

The Bulletin

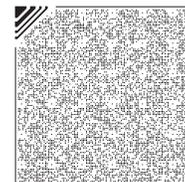
Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



July-August 2019



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Cover Photo: BVA Female Appalachian Trail participants and their guides wearing pink Support Blinded Veterans shirts posing for a group photo on stairs in front of the Ranger pavilion before embarking on their last day on the trail.

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President's Page

by Tom Zampieri



We recently became a member of the Military Coalition with over 32 military service associations to help expand our influence through further cooperation and support on our issues. Our 74th Convention is coming together and it looks great. Our government relations team continues to work with members of congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, and other veteran service organizations to further advocate for our veterans. Special appreciation to Melanie Brunson for securing the new VA Special Mode Travel policy; it will have provisions that blinded veterans can be enrolled in the VA transportation program when a VA provider provides a note in the medical records that the blinded veteran needs special mode travel or VA vans to get access to medical services. For the second year in a row, BVA was successful in having the house defense appropriations committee vote to provide \$20 million for the Department of Defense Vision Research Program that will fund researchers to find new treatment for battlefield eye injuries and methods to restore vision in those with vision trauma.

While in Washington, D.C. for Memorial Day, Joe Bogart and I secured a meeting with the director of DOD VA Vision Center Excellence, Colonel Mark Reynolds MC, and the deputy director, Dr. David Eliason, who is also an ophthalmologist. We were able to discuss the numbers of military eye injuries, traumatic brain injuries with vision impairments, and some of the vision

research they are working on that will have direct impact on not just the warfighters, but also service members and veterans as more recommendations are made throughout the DOD and the VA. Both will be attending the Tulsa BVA convention, along with some of the other Vision Center Excellence staff.

I also had the opportunity to tour the new BVA Headquarters and it is really a great improvement from the current small space; the location in Alexandria is absolutely outstanding. The office space and configuration will improve the conditions for staff and the many visitors who come to meetings. The third floor of the building property was a really great bargain for us. It will reduce our monthly expenses from paying rent and brings us more contacts with other local businesses and services in the same large building that will be of further help in meeting our mission and goals. The future is bright for BVA and I am looking forward to telling everyone at our Convention in August just how bright that future can be.

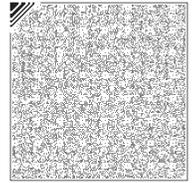
Did You Know?

- On a railroad overpass in downtown Tulsa, a mysterious brick circle laid into the ground is dubbed “the center of the universe.” When people stand in the center and shout, they hear an extremely loud echo that is barely audible outside the circle. (<http://mentalfloss.com/article/503190/25-things-you-should-know-about-tulsa>)



Executive Director's Message to Members

By Joe Bogart



Happy Independence Day to all Americans, or as our British friends would say, "Happy

Treason Day you ungrateful colonists!" Whatever you call it, we've celebrated it for 243 years and we will continue! We, at the BVA, know how to celebrate and even do it with our friends across the pond at the Blinded Veterans United Kingdom.

Our members had a great visit with our BVUK brothers and sisters on the latest Project Gemini Trip. This program continues to build the bond of peer mentoring with some of our truest military allies with whom we share the common bond of vision loss. During our past events, BVA members learned some of the differences in blind rehabilitation conducted in the UK and in South Africa. Additionally, they witnessed the UK government in action and strengthened the friendships between our countries.

Speaking of friendships, our first ever all blinded female Appalachian Trail hike was a resounding success. Not only were our blinded sisters victorious in their 30-mile multi-day hike on some of the roughest terrain in the U.S., but they built bonds with new friends and strengthened themselves.

Living with vision loss is very challenging, and these four inspiring women went beyond that challenge to do more with their life. They overcame all obstacles and each with an inspiring attitude and determined spirit.

That determined spirit is carrying us all the way down Route 66 to the 74th Annual BVA Convention in Tulsa, Oklahoma! We have some highlights this year, like noted author and reporter Joe Galloway speaking at the Father Carroll Luncheon and the caregiver discussion panel led by Gary Barg of Caregiver.com. Combine that with Wednesday evening's minor league baseball game that includes play by play announcing, food, and beverages in our own private area and Thursday night's bowling, the week will be spectacular!

We don't just sit around; we are taking on the challenges that are not easy for the fully sighted. Blinded Veterans all have a story to tell; a unique perspective on life, a grit and perseverance to beat the odds. We are moving forward to lead as the Veteran Service Organization that leaves no brother or sister who served behind. We continue to work together to better serve our communities, our country, and our fellow Veterans to make this a better world.

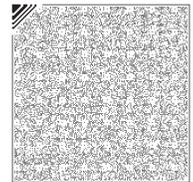
Did You Know?

- Only two men signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4th 1776 – John Hancock (not the big signature!) and Charles Thompson, secretary of Congress. (<https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/independence-day-fun-facts-you-may-not-know-about-july-4/>)



Legislative Update

By Melanie Brunson



There has been a flurry of activity in recent weeks, both at the VA and in Congress, which concerns veterans. We are particularly pleased by the first item; a policy issued by the VA Central Office in Washington clarifying the circumstances of when blind and visually impaired veterans are eligible to use Special Mode Transportation to get to and from their medical appointments.

New Policy On Use Of Special Mode Transportation by Blind and Visually Impaired Veterans

In May, the Department of Veterans Affairs issued a memorandum to all VA medical centers nationwide clarifying that under certain circumstances, veterans who are blind or visually impaired are eligible to use Special Mode Transportation to get to and from their medical appointments. In order to be eligible to use this service, veterans who are blind or visually impaired must obtain an order from their doctor stating the following:

1. The veteran has a diagnosis of blindness or visual impairment, and
2. The veteran needs transportation assistance because although she/he can ambulate, the veteran cannot get safely to the location of his or her medical appointments.

The order containing these particulars must be entered into the patient's medical record. Once this order is completed, the medical center is required to provide the veteran with transportation to and from medical appointments, either through VA's Special Mode Transport program, or other transportation services available in the local

area. This applies to all VA-authorized medical appointments, whether at the VA medical center itself or in the community. Please note that eligibility requires a doctor's order, but that order is sufficient for the purposes of determining eligibility. The VA has published a factsheet on this policy. Veterans and medical center staff who have questions are urged to read it on the VA website.

100% Disabled Veterans Now Eligible For Space-A Flights

As a result of legislation passed by Congress in 2018, veterans with 100% service connected disabilities are now eligible for travel on Space Available flights operated by the Air Mobility Command. Better known as 'Space-A' or military hops, Air Mobility Command (AMC) operates frequent flights throughout the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa.

For those who may be interested in additional details about how to take advantage of this program, information is available online at the following link: <http://bit.ly/VeteranSpaceAFlight>

BVA Testifies Before House And Senate Veterans Affairs Committees

During the month of May, BVA testified at two Congressional hearings. On May 1, we testified before the House Veterans Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. The subject of our testimony was H.R. 1199, the Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act. This bill would require the VA Secretary to conduct a study of the department's websites, apps, and kiosks for the purpose of identifying any accessibility barriers that currently exist. His findings, together with an action plan that details how those barriers will be addressed and the VA brought into compliance with Accessibility Guidelines, as set forth in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, are to be reported to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs. BVA believes this is a good start and is, therefore, supporting this legislation.

On May 22, the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs held a hearing on the Senate's version of the bill, S. 647, as well as several additional bills. We submitted written testimony for this hearing as well. In addition to supporting S. 647, we supported S. 850, the Highly Rural Veteran Transportation Program Extension Act. This legislation has the potential to provide much-needed help to veterans whose disabilities prevent them from driving themselves to appointments. Among other things, it permanently authorizes the Veterans Transportation Program (VTP). Under current law, the VTP must be reauthorized and funded every year. The fact that money runs out every year is a major disincentive for VA medical centers to

participate in the program, so we welcome this effort to insure that the VTP is one of the VA programs that continues to be available for veterans on a more permanent basis



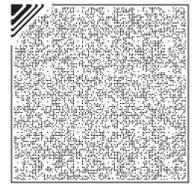
Congress Considers More Money for Accessibility

As the weather outside heats up, so does the talk around Washington about federal spending. With a new fiscal year three months away, this is the time of year when members of Congress start trying to reach an agreement on spending levels for the new year. This year, in addition to Congress's spending proposals for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the spending proposal for the Library of Congress is of particular interest to blinded veterans. This is because House appropriators have included in the Library of Congress's spending package two programs that could impact people who are blind or visually impaired. First, an appropriation of \$5,500,000 to the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled for modernizing the website that handles the distribution of audio and braille reading materials, and for purchase of braille e-readers, and second, an appropriation of funds for initiatives that are aimed at giving people with disabilities greater access to the U.S. Capitol, including enhancements that will enable blind or visually impaired visitors to navigate the buildings independently. We will keep you apprised of any further action on these initiatives.

Finally, speaking of the National Library Service for the Blind, you may have noticed that the reference to this agency in the

previous paragraph called it by a slightly different name than you have seen before. That is because as of July 1, 2019, this agency has a new name. Since the term “Handicapped” has fallen out of favor, and agency leaders are not convinced that it accurately describes their clientele anyway, it has been removed from the agency’s name. The agency formerly known as the National

Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is now called the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled.



For a more complete list of legislative proposals that BVA is supporting, please visit our website bva.org, or our Facebook page, <http://bit.ly/BVAFacebook>

Of Note

VA Mission Act Implemented 6 June

On June 6, the VA MISSION Act 2018 was officially implemented. Designed to improve veteran access to VA healthcare, the VA MISSION Act addresses in-network and non-VA healthcare issues, veterans’ homes, access to walk-in VA care, prescription drug procedures, and much more.

This Act offers an urgent care benefit providing veterans with greater choice and access to timely, high-quality care.

The MISSION Act will allow veterans to access urgent care at non-VA approved facilities called “community care providers.” Veterans will be able to use their VA coverage for these clinics with prior approval from the VA.

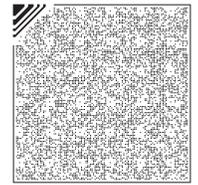
The MISSION Act allows veterans who live in rural areas and far from VA facilities easier access to care.

A list of all in-network clinics is available on the Department of Veterans Affairs website. The VA anticipates the list will grow as the months go on. Veterans are also encouraged to call their local VA with any questions on eligibility.

The VA can only pay for care under this benefit if the Veteran is eligible, the services are not excluded under the benefit, and the provider is part of VA’s contracted network of community providers and is identified as an urgent care provider. If an eligible Veteran goes to an out-of-network urgent care provider, they may be required to pay the full cost of care.

For more information visit: <https://www.missionact.va.gov/>

Operation Peer Support (OPS) News



Operation Peer Support (OPS) is a program designed by the Blinded Veterans Association to assist blind and visually impaired veterans and their families with educational resources and adaptive sports in order to regain independence, social skills, and confidence through rehabilitation.

Female Appalachian Trail

By Kylie FitzGerald

For many people, the thought of even doing a small portion of the 2,200 mile Appalachian Trail is daunting. However, for four of our female blinded veterans, taking on a portion of the Appalachian Trail was exciting. It was an adventure and challenge to undertake. A way to show themselves and the world that being blind or visually impaired is just a small obstacle that they can overcome.

These women did exactly that. From May 30-June 1, four of our blinded female veterans went to Amicalola Falls and Dahlonega,



Photo taken from the bottom of the cliff face as the four female blinded veterans begin their repelling descent with a 5th Army Ranger Battalion Soldier watching over them. Left to right: Shianti Lee, Jeanie Murphy, Monaca Gilmore, and Marlene Davis-Lilly.



Operation Peer Support Chairman, Monaca Gilmore, halfway through repelling down the cliff face.

Georgia to hike a portion of the Appalachian Trail. Before starting the hike, the hikers and guides spent days and weeks training for the grueling physical challenge that the Appalachian Trail presents. They then met up at Camp Frank D. Merrill where they practiced and honed their repelling skills as well as participated in various team building exercises to get to know one another.

They spent the next three days hiking the Appalachian Trail and navigating the uneven terrain of the trail with the help of each other and their guides. Along the hike itself, they stopped at designated Mission Support Sites to rest and refuel for the next day of hiking. At the end of the hike, they put their repelling skills to the test as they repelled down a cliff side with the help of their guides and rangers from Camp Frank D. Merrill.



BVA female blinded veteran hikers and guides helping each other navigate the uneven terrain of the Appalachian trail.

When asked why these types of events are important, Joe Amerling, who helps plan these events stated that “these blind veterans come from different places in life whether that’s age, location, whatever it is, but they have the military background and their loss of sight as the thing that brings them together. They come together to accomplish things they may have never done before. It instills a lot of confidence, teamwork, and comradery.”

These women accomplished their goal: they proved that vision loss is no more than an obstacle that can be overcome with hard work and a never dying spirit.

Special thank you to Delta Gamma and The Delta Gamma Foundation for sponsoring this event!

Forward Sailing

By Kylie FitzGerald

On May 3-5th, 2019, some of our members participated in Operation Peer Support’s first ever Forward Sailing event, an event where blinded veterans are taught the basic skills of safe sailing. The program was started by Mark Bellino who is a member of the Fishing

Bay Yacht Club in Deltaville, Virginia.



Forward Sailing is a sailing clinic that Mr. Bellino started with a group of friends he has been sailing with for seven years. As a fellow veteran himself, he decided to use his sailing skills to help train blinded veterans. He saw that many blinded veterans had an interest in learning how to sail so he reached out to the BVA Operation Peer Support Chairman, Monaca Gilmore, to offer his sailing clinic to local blinded veterans.



Group of sail boats manned by blinded veterans and guides.

“I started Forward Sailing because I don’t like the world. The solace I get on the water and sailing allows everything to go away and it gives me a chance to recharge. I wanted to give the blinded veterans the opportunity to get the same solace and break from life that I get when sailing” said Mark Bellino.

This event is a great way for members to get out of their comfort zones, try something new, and have fun fellowshiping with other members. Both sides learned a lot from this experience. Mark Bellino learned how to make the sail boats more accessible for the blind or visually impaired and the participants learned that they can sail and learned about

the joy one gets from sailing and being out on the water and in nature.

BVA member Don Bickham said “I thank the BVA and OPS for a life-changing experience. I know that a fish grows to the size of the environment. For me to experience a bigger boat as part of the crew while racing and learning on the fly was exhilarating. I am very grateful.”

After the event participants all agreed that this was an enriching experience and sailing is not only a challenging and competitive sport, but also very peaceful.

It is a great opportunity for blinded veterans to be able to

experience new activities and participate in activities they may have thought they wouldn't be able to do anymore.

Bellino plans to keep offering the Forward Sailing program to blinded veterans in the future, continuing to teach anyone who wants to learn to sail how and why it is such a wonderful past time and sport.

Project Gemini

From the participants

Wow, what an honor to be chosen to participate and experience what it would be like to be in the shoes of our sisters and brothers in arms from England. This trip gave us a glimpse into how our UK brothers and sisters who have experienced vision loss during service to their country deal day to day

with that loss and how their country assists them in being independent.

We were highly impressed and in awe with the care and support shown to our blinded sisters and brothers. That same care was extended to each of us. The comradery was beyond our expectations; we could not have asked for better hosts. Our week started with us being greeted by Sue Eyles and Alan Walker, both of whom are UK Blind Veteran and were chosen to be part of the Hosts Team. They were most gracious hosts throughout the entire tour.



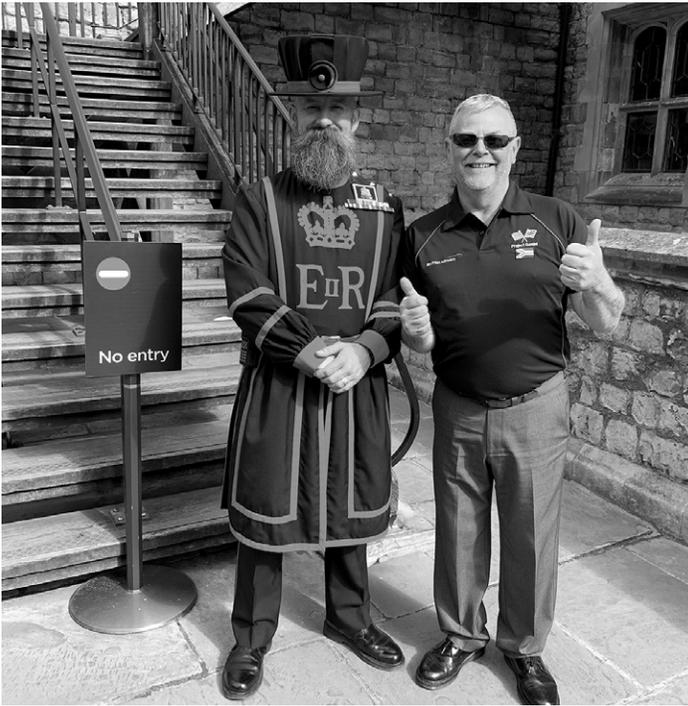
Group shot of BVA and OPS Forward Sailing participants



Group photo of Project Gemini participants from the US, UK, and South America in front of the HMS Victory at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

Once we were retrieved, we were whisked off to the house (Porthall) where we would be residing at in Brighton, UK. It was a nice home in the country side with many walking trails and the English Channel was in walking distance. The views from our windows were serene and breathtaking. We were greeted by Colin Williamson and given our briefing for the house and our plans for the week. After freshening up, we went to our evening meet and greet at their Brighton UK Blind Centre.



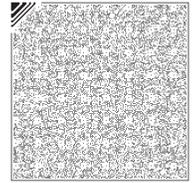


Project Gemini participant standing at the Tower of London with a Yeoman Warder, a Tower of London Guard.

There was a local band that volunteered to render music and entertainment to the elderly residents. After an hour or so of mingling, we returned to the house for the night, anxious for the next day.

On Sunday morning, we enjoyed brunch at Devil's Dyke before being introduced to Louise, Colin's assistant and right-hand woman. She had our week planned out and was ready to face any challenges. We traveled about 40-50 minutes to the serene hillside of Devil's Dyke where we were introduced to beautiful picturesque valleys and hillsides, along with a very nice pub that looked out over the hills. It was breath takingly beautiful. During our pub visit, we were briefed once again about our plans for the upcoming days which would consist of a tour of the UK Blind Centre in Brighton and a trip to Portsmouth Historic Dock Yard to visit

the museum which housed the Naval ships of the Royal Navy in which Jan Price, one of our UK Blind veteran sisters would have been in service with. She shared many stories of her time as a service member serving in the Royal Navy. We also took a trip to London to attend a session of government in Parliament, visited the Palace of Westminster and the Tower of London, spent a day at the go-kart track, a day out at the dog races, and a day at Haver Castle and Gardens where Queen Ann lived. Our week culminated with a Project Gemini Formal Dinner where we met the Director Nick Caplin and his lovely wife Isobel.



Group photo of members of the BVA, BVUK, and St. Dunstan's Association for South African War-Blinded Veterans in front of the English countryside. Left to right: Steve Mills (BVUK Sighted Guide), Alan Walker (BVUK), Kerry Reed (BVUK), Janice Price (BVUK), Colin Williamson (BVUK), Lonnie Bedwell (BVA), Rain Rich (BVA), Peter Graves (BVUK), Ray Reynaldo (BVA Sighted Guide), Sue Eyles (BVUK), Lawrence Harrison (BVA), Abraham (Braam) Naude (South Africa), and Pieter Engelbrecht (South Africa).

This experience has been one that we will cherish for years to come. It has allowed us to connect with our fellow soldiers in arms from other countries and to have insight in to the lives of our fellow foreign veterans. It's great to see how blessed all of us are to have a voice in government to fight for us and other veterans. We came home with a better understanding and a greater appreciation for what our BVA, BRC's, and BVUK are doing to assist veterans daily. We would like to thank the BVA and Colin Williamson of the BVUK for their vision to unite and to glean knowledge from each other to open possibilities that would not have been afforded had one man not had a vision without vision. It has been an honor.

Ranger Endeavors 2019

By Kylie FitzGerald

Together with the Blind Endeavors Foundation, BVA and Operation Peer Support sponsored another year of Ranger Endeavors!

Blind Endeavors Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit started by BVA member

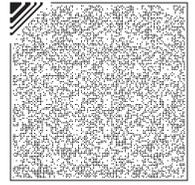
Steve Baskis to help people who are blind or have other disabilities take part in recreational athletic activities and helping to develop the equipment, techniques, and programs needed to accomplish these activities.

Blinded veterans from the BVA and Blind Veterans United Kingdom participated in



Lumpkin County Sherriff Officer helping a BVA member to properly throw an axe.

Ranger Endeavors from June 3 – June 8. The activities took place at Camp Frank D. Merrill, Georgia, home of the 5th Ranger Training Battalion.



Ranger Endeavor Participants paddling a dragon boat

These veterans are taking part in activities that they have most likely done before in the military such as hiking, repelling, camping, and range shooting, but with adaptive technology that allows these blinded veterans to take part in these activities again. They are also doing activites that they may have never done before! Such as paddling to the beat of a drum in a dragonboat, entering a wind tunnel and doing indoor skydiving, and axe throwing. They spent their evenings



BVA Member and Ranger Endeavor participant giving a thumbs-up while flying in an iFly wind tunnel

sharing stories over food and creating lifelong friendships. This year the female blinded veterans who hiked the Appalachian Trail decided to stay and participate in the fun as well!

Endeavors like these allow these blinded veterans to not only experience new activities and old hobbies they liked, but it shows them that they can accomplish anything.

Lumpkin County Sheriff's Office Volunteer helping Monaca Gilmore, Operation Peer Support Chairman and BVA National Sergeant-At-Arms, shoot a Ruger Black Hawk Revolver Replica.



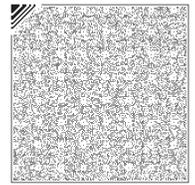
BVA Member and Blind Endeavor Participant, Shianti Lee, repelling down an obstacle course rock and repelling wall with the help of 5th Ranger Training Battalion soldiers.



BVA National President, Thomas Zampieri, shooting a modified M4 with the help of Lumpkin County Sherriff Officer.

These combat veterans don't let being blind stop them from boating

By: Layne Saliba for the Gainesville Times



A group of seven American and British veterans, all blinded in some way during combat, climbed out of a dragon boat at the Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club's boathouse Monday, June 3. They all stood in a circle, put their hands in the middle and shouted "USA" as they raised their hands to the sky. They had just gotten back from being on the water, learning how to paddle, and were ready to cool off from the heat.

"It was so exciting," said Monaca Gilmore, who served in the Army in Iraq in 2005. "It was an adrenaline rush." The group was in the area for its fifth year — trying out dragon boats for the first time — as part of a week-long event put on by the Blinded Veterans Association and Blind Endeavors, two organizations that give veterans opportunities to join in activities in which they may otherwise not get to participate.

"A lot of the events we'll be doing are really to get those people who are visually impaired, our blind veterans, to feel more confident in more social situations," said Thomas Zampieri, President of the Blinded Veterans Association.

When veterans are blinded in combat, they often times come home and isolate themselves. They have trouble acclimating to life after being blinded.

"They just won't go out and do things," Zampieri said. "They wont even go to the store with their families and they become so



Blind Endeavors Range Camp participants paddle a dragon boat for the first time together with Jim O'Dell, a Lake Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club High Performance coach, keeping a steady rhythm.

self conscious of the fact that they have to have a cane.”

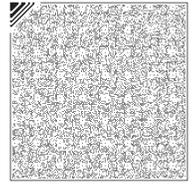
But for Steve Baskis, who was blinded while serving in the Army in Iraq in 2008, there's not much he won't try. That's why he started Blind Endeavors and hopes events like the dragon boat training remind blind veterans to keep moving, no matter what.

“A lot of the things we do this week revolve around moving,” Baskis said. “I stare into darkness. I have no vision at all. I'm completely blind. So, that can influence people to be still and not do anything. So getting out and exploring the world around us helps us establish a new normal.”

The week will include things like climbing Yonah Mountain and going to a shooting range in order to help the veterans find that new normal.

“Some of the veterans here do live near water, so they can get excited from what they learn here and head home and get on the water,” Baskis said. “That could be added to their lifestyle and what they do because some

veterans have a hard time figuring out what they want to do after a traumatic change.”



But as the veterans walked down to the water to get in the dragon boat Monday, it was clear what they wanted to do: paddle.

They didn't hesitate or second-guess. Each one stepped over into the boat, paddle in hand, and began paddling to the beat of the drum.

“It's been a fabulous experience,” said Lloyd Hanslow, one of the blinded British veterans. “It's been absolutely an eye-opening experience.”

He was happy that everyone in the boat was able to paddle, even though most of them had no experience. “Everybody just worked on the same level.”

Gilmore was happy to have that community on the water, too. But she was even happier to have it back on the shore, walking alongside her to the boathouse and in life in general.

“It brings hope to blinded veterans, who a lot of times are left behind,” Gilmore said. “And when we're left behind and not given these opportunities, it sticks many of us deeper into depression. It lets us get out and socialize with others who are having the same issues we're having and get a better understanding that we're not alone. There are others out there.”

Original: <https://www.gainesvilletimes.com/news/these-combat-veterans-dont-let-being-blinded-stop-them-boating/>

Upcoming OPS Events



MR340 Update

Five of our BVA members are tentatively scheduled to participate in the the 13th Annual Missouri River (MR) 340. However, due to one of the wettest springs on record, the Missouri River has experienced massive flooding and the race has been postponed. While flood control measures have been taken, there is nowhere else for the water to go. They are expecting the race to happen in either August, September, or October. Follow our social media, newsletter, and the August-September Bulletin for updates.

The MR340 is an endurance race across the state of Missouri where competitors start kayaking in Kansas City and finish in St. Charles. The race was created by Scott Masker, 14 years ago, after floating the Missouri River with his friends. It is 340 miles and competitors are allowed a total of 88 hours to complete this race. Completing the 340 miles in 88 hours is a huge accomplishment as only 2/3 of the teams were able to do this last year. Although there are no dams, locks, or portages on this stretch



Two blind kayakers standing with their guides waiting to load their kayaks into the water.

of the Missouri and it is considered Class 1 water, the race is not without dangers. The biggest hazard to paddlers will be motorboats. This event will showcase the ability of our blinded veterans to do anything they set their minds to as well as to gain awareness for the association and raise funds.



Group of blind kayakers with their guides taking a break on a river

Did You Know?

- The Missouri river is the longest tributary of the Mississippi River and second longest river in North America and is about 2,315 miles long. (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Missouri-River>)



Become Involved in your Regional Groups

By: Dennis O'Connell, District 1 Director

Regional Groups covered are contiguous from Maine through Pennsylvania.

Membership is the life blood of our Association and our regional groups. We NEED all members to get involved. I thought the following story hits the nail on the head.

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could do.

Does the above short story help you think about getting involved? I hope it does. It seems that there are many members of the Blinded Veterans Association who might be one of those four persons mentioned above.

For some reason or another, many of our regional groups are not able to get their members to become active. Because of the lack of participation of their members, some regional groups are disbanding and hoping to merge with other regional groups. But what if that other regional group is having similar problems? If distance to travel to your regional group meetings is a main concern, then think of the travel distance from one

regional group to another, compared to the travel within a regional group. Let's try to become more active in your regional group and attempt to attend one of your meetings.

Raising the Flag, Braille Flag Installed at Jacksonville National Cemetery

by Paul Kaminsky, BVA Director District 5

Most people picture the American flag as having Stars and Stripes in vivid red, white and blue. The Braille flag is much smaller than a traditional flag, made of bronze instead of cloth and mounted on a post in the ground. The Stars and Stripes design is raised on the bronze so blind individuals can feel it, and the Pledge of Allegiance is written on it in Braille as well.

On June 3, 2019, a new Braille flag was unveiled just outside the Jacksonville National Cemetery's information center. The new flag was donated through the combined efforts of the Blinded Veterans Association, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1046, VVA Chapter 1088, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of Nassau County.

This dedication of placing Braille Flags is part of a project began by Jacksonville, Florida native Retired Sergeant Walt Peters, a blinded veteran, three tour Vietnam Veteran, and member of the BVA. Peters, desire is to have these Braille Flags placed in as many VA or Veteran facilities as possible. Thus far, in Florida, Walt has personally placed these Braille Flags in Jacksonville, Gainesville,

Tallahassee and Lake City. Each of these VA facilities has a VIST Coordinator assigned.

Each man who spoke during the ceremony mentioned or thanked Peters for being a central part of the Braille flag effort. They were Buck Taylor of VFW Kings Bay, Ga.; Paul Kaminsky of the Blind Veterans Association; Al Richburg, director of the cemetery; and Peters himself.

“I feel that this Braille flag is a godsend for us blind veterans in America,” Peters said to the crowd of a few dozen.

The only other Braille flag in Jacksonville has been at the VA clinic since 2017. Peters also donated that flag.

The Braille flag was designed by Randolph Cabral of the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute, whose father was a blind veteran. In 2008, Congress approved the Braille flag as an official American flag and passed a bill authorizing the placement of the flag at Arlington National Cemetery in February 2008.

The next scheduled dedication will be done at the oldest cemetery in the United States, Saint Augustine, Florida.



Walt Peters (center), joined by Paul Kaminsky (left), and Cemetery Director Al Richburg, (Right) alongside the new Braille flag at Jacksonville National Cemetery.

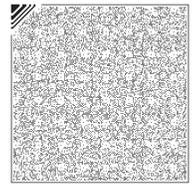
Register for New Jersey Regional Group Golf Tournament

The New Jersey Regional Group is having a golf tournament on September 12th. For more information about it, contact Leonard Pope at (609) 333-3828.

Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group Holds Annual Banquet

The Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group of the BVA held its annual banquet on April 26 at Salute Italian Restaurant in Gulfport, MS. The banquet’s MCs were Joe Burns and Tracy Ferro. At 1:00 PM, Mr. Burns gave the opening remarks and welcomed everyone to the LA/MS annual banquet. He then asked for everyone to stand and called for the posting of the Colors by the Oswald Fayard VFW Post 6731. 13-year-old Anna Gautreaux performed a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem and Chaplin Lance Hoggett, from the Biloxi VAMC, gave the invocation. Mr. Burns then asked for retrieval of the Colors.

Mr. Burns acknowledged Mr. Earl Forstall, a WW II B- 24 and B-17 crew chief and a long-term member and officer of the LA Regional Group, who will be 100 in September; Mr. Forstall stood up and took a bow. Mr. Burns gave a brief history of the BVA and welcomed any blinded veteran to join. Of the 68 guests in attendance there were 29 blinded veterans and 25 were members of the BVA, many were attending the Biloxi BRC and were from a number of BVA Regions throughout the Midwest and East Coast. There were also a number of veterans from the Biloxi Veterans Retirement





BVA member James Carrana sitting at a dining table at the Louisiana / Mississippi RG annual banquet surrounded by BVA friends.

Home. The Biloxi BRC was well represented with many of its staff and instructors.

Mr. Ferro introduced Biloxi BRC Assistant Chief David Burke, Psychologist Dr. Desmon Mitchell, and Social Worker Beth Bosarge. Mr. Burke addressed the group and spoke of the changes and addition of staff and updated programs. Mr. Burke also stated that the BRC has passed all inspections with an A+ rating for the last few years. The Biloxi VIST, Mrs. Robin Sniffen, spoke of her duties with the VA and helping the veterans with vision problems. Mr. John Majkut, BROS for the Alexandria, LA VAMC told of his duties with the veterans, conducting group meetings throughout his region and helping the veterans in their homes and improving their quality of life. Dinner was then served and desserts were provided by Mrs. Ferro, Mrs. Schoelerman, and friends, which included Mrs. Ferro's American Flag cake and one topped with the BVA logo, all were delicious.

Mr. Ferro introduced Dr. Malinda Wimbs with the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services. Dr. Wimbs, although totally blind since her early youth, was able to educate

herself and earn a Doctorate. Dr. She spoke of her struggles with college, but acknowledged that it all payed off and is now working with the disabled, but not the blind. She is a shining example for all of her clients, fellow employees, and the blind community.

Mr. Ferro then introduced Mr. Daniel Rice with the Biloxi VA Fire Department. Mr. Rice gave some pointers on fire safety and what we, as blind or low vision men and women, should do to prepare our homes and work place to guide us to an exit in case of a fire with lots of smoke or other hazards. Mr. Rice also suggested that we notify the local fire and police department of any disabilities that anyone living in the house may have.

John and Kathy Foster, with Low Vision, etc. were introduced. They explained that they were from Monroe, LA, but serviced both Louisiana and Mississippi with most of the products that the VIST or BROS order for us. They brought some of the newer products that are available including a portable CC TV, which was a big hit. Unfortunately, with our large crowd there was not enough room to set up a display table, but after the banquet with the tables cleared they demonstrated the devices to many of the curious veterans, one veteran spoke for everyone, "I had no idea this was available and it is so easy to use".

The members of the LA/MS RG gathered for a short business meeting. The following are the newly elected officers: President - Tracy Ferro, Vice President - William Gordy, Secretary - Gary Schoelerman, and Treasurer - Joe Burns. Election of Delegate to National Convention, Gary Schoelerman and Joe Burns as Alternate.



Blinded Veterans and Witkop Foundation To Host Tulsa Golf Tournament

Two non-profit organizations will team up together on Monday, August 19th at the Oklahoma Golf Course for a benefit golf tournament to help programs that support our American disabled veterans. The Blinded Veterans Association was founded 74 years ago to support blinded veterans helping blinded veterans and their families. The Witkop Foundation is a non-profit established to honor those sacrifices of service members, veterans, and first responders and to show appreciation; as well as support outdoor education and promote efforts to conserve natural resources around the globe.

“We agree with their belief that outdoor recreational events can positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families,” said Joe Bogart, Executive Director, Blinded Veterans Association. “BVA and Witkop programs help veterans with disabilities to discover the outdoors and teach skills to overcome their challenges as well as develop confidence and build peer support.”

On Monday morning, BVA members and Witkop volunteers will meet golfers and sponsors at the lush rolling terrain in the southeast Tulsa Metro community of Broken Arrow for shot gun start at 9:00 am. The Golf Club of Oklahoma is a private four-star club experience. With modern, upscale conveniences, the club has a magnificent championship layout, large practice facilities, and an array of golf, social, and recreational amenities for our golfers and sponsors.

In cooperation, we also have PGA player and veteran, Jay Milinichik of the Long Drive for Heroes organization ([http://](http://longdriveforheroes.com/)

longdriveforheroes.com/) in support of our collaborative effort to raise community awareness regarding our charitable efforts. Jay will provide additional professional challenge platforms to help make this an exciting golf tournament and meet our goals of supporting our veterans and first responders.

Register at: <https://www.witkopfoundation.org/blinded-veteran-association-golf-tournament.html>

Blinded Veteran Proud of Citizenship

By: Chester Curtis

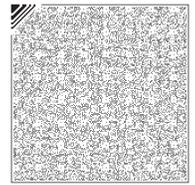
Enrique Sanchez is proud of his military service and prouder that it provided a gateway to citizenship. He can also thank an aptitude for engineering that carried him towards that goal.

“From a young chap, I was in love with diesel engineering, and I would apprentice wherever I was able to squeeze myself in. I went and I picked up as much as I could,” said Sanchez.

Sanchez started his career in 1944 in the Merchant Marine as a Diesel Engineer before entering the U.S. Army ten years later in 1954.

It was his service in the U.S. Army that prompted Enrique to pursue US Citizenship.

“I remember to this day,” said Sanchez, “after about three months in the Army, I went to the Adjutant General to request citizenship and he told me I had to be a resident for seven years, then four years’ probation before I become a citizen. I explained to him there was a law passed in Congress, the Reverse Act of 1945, that states anyone serving in the United States Armed Forces, are entitled to



citizenship. He said ‘well, I’ll look into it.’ A few weeks later I get a call to report back to him. I went back, he shook my hand and said ‘you were so right. I’ve been here 20 years and never heard of it.’ It’s only two lines in the Walter [McCarren] Act. You cannot be denaturalized or deported,” said Sanchez.

Becoming a citizen couldn’t have made Sanchez any happier.

“It was exhilarating, an honor,” he said. “It’s something that many people look for, and they don’t get. Many of the aliens or foreigners go in the service and they do not



Enrique Sanchez smiling broadly for the camera along with his wife Laura.

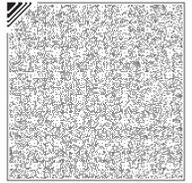
take this opportunity because they figure once sworn in, they are a citizen, which is right; while you’re in. Once you come back out and you’re discharged, you refer back to what you were.”

“Serving in the Army and becoming a citizen helped me in all my endeavors,” said Sanchez. “I learned to carry myself with the highest esteem and respect. Wherever I went on the job, this was one of the things that made me triumph and complete all my goals.

One such triumph was dealing with blindness.

“They diagnosed it as bilateral papillitis. The optic nerves become defrayed and they don’t mend back.”

“However, one thing that got me through was joining the Blinded Veterans Association. I was sponsored to attend the Convention in 1976 and have been coming back ever since. Becoming a member of the Blinded Veterans Association is one the best things you can do. The VA and the BVA will see to it that you have the necessary tools to work with. You are taken care of. That’s one of the things I always tell people. You can be blinded, but you’re not alone.”



Did You Know?

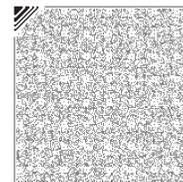
- Anne Sullivan is known worldwide as the teacher and companion to Helen Keller. However, many don’t know that Sullivan herself was visually impaired. An eye infection left her nearly blind at the age of 8, although she later regained some vision after a series of operations.

(<https://www.perkins.org/stories/10-little-known-facts-about-blindness>)

BVA National Convention Update

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 home of "Mother Road" Route 66



Regional Leaders, We Need You!

We need your program ads!

Advertisements are currently being accepted for the 2019 BVA Convention Program book that will go out to every convention attendee. If you are an individual or a Regional Group wishing to purchase and submit a Convention Program advertisement, please complete the convention ad order form available at <https://www.bva.org/regional-group-program-ads-and-credentials/> and submit ASAP via email to kspence-gilbert@bva.org or by fax to 202-371-8258.

Tulsa Animal Care:

Guide dogs are more than welcome to attend the convention. If you are bringing your guide dog please make sure to make note of that on your registration form.

These are the two animal hospitals near the convention for your convenience:

- Hammond Animal Hospital: 918-494-0151 (across the street from the Marriott). Open 7:30 AM – 6:30 PM Monday – Friday and 9 AM – 12 PM on Saturdays.
- Animal Emergency Center: 918-665-0508. Located at 4055 S 102nd E. AVE., Tulsa, Oklahoma 74146. Open 24 hours.

Premiere Events!

Kayak with BVA on Monday August 12th

We have planned kayaking on the local river to promote health and healing, sponsored by Team River Runner. 25 veterans will be provided with the boats, guides, and PFD's by Oklahoma Kayak. We will be gone for the day, with a BBQ lunch provided on the river. To sign up please email Terri Everett, certified Kayak instructor and event coordinator at Terri.everett1@va.gov or Convention Coordinator, Krissi Spence-Gilbert at kspence-gilbert@bva.org. Terri will provide you with a registration link and additional information. Spaces are limited, so please be sure to contact them at your earliest convenience. We hope to see you there!

Caregiver Session Panel on Tuesday, August 13th

Gary Barg, noted speaker, writer, and publisher on caregiving issues since 1995, is Founder and Editor-In-Chief of the first national magazine for caregivers, *Today's Caregiver*. Gary created The Fearless Caregiver Conferences, hosted across the country, to bring caregivers together in order to share their knowledge, experiences, and wisdom as well as learn about vital products, services, and technologies. Gary, alongside guest speaker experts Michael Macon RN, VA Caregiver Support Coordinator, Mickey Hinds Education Coordinator OK LIFE Senior Services, and Richard Tapping, Vice President

for Vispero will host *“Best practices: advice, support and adaptive technologies for family caregivers and the visually impaired”* at the Tulsa Marriott Hotel to kick-off the start of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) national convention week.

Tulsa Drillers Baseball Game on Wednesday, August 14th

BVA will enjoy an exciting Drillers Game from The Coors Light Refinery Deck, which continues to be ONEOK Field’s most popular group area. This private, covered, outdoor venue provides play-by-play game commentary and includes an all-you-can-eat 2 hour buffet with soft drinks, and a cash bar! Discounted Coors Light draft beers will also be available for the duration of the event!

Coffee Hour for Vietnam Era Veterans with Joe Galloway on Thursday, August 15th

Joseph L. Galloway was one of America’s premier war and foreign correspondents and recently retired as the senior military correspondent for Knight Ridder Newspapers; prior to that he was a special consultant to General Colin Powell at the State Department. He has had assignments in Japan, Indonesia, India, Singapore, and served four tours as the war correspondent in Vietnam. He has also covered Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Haiti,

and Iraq. He also co-wrote *“We Were Soldiers Once-And Young”* and *“Triumph Without Victory: The History of the Persian Gulf War.”*



Galloway is the recipient of multiple awards including the highest honor the Army’s Infantry can bestow on an individual, the Legacy of Service Award of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund in 2011, and a Bronze Star Medal for rescuing wounded soldiers under fire in the Ia Drang Valley, in November 1965. His is the only medal of valor the U.S. Army awarded to a civilian for actions in combat during the entire Vietnam War.

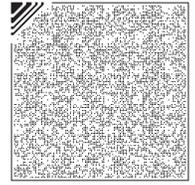
Bowling at Andy B’s on Thursday, August 15th

Thanks to the BVA’s Operation Peer Support Program for hosting BVA’s bowling event at Andy B’s, the go-to destination for dining and entertainment. Situated in a semi-private event space, this alley includes 48 lanes of refined bowling, a 40+ piece arcade and gaming area, laser tag arena, go-karts, and escape rooms. Please remember to sign up on your registration form.



Registration Packets:

Available now at
<https://www.bva.org/bva-convention>
or contact headquarters for a form to be sent to you.



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.**

Important reminder!

Book your Hotel rooms now before 24th for the discounted rate!

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!**

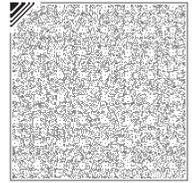


BVA Georgia RG member Elizabeth Holmes shot her first turkey in Sullivan, Indiana with the Heroes New Hope Foundation on April 24th.



Chaplain's Corner

by Chaplain Jay McLeod



Greetings and Blessings to all of you. A few weeks ago, we were asked by a company named Trycera Financial Inc, to represent our beloved BVA at an event here in Las Vegas that catered to the success of Veterans and people as a whole.

We proudly accepted the challenge of getting it together and manning a table, advertising who we are as the Blinded Veterans Association, and how people can get connected and plugged in to what we do. What I have noticed is that God seems to always put us in the right place at the right time to make a difference.

I have to take my hat off to the women's auxiliary who once again showed their selfless sacrifice to get some of our blinded veterans to the event. They set up our information table as well as took pictures for us to share with you all.

Well, I find myself in awe of the selflessness and love for veterans that the leadership of Trycera have for what we, as veterans, have endured and survived. Their dedication to the financial success of active duty military, veterans, and families and helping them through their many financial programs goes above and beyond. They believe that their programs can help solve the problem of hopelessness, hunger, stress, and domestic violence due to financial problems.

They have programs that actually help us blinded veterans become even more self-reliant. As we speak, they have asked some of us blinded veterans to help develop even more

ways to help eradicate the lack of financial prosperity and hopelessness some feel. They all have military connections and just spoke at the USAF

Graduation ceremony class of 2019.

They have requested to become honorary members and supporters of our beloved BVA. With the rise of veteran deaths due to PTSD and hopelessness, they are willing to train veterans to be successful and open up different businesses that will allow the veteran to still get treatment and earn a living. The opportunities are huge!

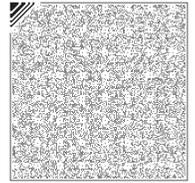
The Bible says in Hosea 4:6, "Destruction has overtaken my people because they have no knowledge." Well with the basic principles and knowledge Trycera teaches at no charge, we can grow to become an even better people. Imagine a world where poverty was a choice, not a condition of circumstance or lack of knowledge. Some veterans are not 100% service connected disabled but yet cannot work normal full-time jobs. These veterans have spouses at home who help take care of them and do not even qualify for an adequate health insurance for their spouses or children. This company, Trycera, has programs to make a change financially. This is the love Jesus was talking about.





Auxiliary's View

By Rev. Edna Kirksey-Dixon



51678 Oakwood Drive
Bay Minette, AL 36507
Revedna20101@hotmail.com



Our words of encouragement: We can waste a lot of energy fighting the facts. We may be sick or have financial limitations. We might have a misunderstanding with a friend or loved one. We may have noticed more gray hair on our head or the job might not be as fulfilling as it once was. Accepting that these conditions exist is not admitting defeat. It is acknowledging what you have to work with. Surrender your disappointment to God. Talk as you would to a friend – tell God your troubles, release them, and know that God is working to resolve them according to His will. Father, thy will be done. In one of the Psalms, King David is being hunted by Saul trying to kill him. King David prays and tells God about the situation and the Bible says he lay down and slept. Oh, that we could release our burdens so easily!

We, as Caregivers, have many concerns and worries. May you know peace and comfort as you care for your Veteran. We might say the following prayer:

Dear Lord, teach me how to trust and believe what I can't prove or what I can't see but to trust in You, to lean on You. Also, help me to be honest enough, and humble enough, to say the words, "I don't know and I need help." Amen.

Once again we prepare for the upcoming convention. We are going to an area that we have not been to before – Tulsa, OK. Oklahoma is a beautiful state – so many

things to see and experience. Hopefully we will have time to visit a Native American village and sample some of the native food and culture.

A lot of planning, work, and coordinating are required to make each convention unique. If at all possible, please plan to attend. The layout of the meeting rooms is wonderful – all of the meetings are in a central location. Many new and younger veterans are joining and they need the experience and support of our older veterans.

Ladies, don't forget that the BVAA has a program chairperson and programs are planned for each day. *(In a whisper)* I hear that it is safe to leave your Veteran and come join us as we share, learn, and develop our own interests.

Pat Stancliff, BVAA Vice President tells me we will have a Mary Kay lady present to offer suggestions and advice about our choices in makeup and hair and I, personally, am looking forward to this presentation. There will also be an arts and craft session. Pam Hogan, Activities Director, has some very interesting Arts and Crafts for us to try. I have seen some new and very beautiful greeting card ideas that will be shared.

As I write this, it is early May and Spring has arrived on the Gulf Coast. Spring always renews our spirits and we want to plant new flowers, clean house, and air everything out.

What sweet dreams come with the Spring season. Here in the South, as well as most of the country, we have had rain, rain, and more rain. Since I can't be outside, I tackle the house cleaning with a vengeance - I can clean house for a half day and then I want and need a nap. We believe that we still have all the energy, vim, and vigor we had when we were much younger but we need to pace ourselves and stop when we really need to rest. Please don't forget to care for yourself.

Don't forget our Silent Auction – all proceeds go into the Scholarship Fund. If you are a “crafty” person please consider donating a few items or if you have other items you wish to donate, send them to me at my address above. Some items may be difficult to fly with but I will be driving from South Alabama so I can bring a large number of items.



OrCam, the most advanced wearable AI device for blind Veterans

By David Knack

I have been working with blind and visually impaired Veterans on OrCam devices for the past 3 years. I've always been impressed by how well the devices work, but the OrCam MyEye 2 is a huge step forward. The MyEye 2 is a tiny camera that attaches to a pair of glasses using a special mount, which means your hands are free. It will read any text on any surface, and will also recognize faces, barcodes, money, color, and the time. It does all of these functions without any kind of screen for you to look at, which means OrCam is helpful for people with a variety of different vision conditions. There are a lot of different devices that we use, and it's really important to find the right device for each person. That being said, the OrCam MyEye 2 is the best device for many Veterans. It's small, portable, and easy to learn; it makes a big difference in terms of independence and quality of life.

Small and Portable

OrCam MyEye 2 is about the size of your thumb. It weighs less than an ounce and fits on the side of a pair of glasses (or sunglasses). It's so small, lightweight, and easy to take OrCam out and about. We take our Veterans on trips to the grocery store, so they can read signs to find the right aisle. We also go to restaurants like McDonald's and practice reading the menu behind the counter. Wherever you go, it makes sense to bring the OrCam with you.

Easy to Learn

Technology can be really complicated and difficult to learn, but it doesn't have to be. OrCam is really simple to learn, and it just keeps getting easier over time. The people who designed this device made a really sophisticated computer that can do a lot of useful things, but they made it in a way that anyone can learn to use it. A lot of

our Veterans are concerned that the device is going to be hard to learn, and may even be more trouble than it is worth. Once they try the device and see how easy it is to read their mail or recognize money, they see for themselves that OrCam really is something they can learn quickly and use every day.

It Makes a Difference

One of the biggest reasons I love working with OrCam is the difference it makes in the lives of Veterans. When I have the opportunity to talk to some of the folks who have received their OrCam through the VA, they often can't imagine their lives without OrCam. They use OrCam to read their mail, restaurant menus, and so much more. One Veteran wished he was still able to read, and he had a ton of books at home, but once he had his OrCam, he was able to pick up a book for the first time in years and read it by himself. Many Veterans save the faces of their friends and family members. OrCam gives them the ability to recognize their spouses, their kids, and their grandkids. Obviously that means a lot to them.

From my perspective, the best thing about OrCam is that it gives Veterans independence. Once they have OrCam, they aren't dependent on others to read or to count money. There's so many more tasks that are just part of their daily lives that OrCam makes easier to take care of.

Is OrCam right for you?

People often ask me, "Who is OrCam for?" or "Is OrCam for people who are totally blind? Is it for people with low vision, or a specific eye condition like Macular Degeneration?" And my answer is always, "OrCam is for people who can use it to live a better and more independent life." If you are blind, or if it's hard for you to read, even with magnification, OrCam could be for you. If your vision is getting worse over time, or if blind spots in your vision make focusing your eyes difficult, OrCam could be for you.



How to Get OrCam Covered by the VA

The VA is purchasing OrCam devices for Veterans who qualify. The best thing for you to do is to talk with your VIST coordinator and tell them you've heard about OrCam and would like to try it for yourself. There's a lot of technology out there, and your local VA can help you get started in finding the device that will be best for you.

David Knack is the Area Sales Manager for the Southeast with OrCam Technologies. Before coming to work with OrCam, David worked with individuals with disabilities at the Star Center in Jackson, TN.





Coping When PTSD Brings You to a Dark Place

Military.com | By Michele Rosenthal

My first client, Sabine, was a suicidal 50-year-old woman with posttraumatic stress disorder. She was clearly in a very dark place. As a PTSD survivor who has had her fair share of imagining suicide to escape PTSD symptoms, I understood what Sabine meant. However, in my recovery, I discovered that the road to freedom from PTSD symptoms had successes that replaced those dark thoughts with thoughts about what I would do when my life and mind were my own again.

Sabine and I dove head first into the work of recovery, using traditional and alternative processes to decrease feelings of trauma and increase feelings of safety and control. Working together once a week for eighteen months we reached our goal. Today, Sabine is not only free of thoughts of suicide, she's free of PTSD symptoms, too. PTSD symptoms can bring people to a very dark place emotionally. Seeking professional help is a vitally important step in the PTSD recovery process. In addition to that, people can:

Acknowledge and treat symptoms of depression. People with PTSD often get depressed about their situation. While depression can make you lethargic and lack motivation for change, there are some ways of treating depression naturally that can make a difference. Other ways include incorporating exercise into your routine, eating (and avoiding) certain foods, taking vitamins and even looking into light box therapy if you

feel you may have seasonal affective disorder (feeling depressed in the winter months).

Remove temptation to take extreme steps. One veteran I knew who lived with PTSD and traumatic brain injury shared that when he began to feel suicidal he took actions to create his own intervention. For example, he removed all firearms from his home. Other veterans have told me they have stopped drinking or flushed unnecessary pills until they started to feel better.

Share those dark thoughts. For many who struggle with depression and thoughts of suicide, the natural inclination is to keep it to themselves. We all want to be seen as courageous, brave, responsible and even heroic. At first look, it may seem weak to admit an internal struggle that threatens to overwhelm our ability to cope. However, admitting to the struggle and asking for help is a truly heroic and courageous act. Your local military treatment facility is a great place to start. You can also find providers in your area who donate treatment services.

Rev up your brain's executive function. When the lower and mid-brain structures (those attuned to threat and emotion) overthrow your prefrontal cortex, your brain lacks its ability to focus, inhibit reactionary emotions, and make choices in your best interest. Practicing meditation and mindfulness can greatly improve your brain's executive function because it engages your prefrontal cortex.

What do I need to feel a little bit better? One of my favorite methods to interrupt deeply dark thoughts is the employment of

a simple process of asking one question: What do I need to do to feel a little bit better? Focusing on the answer, plus how to get it, and then repeating the question until you move your mind into a more resilient space can shift you from powerless to powerful. In this new space it may be possible to address the real pain driving the dark thoughts, and from there find ways to reduce and even eliminate it.

Beat the Heat: Summer Tips for Seniors

Today's Caregiver | by Allen Riggs

Every summer, thousands of Americans suffer from heat stroke, heat exhaustion and dehydration. And each year, an average of 300 people in the United States dies from heat-related illnesses, according to reports from the Center for Disease Control.

Seniors are more susceptible to heat-related illnesses as their bodies do not effectively cool down and it takes longer to recover when they get overheated. As the temperature starts to rise, it is important to take a moment to think about ways to beat the heat and avoid unnecessary illness.

Below are five customized tips that can help you or someone you love battle the heat, sun and humidity, which are unavoidable throughout the summer months:

1. Check homes for proper ventilation

Excessive heat, when temperatures and humidity reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit or above, can be dangerous, especially to those who are home without air conditioners or fans. Many seniors will sacrifice a cool breeze from an open window due to security concerns. Inexpensive safety latches are available for windows that allow the air to circulate, but also prevent the window from

being completely opened from the outside. Check with your local hardware store for options.



2. Seek relief from the heat in public buildings that are air-conditioned

Not every senior has air conditioning in their home and there is a point at which fans can't combat the summer heat. When this occurs, visit public places such as local shopping malls, libraries, restaurants, or visit with friends or family for a welcome break from the heat.

Beware of medications and/or senior diets that can increase risk. Hot weather can accelerate dehydration, especially in people who are taking medications that have the side effects of fluid and electrolyte loss. Many medications, particularly antibiotics and diuretics, can block the body's natural ability to cope with the sun and heat. You should always check with a pharmacist or doctor to ensure that medications will not cause you or your loved ones to be more susceptible to heat-related problems. Also, if seniors are on a low carbohydrate diet, be sure they drink plenty of fluids, as the additional proteins in this diet can cause the body to heat up more quickly.

3. Plan ahead for outdoor activities

During hot weather, everyone, especially seniors, should wear loose fitting, cool, light-colored clothing, and a hat or cap. Whenever possible, try to stay in the shade and be sure to use a high SPF sun block (30+) in order to protect a senior's sensitive skin.

4. Drink plenty of replenishing fluids

Alcoholic beverages and caffeine should be avoided since they can cause dehydration. Water is a great option, but does not effectively replace the potassium and sodium

(electrolytes) that we lose when perspiring. Popular “sports drinks” such as Gatorade, Powerade and/or inexpensive homemade substitutes (see recipe below) are great choices for rehydrating the body.

Rehydration drink*

Measure all ingredients precisely. Small variations can make the drink less effective or even harmful. Mix the following:

1 quart (950 ml) water

½ teaspoon (2.5 g) baking soda

½ teaspoon (2.5 g) table salt

3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 g) sugar

If available, ¼ teaspoon (1.25 g) salt substitute (such as “Lite Salt”)

* Do not give this homemade drink to children under age 12.

Source: www.webmd.com

Potential symptoms

Always be on guard for symptoms of heat exhaustion, which include pale, cold or clammy skin, extreme thirst, light-headedness, fainting, mild nausea, vomiting, and excessive sweating. Signs of heat stroke include hot, dry skin, a fast, strong pulse, confusion, and a body temperature of 104 degrees or higher. If a person exhibits signs of heat stroke, this is a serious medical emergency and 911 or your local emergency medical team should be contacted.

The good news is heat-related illnesses and injuries are preventable. If you understand the signs and watch out for the symptoms, you too can beat the heat this summer season.

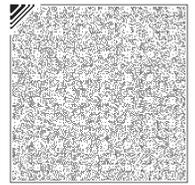
Vision Loss Affects Our Ability to Communicate

Today’s Caregiver |

by Danielle Myers-Rickard

Did you know that by age 70, fewer than 30 percent of elderly people have 20/20 vision?

Normal age-related visual impairments such as macular degeneration, cataracts and glaucoma can impact day-to-day functioning. They can affect our ability to drive, read prescription bottles, safely maneuver an uneven sidewalk, or recognize a friend at church.



Visual impairments can also affect our ability to communicate effectively with others. We observe our partners to see if they “get” what we are saying when we talk to them. Consider the visual clues that we look for during a conversation:

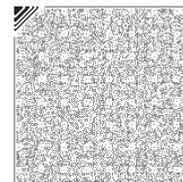
- Facial cues, which indicate mood or emotion
- Hand gestures, which can indicate size or direction
- Turn-taking cues, including raised eyebrows
- Feedback, such as head nodding

These types of non-verbal messages may be lost or misunderstood by people with poor vision. Both people in the conversation are then prone to misinterpretation. Imagine not being able to see someone roll his eyes when making a sarcastic remark. You might think that he is rude and he might think that you don’t have a sense of humor!

Here are some simple things you can do when talking to someone who has visual impairments:

1. Identify yourself when going to visit. “Hi Grandma. It’s me, Mary.”
2. Describe what you mean with words in addition to hand gestures. “The fish was two feet long.”
3. Sit in a well-lit area, but avoid sitting directly in front of bright windows

- or standing in doorways. This “backlighting” causes a silhouette effect and people cannot see your face clearly.
4. Eliminate distracting background noise. When someone has poor vision, he may rely more on his sense of hearing to make up for the loss.
 5. Use bright table or floor lamps whenever possible and ensure cords are out of the way to avoid falls. Overhead fluorescent lighting causes glare on linoleum and hardwood floors.
 6. Install nightlights in hallways, the bedroom and bathrooms.
 7. Offer your arm for support when you are out together and tell him or her about upcoming curbs or stairs.



These tips can help keep your loved ones involved in meaningful conversations and ensure their safety at home.

GI Bill Celebrates 75th

This year, the GI Bill is celebrating 75 years. It has positively impacted the lives of generations of active duty, veterans, and their families through promoting higher education, home ownership, and other benefits.

On June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the GI bill into law to provide a wide range of benefits to veterans returning from World War II including low-cost home loans, educational and vocational training, unemployment payments, and an expansion to veterans’ health care. Since 1944, the VA has paid about \$400 billion in education benefits to 25 million beneficiaries. In 2017, the Harry W. Colmery Act, or the Forever GI bill removed the 15-year expiration for many Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients and added benefits for Purple Heart recipients.

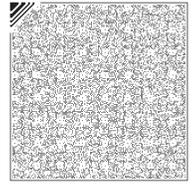
The VA also provides employment and job-placement assistance to service-disabled veterans and service members. In Fiscal Year 2018, VA provided vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities to nearly 126,000 participants.

The VA home loan program has allowed the VA to guarantee over 24 million home loans since 1944 and in Fiscal Year 2018 alone, VA guaranteed over 610,000 home loans totaling over \$161 billion. They also provide grants to seriously disabled veterans to purchase, modify, or construct a home to meet their adaptive housing needs.

Because of the GI Bill, there are programs that support every veteran in the United States whether you want to continue your education, find a job, purchase a house with a low-cost loan, or renovate a house to make it more accessible.

From the Veteran's Service Staff

By Claudia Baldwin



Preparing for the BVA Convention

During our convention, we will be conducting Veteran Service Officer training for any interested blinded veteran to learn about veteran benefits and the information we train on to maintain BVA accreditation. Since the convention is a very busy time for everyone, we will be providing claim assistance for our members during the convention; however, we require that BVA members or non-members make an appointment with our scheduled VSOs for reviewing or discussing your individual claim.

If you are interested in making an appointment with one of our VSOs, please call or email Mr. Wade Davis:

Phone: 1-800-669-7079 Ext. 308

Email: wdavis@bva.org

The MISSION Act

The MISSION Act is one of the major rollouts beginning June 6, 2019 for enhancing VA healthcare for all veterans. The VA has developed specific education for Veterans about receiving VA care, healthcare benefits, and other related updates. This educational booklet is titled "Health Care Options Through VA."

Veterans can receive this educational booklet in three ways:

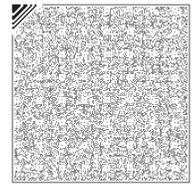
1. Download the electronic version of "Health Care Options Through VA" booklet at https://www.missionact.va.gov/library/files/MISSION_Act_Community_Care_Booklet.pdf

2. Contact a Public Affairs Officer at their nearest VA Medical Center for a printed copy of the booklet
3. Request a printed copy of the booklet at no cost by filling out a print form available online www.missionact.va.gov and at the medical centers

Kiosk Updates and Testing

The Blinded Veterans Association and the Department of Veterans Affairs, specifically the Section 508 office, are working diligently in making sure all components of its services to all veterans are accessible and inclusive. One of these systems are the kiosks, which have been implemented for several years at VA medical centers and clinics, and enable veterans to check-in to their appointments. Originally, this kiosk was not accessible to blind veterans, but the VA has worked with a developer to update its software systems to make the kiosk more accessible. The latest update was April 2019. We are asking our membership to test the accessibility of this updated kiosk throughout all VA facilities so we can bring issues to the VA's attention to improve this kiosk experience. If you test the kiosk, please tell us about your experience and send your observations to FieldService@bva.org. We have a working group meeting with the Section 508 office in late August, and would like to have some feedback from blinded veterans' experience of the kiosk and its updated software.

Tom Zampieri Co-Authors Research Article



In April, BVA President Thomas Zampieri, Ph.D co-authored a research article with Gregory L. Goodrich, Ph.D titled “*Evergreen: The First U.S. Veterans’ Blind Rehabilitation Center*” published in the the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*. It outlines the history of blind rehabilitation for adults and veterans in the United States during World War 1. Following is the abstract, if you would like to read the full research article, it is published on the BVA website at <https://www.bva.org/evergreen-the-first-u-s-veterans-blind-rehabilitation-center/> courtesy of growkudos.com and the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.

What is it about?

The first blind rehabilitation center for veterans and adults in the United States was created during World War 1 on an estate near Baltimore, Maryland that was known as Evergreen. We describe the events leading

up to the founding of the center by the United States Army and the rehabilitation program that evolved to meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of blind veterans. We also discuss the unique aspects of this program and its place in the history of blind rehabilitation services.

Why is it important?

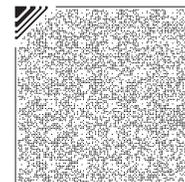
The history of any field is inherently important. Evergreen was unique in that it provided vocational rehabilitation to blind adults and pioneered many developments that are now common place including scientific studies of vocational rehabilitation, family training programs, and others. Understanding the forces that shaped this program and its development offer insights that help us understand the professions involved in blind rehabilitation and may offer insights relevant to the evolving needs of this field.

BVA Accepted into the Military Coalition

On May 2nd, the BVA was accepted into The Military Coalition. The Military Coalition is a group of over 32 military, veteran, and uniformed service organizations in joint pursuit of maintaining a strong national defense, maintaining uniformed service compensation and benefits, representing the interests of the entire uniformed services including members’ families and survivors, and educating the public on the extraordinary demands and sacrifices associated with a career in the uniformed services. Being a part of a large group of veteran service organizations means that “by working together on issues of mutual agreement, the participating organizations can harness the grassroots support of more than 5.5 million members plus their families and accomplish far more than by working on these initiatives separately;” we’re going to be able to have a stronger voice to advocate for our Blinded Veterans with The Military Coalition behind us. We are grateful to be a part of this and cannot wait to work with these organizations to bring about change. Visit <http://www.themilitarycoalition.org/> to learn more about The Military Coalition and what they do for members of the uniformed service.

In Remembrance

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



Florida R.G.

Rocco Casali
Elvin Felty
Arthur Fritts
Ralph Geiger
John Hagnes
Homer Johnson
William Turner

Massachusetts R.G.

Leonard Lyons
Harry Salvo

Military Bases and No State R.G.

Elvin Norris

Nebraska R.G.

Stanley Zaloga

New Mexico R.G.

James Beaty
Albert Dunkin
Solon Ellison
Paul Fix
Julius Fitzner
John Frank
Federico Lovato
Edward Magdalinski
Lee Montoya
Mannuel Otero
Arthur Palmer
Jim Sampson

New York R.G.

Joseph Martone

North Carolina R.G.

Thomas Serdula

Oregon R.G.

Woodrow Brown

Puerto Rico

Acevado Aviles
Joese Riog Carlo
Armando Couvertier
Kermit Cuesta Gonzalez
Domingo Gonzalez
Ramon Figueroa
Miguel Orta
Rogello Aybar Rivera
Asuncion Torres

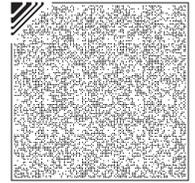
Spokane Inland Empire R.G.

Keith Murray

White River Junction R.G.

Edwin Frizzell

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Vice President – **PAUL MIMMS**
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Bookkeeper – **YVONNE PRESTON**

BVA VETERANS’ SERVICE RESOURCE CENTER STAFF

Staff – **CLAUDIA BELK, LOREAL HAMILTON, COURTNEY JENNINGS,
PATRICK JOHNSON**

Please Return to:
BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION
125 N. West Street, 3rd Floor
Alexandria, VA 22314

**FREE MATTER FOR
THE BLIND OR
HANDICAPPED**

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

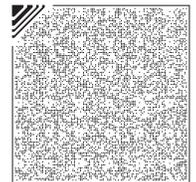
Handle as **FIRST-CLASS MAIL**
Domestic Mail Manual Sec. 703.5.1-2

Final Thought

By Tom Zampieri

Memorial Day was a special opportunity for representing BVA members at the Arlington National Cemetery official wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Warfare doesn't kill, fortunately, as many American service members at the rates it used to due to modern military tactics, technologies, weapons, vehicles, and battlefield emergency trauma care. The Post 9/11 era wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and conflicts elsewhere in pursuit of enemy combatants, brought us a new survival rate of 97% in combat wounded overall who were deployed. However, walking with the many families of Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives with their children one recognizes the pain and sacrifice they have made for all of us.

Unlike those who have fallen, these are families of the men and women all around us who had to deal with their terrible losses and they can still be helped with our support and appreciation for their sacrifices. They carry scars we can never see from the outside and we owe them forever our eternal gratitude and respect. Reflecting at the Tomb of Unknown Soldier on Memorial Day, I am reminded of the quote attributed to General George Patton: "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived."



Presentation of the BVA wreath at the Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington Cemetery. Left to right: Jay Cabacar, VFW National Honor Guard Member; Chet Curtis, BVA Director of Public Relations; Michaun Harrison, and Thomas Zampieri, BVA National President.