Apple to the global organization that adopts standards for emoji. And now that organization, the Unicode Consortium, has added these accessibility themed characters to the list of forthcoming emoji.
from active military service, becomes legally blind due to injury or disease, at no fault of the veteran, then the veteran can file for Paired Organ rule for the non-service connected eye or extremity as stated in the regulation. However, there are other stipulations that go with this special type of claim.

First, if a veteran received any monetary settlement or compensation for loss of the organ or extremity, this will need to be deducted from the VA compensation. This includes any legal fees paid to receive the settlement. The regulation states that it is the duty of the veteran to report such settlements or compensations; failing to report such information to the VA will cause the veteran an overpayment. Something to note, social security disability benefits and worker’s compensation are excluded from this reporting. There are other benefits that will not qualify a veteran who has service-connection under the paired organ regulation. One of the benefits is the automobile grant. Under this regulation, a veteran is not eligible for such benefit.

If you know of a veteran who might qualify for this benefit, please don’t hesitate to contact our BVA Resource Center to speak with a Veterans Service officer to discuss eligibility criteria for such benefit.

What Disabilities Qualify for Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)?

The disabilities VA can consider for SMC include:

- loss, or loss of use, of a hand or foot
- immobility of a joint or paralysis
- loss of sight of an eye (having only light perception)
- loss, or loss of use, of a reproductive organ
- complete loss, or loss of use, of both buttocks
- deafness of both ears (having absence of air and bone conduction)
- inability to communicate by speech (complete organic aphonia)
- loss of a percentage of tissue from a single breast, or both breasts, from mastectomy or radiation treatment

BVA Proudly Supports Gold Star Families Remembrance Day

BVA is proud to support legislation to designate March 2, 2019 as "Gold Star Families Remembrance Day." This day honors and recognizes the sacrifices made by the families of veterans and members of the Armed Forces who gave their lives to defend freedom and protect the United States.
Extreme Cold Temperatures Create Serious Health Risk
Source: American College of Emergency Physicians

Temperatures are plummeting across much of the country and some areas may even see some of the coldest temperatures on record. The nation’s emergency physicians warn that this could be potentially life-threatening and urge people to prepare now.

“The cold in certain parts of the country is not just uncomfortable – it’s downright dangerous,” said Vidor Friedman, MD, FACEP, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. “Even a few minutes in cold temperatures like this can cause serious risk to your health. Make sure you are ready, make sure your home is ready and do not stay outside if you don’t have to be out.”

Dr. Friedman adds that even a few minutes in the severe cold that is predicted can cause frostbite and hypothermia.

Symptoms of hypothermia include:
• Slurred speech
• Sluggishness
• Confusion
• Shallow, slow breathing
• Unusual behavior
• Slow, irregular heartbeat

Other signs may include a lack of sensation in the affected area; and skin that appears waxy, cold to the touch or discolored (flushed, white, gray, yellow, blue or purple). To prevent hypothermia, avoid prolonged exposure to the cold, ensure adequate heating, and dress appropriately for the environment and circumstances. In addition, avoid excessive alcohol consumption and the use of illegal substances, which can increase the risk of hypothermia.

As temperatures drop, it’s more likely that people stay inside. In the house, it’s important to make sure that carbon monoxide detectors are working and you are using heaters or radiators safely and appropriately. Now is the time to make sure your pets are accounted for and safe.

“If you must go outside, do so sparingly and dress appropriately for the cold,” said Dr. Friedman. “Check on your friends and loved ones and be particularly mindful of vulnerable people – children, the elderly or people that may have nowhere safe or warm to go. If you think you are having an emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.”

Control Your Cholesterol, Protect Yourself from Heart Attack and Stroke

Have you had your cholesterol checked? Most adults should have a cholesterol test every 4 to 6 years. That’s because nearly 78 million American adults have high levels of the type of cholesterol that’s linked to heart disease and stroke.

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that your body needs to function properly. It travels through your bloodstream to reach the cells that need it. Your cells use cholesterol for many important functions, like making hormones and digesting fatty foods.

But too much cholesterol in your blood can cause waxy buildup called plaques in blood vessels. “These plaques can
eventually become inflamed and rupture, leading to a clot,” explains cholesterol expert Dr. Ronald Krauss at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland.

If a clot blocks blood flow through an artery in the heart, it can cause a heart attack. “Or, if this happens in the artery of the brain, it can cause a stroke,” he says.

Cholesterol travels through the bloodstream in particles called lipoproteins. There are different types of lipoproteins that have different effects.

Low-density lipoproteins, or LDLs, contribute to plaques. LDL cholesterol is sometimes called “bad” cholesterol.

“Many people in this country have too many of these LDL particles in the blood,” Krauss says. Studies have found that lowering LDL cholesterol levels reduces heart disease and stroke.

The most common cause of high LDL cholesterol is an unhealthy lifestyle. Excess body weight and eating a lot of animal fats are linked to high levels of LDL cholesterol. The genes that you inherit from your parents, other medical conditions, and certain medicines can also cause high cholesterol.

You may also have heard about “good” cholesterol: high-density lipoproteins, or HDL. HDL particles absorb cholesterol and carry it to the liver. The liver then flushes it from the body. That’s why scientists previously thought that raising levels of HDL cholesterol might lower your risk for heart disease and stroke.

But recent research suggests that HDL cholesterol works better in some people than others. And clinical trials haven’t found that medicines aimed at raising HDL cholesterol reduce the risk of heart attack. There’s still a lot to learn about HDL.

Lab tests can measure the different types of cholesterol in your blood. How often you should get tested depends on your age and other risk factors, including a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease.

If tests show that you have a high level of LDL cholesterol, your doctor may order additional tests. You can try to lower it by eating a heart-healthy diet, being physically active and losing excess weight.

For some people, lifestyle changes aren’t enough to lower LDL cholesterol. Your biological makeup can be a strong influence on cholesterol buildup, too. In these cases, a type of drug known as a statin is the usual treatment. Doctors may combine statins with other drugs.

If your LDL cholesterol is very high, Krauss says it’s important that your family members get tested, too. If your genes put you at risk for high cholesterol, your close relatives might have a similar risk.

Talk to your doctor about getting tested. And remember that heart-healthy lifestyle changes cannot only lower cholesterol levels but also bring many long-term health benefits.

Blinded Veterans Association Announces Scholarships Open For 2019-2020 Academic Year

For this 36th year of the program, the 2019-2020 academic year of the Kathern F. Gruber Scholarship Program, there will be six (6) scholarships awarded for $2,000 each. The Thomas H. Miller Scholarship Program, now in its 7th year, will award one (1) scholarship in the amount of $1,000.00. There will be a total seven (7)
recipients and two alternates chosen by the BVA Scholarship Committee.

Dependent children, grandchildren, and spouses of blinded veterans to include active duty blinded service members of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible for the scholarships. The veteran must be legally blind; the blindness may either be service-connected or non-service connected. The veteran need not be a member of the Blinded Veterans Association. Additionally, to be eligible for the scholarship, an applicant must have been accepted for admission, or already be enrolled, as a full-time student in an accredited institution of higher education, or business, secretarial or vocational training school.

The scholarships are intended to be used to defray a student’s educational expenses, including tuition, books, and other academic fees. Scholarship payments will be made by BVA directly to the educational institution.

Application for the scholarships may be obtained from our website: www.bva.org/service/html. Requests can also be made by email to: dpetty@bva.org, by mailing your request to: Blinded Veterans Association, 125 N. West Street, 3rd Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Completed applications and supporting materials must be returned to BVA no later than Friday, April 19, 2019, to qualify for the 2019-2020 academic year scholarship program. Due to time constraints related to processing the applications for the Scholarship Committee’s review, applications arriving subsequent to the aforementioned deadline WILL NOT be accepted. Incomplete applications will not be submitted to the scholarship committee. It is the responsibility of the applicant, not BVA to ensure a complete application.

Scholarships will be awarded on a “most-highly-qualified” basis utilizing the following criteria: answers to questions in the application form; transcripts of high school and/or college records; three letters of reference; and a 300-word essay on the applicant’s post-education, lifetime career goals, and aspirations.

Each scholarship is awarded for one year only. Applicants are advised that the number of scholarships recipient may receive under each program will be limited to four (4).

For more information please visit our website: www.bva.org
Or contact our Scholarship Coordinator:
Brigitte Jones – 202-371-8880 Ext.330

Vets Can Claim Refund Under Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act
by Chet Curtis

The Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act of 2016 allows certain veterans who received lump sum disability severance payments additional time to file a claim for credit or refund of an overpayment attributable to the disability severance payment. The law directed the Secretary of Defense to identify disability severance payments paid after January 17, 1991 that were included as taxable income on the Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, but were later determined to be nontaxable.

So, if you’re one of the more than 133,000 veterans who received a notice last July that you might be eligible for refunds of federal taxes you paid on disability severance pay, you have a year to file an amended return.
Any service member who suffers a combat-related injury and is separated from the military receives a one-time, lump-sum disability severance payment based on their rank and years of service. The payment is not supposed to be taxed in certain situations, but DoD routinely took taxes out of the severance pay, according to advocacy groups.

The 2016 law required DoD to stop improperly taxing the disability severance pay. It also required DoD to identify the veterans who were improperly taxed, and to notify them. The notification letter last July included information about the number of disability severance payments that were improperly taxed, and DoD worked with the IRS to provide instructions on procedures for receiving the refund.

About 300,000 veterans received the disability severance payment, and DoD identified 133,000 veterans who may qualify for the refunds.

The amount of refund varies by veteran, because the disability severance payment was based on rank and years of service. But officials have said it’s worth the time to file for the refund.

Veterans eligible for a refund who did not get a letter from DoD should visit the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and IRS’s Combat-injured disabled veterans page for more information on how to file a claim.

VA’s Appeals Modernization Act Takes Effect

New law streamlines department’s current claims and appeals process for Veterans

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has implemented the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017, which was signed into law Aug. 23, 2017, and represents one of the most significant statutory changes to benefit Veterans in decades.

“This is a historic day for VA, its stakeholders and, most importantly, for Veterans and their families,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

“The implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act comes as a direct result of collaboration among VA, Congress and Veteran Service Organizations to deliver on Veterans’ longstanding desire for reform of the legacy appeals system. Beginning today, Veterans will have greater choice in how VA reviews their disagreement with a VA claims decision and enjoy timely resolutions of disagreements through a streamlined process.”

Effective today, Veterans who appeal a VA claims decision have three decision review options:

Higher-Level Review, Supplemental Claim and Appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

• In the Higher-Level Review option, a more experienced adjudicator will conduct a new review of the previous decision.
• Veterans who select the Supplemental Claim option may submit new and relevant evidence, and VA will assist in developing new evidence under its duty to assist.
• If Veterans appeal a decision to the Board, they can choose one
of three dockets: direct review, evidence or hearing. VA’s goal is to complete Supplemental Claims and Higher-Level Reviews in an average of 125 days, and decisions appealed to the Board for direct review in an average of 365 days. Under the legacy process, decisions averaged three to seven years. VA remains committed to reducing significantly the inventory of legacy appeals. VA’s fiscal year 2019 budget included funding for 605 additional appeals employees, which VA used to establish two new Decision Review Operations Centers at the St. Petersburg, Florida, and Seattle, Washington, regional offices. The former Appeals Resource Center in Washington, D.C., was converted to a third Decision Review Operations Center. For more than 18 months, VA has worked toward full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act, but reform has been a goal for VA and its stakeholders for years. In March 2016, VA sponsored an “Appeals Summit” in which VA, Veterans Service Organizations, Veterans advocates and Congress worked together to design a new appeals system. The summit resulted in the drafting, passage and implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act. For more information on Appeals Modernization, visit http://www.va.gov/decision-reviews.

In Remembrance

The Blinded Veterans Association deeply regrets the passing of the following blinded veterans.

Arizona-Central/ Northern R.G.
Richard A. Bugbee
Connecticut R.G.
Maria T. Stewart
Florida R.G.
Henry Cierniakoski
Vincent Gavagan
Georgia R.G.
Frank Sweeney
Greater Houston R.G.
Paul Young
Heartland R.G.
Darol E. Kile
Allen C. Rush
Kentuckiana R.G.
Kenneth Newby
Louisiana R.G.
Wayne W. Lindsey
Bobby W. Ledet
Mid-Atlantic R.G.
Woodrow Gross
New York R.G.
Manuel G. Carbajal
North Carolina R.G.
Richard C. Pederson
Pennsylvania R.G.
George Pilz
Southern California R.G.
Kenneth R. Hock
Southern California R.G.
Joseph G. KinKaid
Southern Nevada/Silver R.G.
Freddie L. Dawson
Washington R.G.
Joe M. Jackson
Rocky Mountain R.G.
Marvin I. Malk
Final Thought

All of us at BVA wish to thank Joe Parker for his dedication and hard work on behalf of BVA and for all blinded veterans everywhere. We know you will all agree that Joe Parker is an inspiring leader and a highly regarded friend. We wish Joe well as he begins a new chapter as our Immediate Past President. We know BVA can still call upon him for guidance and wisdom going forward.

Thanks Chief!

Lieutenant Colonel John K. Williams, USMC retired, celebrated his 80th birthday by honoring the anniversary of the end of World War One by wearing a vintage U.S. Marine Corps World War One uniform along with eight authentic World War One medals he had collected as part of his Marine Corps military memorabilia collection. He wore the uniform to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the famous Battle of Belleau Wood in which the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments fought off German forces for 26 days halting the German advance on Paris.