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The Newspaper for Veterans and All Who Love Them.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY / 2023



See page 19, for visions of the Tet Offensive from the eyes of a member of Veterans for Peace...

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STAND AT EASE *By Don Stark, Publisher / Sales Manager*

With each new edition being prepared for the printing presses, we stop to review the look of the entire publication, but most important to us is the journalism that gets better with every issue.

This particular edition is a cornucopia of not only interesting, but informative columns, that keeps our readership up to date on what transpires in the lives of our veterans. Important information for veteran eligibility for all sorts of assistance including civilian job searching, including area military housing for those in need. Also, you will find information on tax credits for home buying Ohio veterans, and lots of great advertisers to support!

A detailed explanation of the Pact Act, concerning health issues due to Agent Orange and Burn Pits has been a major topic for the DD214 Chronicle. Our vets having served in Viet Nam, Iraq and/or Afghanistan should catch up with the new services available to those affected.



Also, in this issue we have insights on WWII, and the Tet Offensive in Southeast Asia.

Humanity serving humanity, is most apparent during the holidays, and we have a number of terrific columns including Vets helping Vets families at the oftentimes, tough holiday

season. Veterans Day Celebrations in our community, and a commentary of hospice care if and when needed, and an American soldier having returned home, reaching out to his at-risk assistants still under cover in Afghanistan.

We are always concerned in regard to our product and accept any thoughts and/or suggestions to help us in our mission. Happy New Year!

Thank-You!
Donald C. Stark, Publisher



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PUBLISHERS EMERITUS
Terence J. Uhl
John H. Tidyman

PUBLISHER / SALES MANAGER
Donald C. Stark
(216) 323-4699
donaldstark408@gmail.com

ART DIRECTOR
K.A. Szomoru Graphics

WRITING STAFF
Jeri Donohue
Brian Albrecht
Chris Johnston
Barbara Smith
Jacob Arnett

BOOK EDITOR
Nancy Peacock

HISTORY EDITOR
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Editorial Statement

DD214 Chronicle is committed to its readers: Veterans of every generation and all who love them. The printed newspaper is delivered across northern Ohio without charge to more than 600 plus locations: libraries, colleges and universities that welcome veteran students, VFW and American Legion posts, city halls, Veteran Administration offices and health care facilities, organizations in support of veterans, advertisers, political offices, and Veteran Service Commissions. DD214 Chronicle also maintains dd214chronicle.com and DD214 Chronicle/Facebook.

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Ohio Soldier Namesake of Act to Aid Vets Struggling With After-Effects of Burn Pit Exposure

By Brian Albrecht

An Ohio National Guard soldier didn't live long enough to see national legislation enacted to honor his sacrifice in the struggle of thousands of fellow veterans battling the toxic after-effects of burn pits.



Ohio National Guard 1st Sgt Heath Robinson became the namesake for a new law aiding veterans who suffer from the after-effects of exposure to burn pit toxins.

That legislation became the Sgt. 1st Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act last August, when it was passed by Congress, two years after Robinson, a Pickerington native and combat medic who served in Iraq, died of lung cancer at age 39.

The act was a major step in a long campaign to secure U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) approval of disability benefits to treat an array of illnesses blamed on exposure to burning trash in open pits at military installations overseas.

Robinson's role started nearly 10 years after his deployment in Iraq, with blood flowing from his nose and ears, the result of a rare autoimmune disease. Then came the diagnosis of lung cancer, and an oncologist's question: Have you had some kind of toxic exposure? He had. Three months of his deployment had been spent guarding Iraqi workers in close

proximity to a burn pit the size of a football field.

Burn pits were extensively used during the war in Iraq and Afghanistan to dispose of nearly anything and everything, including medical and human waste, electronics, plastics and more, all ignited by jet fuel. Veterans who served in those areas have cited their exposure to burn pits, which can emit the same toxins found in the Vietnam-era defoliant Agent Orange, as the reason for medical conditions including cancers, respiratory problems and hypertension. But the VA, citing a lack of scientific evidence linking



An airman discards uniforms into a burn pit at a military base overseas, a practice that has been blamed for adverse medical conditions, and was recently addressed in a new law dealing with health benefits. (U.S. Air Force photo)

burn pits to those conditions, rejected 78 percent of burn pit exposure claims from 2007-2020.

As Robinson's condition worsened, and he was given months to live, the VA denied caregiver benefits for his wife, Danielle, of Columbus, and coverage for some treatments. Susan Zeier, of Sandusky, his mother in law, recalled that near the end, his pain was excruciating. "He begged my daughter and I to overdose him," she said. "During the last two months, my daughter or I stayed with him every minute, we were so afraid he'd do it himself."

By that time, his wife and mother-in-law had become well-versed in the burn pit issue, and campaigned for passage of the PACT act. They heard about other discharged soldiers who "weren't getting health care provided, many had lost their homes, couldn't pay their bills," Zeier said. "Even though he (Robinson) was terminally ill, he made my daughter and I promise that we would continue the fight for other soldiers."

That didn't change when the PACT Act took effect as the largest

toxic exposure-related concerns. That screening started last November. The VA must also establish an outreach program for veterans regarding toxic exposure benefits and supports, and mandates additional education and training on the subject for VA personnel.

- The VA must conduct new studies of health trends among Gulf War and post-9/11 vets, and develop a five-year strategic plan on toxic exposure research.
- Adds more presumptive exposure conditions and locations for Agent Orange and radiation exposure.
- Implementation (set for this month) of a national call center and network of experts to help veterans with concerns



Pictured in better times are Ohio National Guard 1st Sgt. Heath Robinson, with his wife, Danielle, and daughter, Brielle. (photo courtesy of Danielle Robinson)

about environmental exposure, and provide consultative services to vets in primary care clinics.

- Expands the VA workforce and claims processing, establishing 31 new health care facilities in 19 states.
- Grants retroactive pay to veterans who did not receive care for claims of illness caused by burn pits.

- Requires that veterans enrolled in VA health care be regularly screened for

The VA reported that more than 113,000 claims were filed in the first two months after PACT was enacted, and the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the act will cost \$300 billion to implement in the next 10 years.

The changes came too late for Heath Robinson. His wife, Danielle Robison, recalled, "He just felt like, over time, how could the military knowingly do this to all those soldiers . . . to put so many lives in danger down the road?"

And yet, he never regretted his military service, she added. "Surprisingly, he always said he'd do it all over again. Being military and being a soldier was part of his identity," Robinson noted.

President Joe Biden supported the burn pit benefits campaign, at one point noting that burn pit emissions may have contributed to the fatal brain cancer that his son Beau developed after serving in Iraq.

Among Biden's guests at his first State of the Union address was Danielle Robinson, and the pen that Biden used to sign the PACT act is now proudly displayed in the bedroom of the Robinson's 9-year-old daughter, Brielle.

Zeier was among veterans and PACT supporters who camped for six days outside the Capitol building in protest after the Senate vote on the act was temporarily stalled by Republicans. Also among those protesters was Rosie Torres, who co-founded the nonprofit group Burn Pits 360 with her husband, Le Roy Torres, after the former Army captain developed illnesses they blamed on his exposure to toxic burn pits while serving in Iraq. The volunteer group (www.burnpits360.org) works to support veterans and their families dealing with adverse medical conditions due to burn pit exposure.

Torres described passage of the PACT act as "monumental. We couldn't have asked for anything more, or anything less. "Now comes the real work, the implementation and oversight, and making sure that the VA and DOD fulfill the intent of the law," she noted.

The emphasis now needs to be on prompt screening for the potential effects of burn pit exposure, and delivery of the specialized health care required, according to Torres.

"Veterans are still sick and dying. What we at Burn Pits 360 are working on diligently is to make sure that the VA is held accountable at all levels for the implementation of benefits, especially health care," she said. But she is confident that VA Secretary Denis McDonough will follow through. "The Secretary is a man of his word, and we appreciate his

honesty and integrity for not giving us false hope," Torres said.

Both Zeier and Danielle Robinson were elated at passage of the PACT act, but they, too, said more work is needed. "We were definitely happy that it passed. It was a huge relief," Zeier said. But, "we were unhappy that some of the presumptive illnesses were removed from the original bill due to cost. We want continue working on getting those illnesses back on the presumptive list."

PACT passage represented a change in attitude and awareness of the issue in Congress, according to Zeier, and she credited Vietnam vets with setting the example for presumptive illnesses.

"Vietnam Veterans of America was the first veterans organization to stand with us and support everything we were doing," she said. "They provided the blueprints for fighting for presumptive illnesses until they accomplished the presumption for Agent Orange." Additionally, "there are no directives to care for children who may have suffered birth defects and illnesses because the mother or father were exposed to toxins," she added.

Danielle Robinson said their daughter hasn't yet suffered any physical ailments from her father's exposure, but is still adjusting to his loss. "It's getting better over time," she said. One helpful factor has been getting to know other kids with similar stories, she added.

She was surprised that PACT was named for her husband. "Yes, he sacrificed his life for his country, but lot of these other veterans who are passing also need to be honored," Robinson said.

Their future work will include educating vets regarding the burn pit issue and VA benefits, according to

Zeier. "Even if not you're sick now, you need to get on the VA burn pit registry [1-877-470-5947] and get an initial exam," she said. "If you are having health problems and been denied VA claims in past, re-submit everything."

"We're trying to make sure that veterans do everything they can to get the coverage they deserve, and also survivors," she added. "We don't want anybody left behind."



Susan Zeier, right, poses with her family including her daughter, Danielle, granddaughter Brielle, and son-in-law Heath Robinson. (Photo courtesy of Susan Zeier)

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Christmas, Afghanistan

*In no small tale of slithering slight,
The last C-130 took off in the night.
Left behind were our allies we used for the fight,
Alone on their own in a new kind of plight.
"We all know what happens if we're to be found...
They'll cut off our heads... spill our blood on the ground!"
"For exemplary service with the US of A..."
Badges and awards...In a fire pit, they lay.
Fanning the flames 'til they're ashen and gray,
You heard that they're starting house searches today.
Fleeing the city to family afar,
False rumors that there might be flights from Mazar.
Reaching the village with wife, son, and daughter,
You scrape an existence with the last of your dollars.
Your 12-year-old daughter is gifted at math?*

*"Illiterate, child-bearer", is her Taliban path.
Please help us, our friends, we share in your fate!
"There's a home for you, in the United States..."
Afghanistan veterans frustrated pleas,
Tried to pressure our media on statements like these.
It brought a few congressmen up to the fore,
...Until they found out it's a story no more.
Let Saigons be By-gones, we did ALL we can!
(...To secure lithium deals with the Taliban.)
15 months hidden. You're feeling betrayed.
Thinking back on all the promises made
"My brother, I wanted a moment to say,
Remember my family on your Christmas Day."*

By Jacob Arnett

I wrote this poem for my Afghan interpreters. It's been a real struggle to survive since the fall of the country to the Taliban in August, 2021. I've never written a poem in my life, previously. Not unless it was some sort of elementary school task. It seems to me to be a good way to convey strong feelings in as few words as possible. So, there you go.

As I'm writing this, it's 1851, Pacific Standard Time. Daylight has been vanquished from behind these mountains lining the western edge of Las Vegas by now. The ambient sound of road noise meanders through the night, entering my ears via my upstairs windows as I type. Such an active city. Busy people. People cruising to In an Out Burger. Moms headed to Target. As I recline in my chair, I look out my 2nd story window at the mountains once more and I hear the "ding" of my phone. I glance down to open my phone and I'm met with a familiar message:

"Sir, this is _____ I worked for you in Kandahar. Please help me. You are my only hope sir."
I recline further, flexing both the spine of my chair and my memory of this man. YES! Now I remember you. You're that guy who smiled a lot. Kept the Pashtuns and the Tajiks from all out violence at times. Helped me avoid an Afghan worker riot when the military placed a porta-john between our entry check point and mecca. No more line-of-sight prayers deflected away by U.S. soldiers s-houses thanks to effective interpreters. I remember that. Your dad was an interpreter for the Soviets in the 80's? Yes, yes I know you. I'm so sorry to hear that you're in fear for your life and your family is destitute. I sit up in my chair. I let out a sigh. Another one.

"You got it brother. Please stay safe and send everything you have to my e-mail and I'll see what I can do."



"Afghan children hoping for a better life"

And that's how it's been going since 2020, at least. I previously helped my Iraqi interpreter friends navigate the US State Department's Special Immigrant Visa program since 2009, so having proffered small bits of my time towards these ends over the years, I'm uniquely well-versed in the war-time immigration process as we have it. The benefit that my Iraqi friends had was a reasonably stable environment from 2009-2014 in Iraq. I left Iraq at the close of combat operations in the summer of 2011 and headed back to Cleveland, Ohio, to drink a few beers and pretend to "civilian" again for a few months. It took almost 2 years for Iraq to fall apart after our "nation-building" institutional structure was removed. My Iraqi friends had time to make the decision to get out. Passport offices, printers, decent internet. They had the resources they needed to apply for the SIV.

But when I started getting a steady stream of Afghans reaching out to me via various forms of social media and email in 2020, I knew that the situation was heading South much, much faster in Afghanistan. In fact, the country was falling

apart while American forces were still there, and the decision to close our most important and easily defended airbase, Bagram Air Base, was a critical error that still baffles my military mind to this day. I truly believe that decision cost 13 Marine lives August 26, 2021. We had Marines controlling foot traffic outside the perimeter of a tiny, impossible to defend airport when you had a well defended, much larger airport with security infrastructure available to control entry and exit traffic, safely conduct searches, and provide stand-off distance to avoid catastrophic events like the ability of a suicide bomber to walk up to Marines and detonate. Having flown in and out of both airports, I know this to be true. Having spent 2011-2014 recruiting, hiring, and training Afghan guards to provide perimeter security for U.S. Army forward operations bases in the most dangerous



"The author with a couple interpreters on COP Makuar in Zhari, District Kandahar" (Me wearing Afghan clothes holding AK-47)

areas of Kandahar, we never had a security breach despite attacks and constant threats of attack. Hopefully, the families of these Marines can take solace in the fact that their sons and daughters died heroically serving people who were desperate enough to cling to planes in suicidal attempts to flee their doomsday scenario, the country falling totally into Taliban control once again.

Knowing the day of the Taliban takeover was all but inevitable, I've spent the last few years helping my Afghan former coworkers with recommendation letters from my desk, securing human resources letters from our former companies, and helping with all sorts of administrative issues and language barriers. It has been surprisingly time consuming, but it's a labor of love. These are, in fact, my friends. Not only is the humanitarian crisis monumentally bad for Afghans as whole, it's another story altogether for those who have worked with coalition forces. These men

and women are marked for death by the Taliban and other terror groups, and the Taliban have implemented routine home searches, with fighters ransacking homes and looking for weapons and any evidence of cooperation with US and coalition forces in the past. If found, these individuals are arrested, tortured, and, ultimately, killed by their Taliban captors. To make matters worse, part of the State Department's requirements to qualify for the SIV program is that these individuals must have current Afghan passports. This is something that these



"The author with an Afghan security forces supervisor on COP Edgerton, Dand District, Kandahar"

individuals were unlikely to have had before the Taliban takeover, and something that is impossible to get now with the Taliban having closed passport offices down to prevent escape. It's truly a terrible, almost hopeless situation, and those of us who have been working on behalf of these interpreters have seen firsthand the lack of concern on behalf of our government to take care of these eternally brave men and women after they risked everything to help us.

Yet, despite the lack of flights, passport offices being closed, and the extreme difficulty of finding work to support their families when your identity requires so much concealment, I can finally say that one of my Afghan friends has made it to the United States under this program. I cannot say his name, nor where in America he now calls home, as his family is still awaiting flights, but as of last month he is safely here. I will tell you his story and give you an update on the other 10 or so Afghans I am working with in my next installment of this story. I hope that you follow their journey with me, and I sincerely hope to provide better news of their situation on the next one.

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An Annual Tax Credit for Homebuying Veterans in Ohio

Many Ohio veterans are not aware that the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), the State of Ohio's leading agency for on affordable housing, offers a veteran-friendly direct federal tax credit for homebuyers through the Mortgage Tax Credit (MTC) program. This program is generally targeted toward first-time buyers and can be worth up to \$2,000 per year for as long as you own a home. However, there are special guidelines that allow veterans to qualify for this tax credit even if they are not first-time buyers.

What are the benefits of the MTC?

The purpose of the mortgage tax credit is to make buying a home easier and more affordable for first-time and other eligible homebuyers. In short:

- Qualifying buyers will be issued a Mortgage Credit Certificate when they buy their home allowing them to receive a tax credit for a portion (20%-40%) of the interest paid on their mortgage each year moving forward.
- The tax credit is limited to \$2,000 per year and may be claimed for the life of the loan as long as it is still your primary residence

For instance, let's assume you purchase a home by borrowing \$150,000 at a 6% interest rate, and you qualify for the maximum credit percentage of 40%. Using round numbers, you would have \$9,000 of interest in the first year, and 40% of that would be \$3,600. As the maximum credit per year is limited to \$2,000, however, that is the maximum amount of the credit you could claim.

What are the special rules for veterans?


In general, the MTC program applies to a "First Time Buyer", meaning someone who has not had an ownership interest in a primary residence in the past three years. However, the State of Ohio provides an additional definition for "First Time Buyer" specifically for veterans, expanding it to include "qualified military veterans who have received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Military, even if they have previously owned a home.

This means that qualified veterans may qualify for the MTC program and its annual \$2,000 tax credit even if they are not technically first-time buyers. If a veteran stays in a home for ten years or more, that could make the tax credit worth upwards of \$20,000 total.

Are there any other rules to qualify?

It is important to note that the Mortgage Tax Credit is only available for mortgages obtained through specific lenders approved through OHFA and the State of Ohio. Additionally, the MTC must be approved prior to buying a home; it cannot be obtained after taking ownership. Lastly, there are additional qualification limits regarding income earned per year, purchase price, and other factors.

To learn more about this program or to see if you would qualify, veterans may visit the OHFA website at www.myohiohome.org, or contact Steve Weixel, Producing Branch Manager at Guaranteed Rate, at 216-926-5181. You can also send an email to steve.weixel@rate.com. Steve Weixel and Guaranteed Rate are approved for lending in Ohio for the MTC program, as well as for other programs offered through OHFA.



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SAM CENTER SERVES UP THE HOLIDAYS TO THOSE WHO SERVED

By Christopher Johnston

Every year at the Holidays, Bryan Bowman delights in playing Santa Claus. Especially when he can celebrate Christmas with his beloved fellow veterans and their families at the Serving Area Military (SAM) Center he founded in Massillon.

In March 2015, Bowman opened the center in a former USO office next to American Legion Post 221 at 413 Lincoln Way East. He and hundreds of volunteers, funders and private and corporate donors have grown it into a highly active and productive home base for veterans ever since.

“As a nonprofit, we operate the SAM Center to be a central hub of veteran activity,” Bowman says. “We want to find the veterans in the community and connect them with the resources available, the other nonprofits that are there for them, so that we are able to provide veterans with whatever they need.”

A recent visit revealed the swirl of seasonal activities happening at the center every day, starting with a fresh load of more than 100 Christmas trees from Smith Evergreen Nursery in Magnolia for U.S. active-duty military families and veterans. They can also pick up a tree stand and ornaments, if needed, so they have the entire set up.

But Bowman really enjoys dressing up as Santa or an Elf – or in one of several Christmas suits that he owns for the occasion – and welcoming veterans into the sizable hall that the American Legion always allows the SAM Center to use for free. There, they can grab a grocery shopping cart and select from a room full of tables groaning with toys, games, sporting goods, clothing and other gift items. They can also choose from a variety of decorative papers to wrap the gifts themselves.

Each family receives their choice of either five smaller stocking stuffers or a medium or a larger toy. They also receive one board game for every child, along



Bryan Bowman looks over a small portion of the many gifts.

More gifts

Kids gifts of clothing



Santa and some of his crew at the SAM CENTER, truly an amazing place doing great work for veterans and their families.

with a puzzle or board game for each family to play together. There are gifts for children of all ages from charming baby dolls to colorful stuffed animals, from books to clothing, blankets and Bombas socks and coats, from Nerf guns to tricycles and bicycles.

Veterans can also request specific toys from their child's Santa list; Bowman and his staff or volunteers will purchase them and then place them on the tables for the adults to find when they come to the hall for their appointed time to shop.



Lots of childrens books

“If they change their mind or their child wants something else, that's okay, too,” says Lucia Cirese, executive director of the SAM Center. “We know someone else will take it.”

Eyeing the sprawling treasure trove of toys, clothing and gifts, Bowman explains: “We just want them to be able to get all the gifts so that they have their holiday taken care of. They also receive a Christmas feast with a turkey and all the

fixings, so that their families just have a wonderful Christmas.”

In November, the SAM Center provided complete Thanksgiving feasts for 475 veterans and prepared meals for an additional 300+ people. They also gave out \$4,750 in grocery gift cards to enhance those Turkey Day meals.

Moreover, the following is just a partial list of items and services the SAM Center has given during 2022:

- 9,430 Veterans/Service Members, Widows(ers) are Commissary Clients (Food Pantry)
- 96 Lodging Kits Provided to Veterans Transitioning from Homelessness to Housing
- 2,555 7-Day Emergency Food Bags Provided
- 6,862 Volunteer Hours to Assist Those in Need
- 450+ Veterans Assisted at

September Veterans Resource Fair

- \$825,600+ in Direct Assistance to Veterans
- Dozens of veterans have taken guitar lessons, yoga, paddleboard yoga and other free therapeutic services
- Affected More Than \$2 million in Community Impact

While the SAM Center has been brightening everyone's holidays – and most other days of the year – for many years now, Bowman decided to commit to spreading the spirit of giving to veterans nearly a decade ago. He came to his decision after enduring the unnerving experience of unemployment, bankruptcy, homelessness, deprivation, and near-suicidal depression back in the early 2000s.

As a young man in his 20s, the Canton native had wanted to become a chef, so in June 1995, he enlisted in the Ohio National Guard because they would pay 70% of his tuition to attend culinary school.

He graduated with an associate's degree in food service and a certificate in culinary arts. After a few years of intense, long hours, stressful jobs, and the related failed relationships, he got out in 2001. “The restaurant industry is tiring,” he recalls. “God bless the chefs that can do that for 60 hours a week in that hot kitchen, but I realized it wasn't for me.”

Around that same time, 9/11 happened, and not long afterward, Bowman learned he was slated for deployment. But deployment didn't happen when he expected. Neither did any significant job opportunities, once potential employers learned he could ship out any day in service of his country despite not being paid for the time leading up to deployment.

Bowman found himself sleeping on friend's couches or on the floor in their basements or in his car if he was out late working odd jobs. After six months of abject poverty and depression, he decided he had to pull himself up by his National Guard bootstraps. By 2006, he had stabilized his life. He had earned enough money to start buying and renovating homes that he used as rental properties. He got federal student loans to pay for his housing and expenses and help pay for college.

Bowman attended Liberty University where he earned his bachelor's degree in business administration and management in 2009 and his MBA in leadership development in 2011. He began to become more involved in his community and with nonprofits. He also participated in the Leadership Stark County program and was expanding his community contacts.

Bowman also serves as Director of Military and Veterans Affairs (2019-present) for Congressman Anthony Gonzalez, and before that had worked as Veteran's Coordinator and in other veteran support roles (2013-2019) for former U.S. Congressman Jim Renacci.

Prior to that, he had served as Human Resources Manager, 1-145th Armor Regiment (2007-2012) and Foodservice Sergeant, 737th Forward Support Company (2012-2016) in Stow, Ohio.

While serving, he had gained experience in working with the families and social service agencies and started to learn about the needs of veterans who were in need of financial, housing and other services. He had not only seen National Guard servicemen in need but after opening the center, began to see older veterans who had served in Vietnam

struggling to survive and thrive. Like himself in his early 20s, they didn't know what benefits or services were available to them as veterans.

By March 2015, he had submitted all of the paperwork to found the SAM Center. Initially, they helped homeless veterans obtain lodging kits as a first step to recovery. “The VA was providing only vouchers so they could get an apartment, but then they were sleeping on the floor in the apartment and going to the gas station for their food,” Bowman says. “Their situation was often worse than when they were in a shelter.”

The SAM Center helped them obtain beds and furniture, and through its new food pantry program, the veterans could also enjoy hot, nutritious meals and get the food and supplies they needed to prepare meals for themselves. Most important, though, Bowman's goal was to leverage the food pantry to gain connections to the veterans so that they could learn about all of the resources, benefits, compensation, and programs available to them.

“All of our programs are based on outreach and connecting with them,” he says. “We're there to feed them, but the other reason we have the commissary

food pantry is to connect with those veterans in need. I never wanted anyone else to go through what I did.”

For the first seven years of the SAM Center, Bowman served as volunteer President and CEO of Serving Area Military. His past March, he made way for a new generation of leadership by hiring and turning daily operations over to Cirese as Executive Director and President Ron Manse.

Today, he owns nine homes, but has begun selling them off and has gradually stepped back from his SAM Center duties to spend more time with his wife Stefanie and their two children Anna and Everett.

Anyone wanting to donate can call the center at 330-956-6162, or email support@servinareamilitary.com. For additional information, see their Facebook page (facebook.com/servinareamilitary) or website (https://www.servinareamilitary.org/).

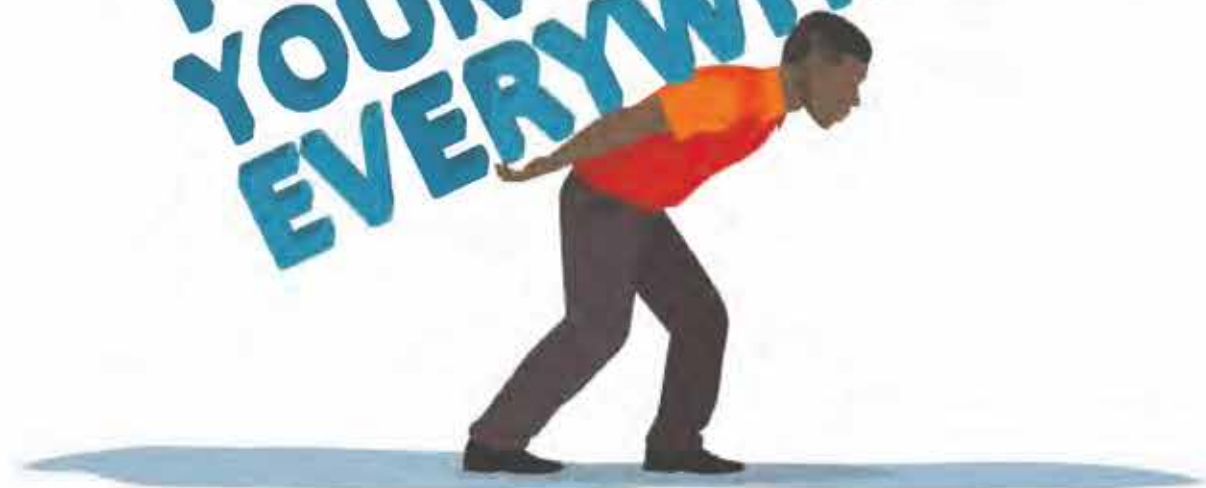
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We Honor Veterans

Hospice Care's Benefits Are Not Limited To a Single Time or Place

By Bill Finn

Though the leaves are falling and we are starting to settle into the holiday season, our community is still adapting to the complex changes we've faced over the last two-and-a-half years. Throughout the month of November, *Hospice of the Western Reserve* is joining other hospice organizations across the nation to recognize National Hospice and Palliative Care Month. This year's theme is "meeting you where you are." As Northern Ohio's premiere hospice provider, we are embracing these changes to do just that.

Hospice of the Western Reserve is a nonprofit hospice, which allows us to put patients above profit margins. As the number of Americans over age 65 continues to grow, there are companies who seek to profit off one's end of life journey. According to the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation, the number of for-profit hospices has more than doubled in the last ten years, which can greatly affect the care that patients, families, and communities receive. However, nonprofit hospices like *Hospice of the Western Reserve* accept all patients, even those who require more complex care and costly interventions. We meet you where you are, no matter your diagnosis.

Perhaps you or your loved one is not ready for hospice, but you are still in need of symptom management and specialized care. We can meet you there, too. Our Western Reserve Navigator program provides quality palliative care for those still receiving treatment for a serious or advanced illness. We work collaboratively with your doctor to help avoid hospital stays, as well as help care for the family and friends who take care of you. Emotional support is critical during health challenges, end-of-life-care, and grief. Hospice of the Western Reserve meets you where you are at in your grief journey, regardless of if your loved one received care from our agency. Our Healing Arts Workshops, children's grief camps, and support groups provide a tremendous sense of community for anyone grieving a loss. For our hospice families, we provide individual support for a

minimum of 13 months after the loss of a loved one, and we follow and support children and pediatric families for 24 months. Grief is a winding, twisting path, and you deserve support every step of the way, no matter where you are in the process.

A key part of our mission is to foster choice in end-of-life care. We will meet you where you want to receive our hospice services, whether it is in your home, in an assisted-living or nursing home, or one of our state-of-the-art inpatient units. This year, we acquired Stein Hospice, which brought our service area up to 13 counties. We also re-opened our Medina inpatient unit, allowing us to continue our service and commitment to the community.

A common misconception about hospice care is that it is about dying. Hospice care is about celebrating the remarkable life you have lived and providing comfort for you and your loved ones at the end of your life. Our clinical teams, bereavement and spiritual care coordinators, volunteers, and support staff are truly some of the most generous and compassionate people we could ever hope to meet in our corner of the world. And we are here and honored to meet you wherever you are in your journey.

Bill Finn is the president and CEO of Hospice of the Western Reserve

(reprint courtesy of Cleveland.com)

Gratitude in Granite

“Never forget what these men did for us”

By Barb Smith

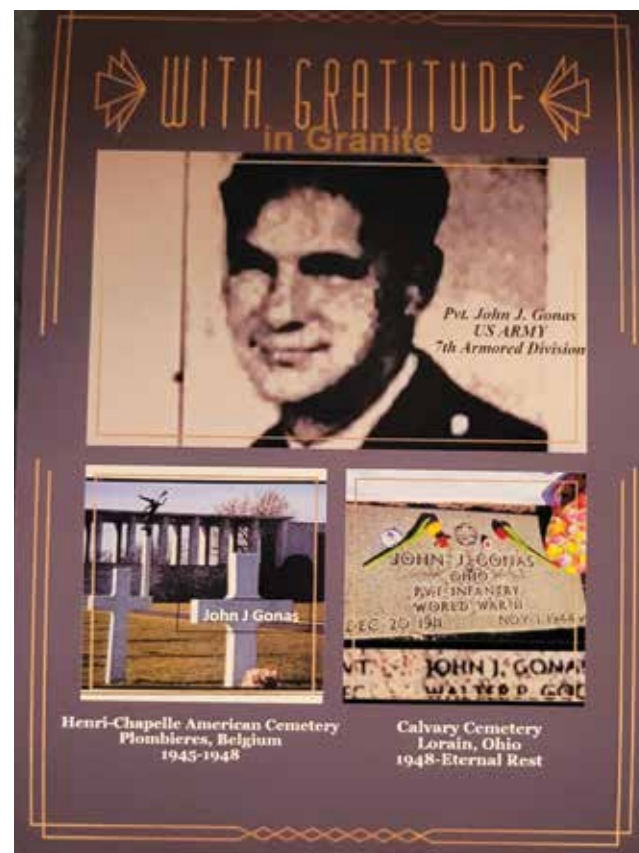
On Oct. 5, 2022, our friend Ivo Richter, and owner of BAIV, British American Infantry Vehicles, Nederweert, Netherlands, drove my husband Bob and me to the village of Ospel, where we were scheduled to meet Niek Hendrix. Ivo and Niek had recently become acquainted via collaborating with the Make-A-Wish Foundation to make a local 11-year-old boy's dream come true, to drive a tank one day, which occurred on September 21, 2022. “Niek has a collection of WWII artifacts I want you to see.” Within no time, Niek was pulling authentic WWII American treasures from their places on glass shelves of illuminated cabinets, and relaying “war” stories, of his ongoing collection of WWII Americana, of just a smattering to which we were treated. Two hours later, we exited this local historian's two-room museum, saw the space behind Niek's garage where he hopes to expand to display more and more of American WWII history. We followed him to the carport, and heeded his directive to “hop in,” as best we could, into his pristine, American Willy's Jeep. After a short open-air excursion throughout the verdant village of Ospel, Niek parked on his father's property. We were awestruck at the sight of the monument which he and his family erected on the family's farm. I sang the Star Spangled Banner and the Beer Barrel Polka at Niek's initiation, during this serendipitous meeting. To learn how Bob and I would be hosting thirty-two days later, a ‘welcome home’ party, in Lorain, Ohio, read the article below.

Thank you to Ms. Julie Wallace, editor of the Elyria Chronicle-Telegram, for permission to reprint the 11/6/22 story of Dave O'Brien, reporter extraordinaire: Netherlands Connection Renewed, Research on Lorain Man Yields Surprises. *LORAIN-Approximately 4,000 miles east of the International City, is the town of Ospel in the Netherlands. Home to about 4,00 people and also a popular blues festival, in 1944 it was ground zero for a bloody battle between Axis and allied armed forces in World War II. Nearly 80 years later, Oberlin couple, Barb and Bob Smith spent a portion of a month-long trip in Europe from mid-September to mid-October in Ospel. While traveling

there, a mutual friend introduced them to Niek Hendrix.

Hendrix has a lovely collection of World War II memorabilia, in his small private museum, Barb Smith said. He took the American couple out for a sightseeing trip in his World War II ERA Willys Jeep.

Hendrix also showed them photos of the memorial his family dedicated to their American liberators in 2007, carved the names of 54 soldiers of the U.S. Army's 7th Armored Division soldiers known to have died to free Ospel from the Germans in late 1944.



John Gonas. Two gravesites.

Barb Smith said she asked Niek to send her a list of all the names of the men carved on the, especially those from Ohio.

To her surprise, one was Pvt. John J. Gonas of Lorain, killed in action in 1944.

There on the monument was a soldier who died 4,000 miles away from his home, nearly 80 years ago, a native of the largest city in the county where Barb Smith worked as a special education teacher until she retired from the Elyria schools nearly 10 years ago. A self-described “Army brat married to a sailor,”

Bob Smith served on the aircraft carriers the USS Franklin D Roosevelt and USS Intrepid during his Navy career in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Barb Smith said she took it upon herself to track down the Gonas family as soon as she got back to the U.S. on Oct. 12.

The Netherlands, 1944

According to the U.S. 7th Armored Division Association website, the soldiers of what was known as the ‘Lucky 7th’ saw the lengthiest combat of any non-airborne American troops in The Netherlands.

Thirty-nine days of heavy fighting went on from Sept. 30 to Nov. 7, 1944, in what is sometimes known as the Battle of the Canals near the towns of Ospel, Meijel and Leisel.

According to Liberation Route Europe, a transnational memorial trail that connects World War II memorials and remembrance sites, and historical accounts 24,000 German soldiers attacked American forces in the area on Oct. 27, 1944, capturing Ospel and Meijel but not Leisel.

Scottish infantry and British armored reinforcements were rushed to the area, counterattacked and stopped the Germans in their tracks. American forces including the 7TH Armored Division then retook Ospel in early November.

The 7th Armored Division paid a heavy price: Fifty-four men were killed and 300 wounded in a single week.

The dead included 33-year-old Pvt. John Gonas, killed when shrapnel hit him in the neck on Nov. 1, 1944, according to U.S. Army records.

Local Research

Upon her return from Europe, Barb Smith's research quickly paid off with help from the Lorain Public Library and Lorain Historical Society. ‘Lorraineite Killed in Holland: Pvt Gonas Gives Life with Army Infantry; Another Wounded,’ read a small headline in the Lorain Journal on Nov. 16, 1944.

The newspaper reported that Pvt. John Gonas joined the U.S. Army in April 1941, and after training at Fort. Benning in Georgia, Fort Knox in Kentucky, and then-Camp Polk in Louisiana,

he shipped off to Europe in June, 1944. The newspaper said he had worked at the Lorain Works of National Tube Co., and that he was survived by his wife, Margaret Grace Gonas, a machine operator at the Lorain Works, and their daughter Martha Ann, 3.

The family lived in the 3300 block of Reid Avenue at the time. Other survivors were John Gonas' parents, John Sr. and Mary (Botchik); two brothers serving in the Armed Forces-Albert Frank Gonas, a gunner's mate stationed in the U.S. Navy, in the Pacific and Edward J Gonas a staff sergeant in the U.S Army Air Corps stationed in England, a brother George William Gonas; and their sister, Agnes.

According to Barb Smith's research and U.S. Army records, Pvt. John Gonas was first buried in the U.S. Military Cemetery Henri-Chapelle in Hombourg, Belgium. In 1945, Mary Gonas wrote a letter to the U.S. War Department, asking for more information regarding her son's death, according to a copy contained in U.S. Army records that were later archived on the 7th Armored Division Association website.

“I have many doubts in my mind and would like to have it settled to have a peace of mind, she wrote the War Department on July 14, 1945, according to a copy of the letter in her son's file. “Could you tell me more and as to where exactly he was buried. When the right time permits I would like to have his body moved to the States, if possible.”

Pvt John Gonas' remains were disinterred in 1947 and returned to

Ohio, and J.J. Gluvna and Son Memorial Chapel-now Gluvna-Shimo-Hromada Funeral Chapel-arranged for him to be buried in Calvary Cemetery.

The files kept by the 7th Armored Division include a document where Margaret Grace Gonas- by then living in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, according to U.S. Army records-relinquished her rights to her husband's remains to his mother.

For unknown reasons, or perhaps because many of them have since died, few remaining members of John Gonas' family apparently knew he had been buried in his hometown. Some even believed his body was still buried in Europe, alongside his brothers in arms who laid down their lives to stop the Nazi menace.

Starting on Oct. 12, Barb Smith made it her mission to track down the Gonas family to honor their fallen relative in some way and let them know the Dutch people had not forgotten their sacrifice.

She found Albert Gonas, the nephew of Pvt. John Gonas, living nearby. Now 79 years old, he and his wife split their time between Amherst and Sarasota, Florida.

Albert Gonas said he didn't know his late uncle, who died the year after he was born, was buried in Ohio. The family thought that he had been laid to rest in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, with his wife's family, he said.

A Graveside Tribute

On Thursday morning, Barb and Bob Smith, their friends Craig and Gayle Hignett, Albert Gonas and state Rep. Joe Miller, D-Amherst, gathered at Calvary Cemetery on North Ridge Rd in Lorain for a short ceremony Barb Smith put together to honor Pvt John Gonas.

Small American flags were placed next to his grave and that of his brother Albert Frank Gonas-who was buried there following his death from a car crash in 1946 only about a month after he returned home from the war.

Barb Smith sang “The Star Spangled Banner” and blessed the Dutch-American Alliance kept alive by the Hendrixes,

In comments that he shared with Barb Smith that she read aloud at the graveside ceremony, Hendrix said his father Harry was 17 when Ospel was liberated by the 7th Armored Division.

Most of the houses in Ospel were damaged, destroyed by artillery or burned by the German army, the Hendrix family farmhouse survived an attempted arson.

Hendrix and his family have long remembered the sacrifice of the

American soldiers from Ohio, New York, Tennessee, Illinois, New Jersey, and elsewhere who gave their lives to help liberate the Dutch-who themselves put up a fierce nonviolent resistance to the Nazis, hid many Jews and persecuted people from the invaders, and spied for the Allies so they could hand over valuable intelligence.

The 54 soldiers of the 7th Armored Division who died in a week of heavy fighting in and around the village “made the highest sacrifice for us,” Hendrix wrote.

When I was eight years old, my father told me: “Never forget what these men did for us,” he wrote.

The Hendrix family didn't forget, dedicating their memorial to the 7th Armored Division in 2007 alongside some very special guests-surviving 7th Armored Division soldiers and family members of some of those who died in the fight for Ospel in 1944.

Here we and all who shall hereafter live in freedom will be reminded that to these men and their comrades we owe a debt to be paid with grateful remembrance of their sacrifice and with the high resolve that the cause for which they died shall live,” Hendrix wrote, sharing a postwar quote by U.S. Army Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and later 34th president of the United States.

Barb Smith gifted Albert Gonas and Hendrix a pair of Honor and Remember flags, designed by a Virginia man whose son was killed in action in Fallujah, Iraq, in December 2005.

(The Ohio House has passed legislation seeking to have that flag named an official symbol of remembrance for the state's fallen soldiers, though the matter has yet to make it a vote in the Ohio Senate, Miller said.)

Albert Gonas said he was “most grateful and thankful” to Hendrix and his family for honoring the men of the 7th Armored Division, including his uncle, “who gave their lives and paid the ultimate sacrifice to protect the innocent lives of those living in Ospel.”

“The monument is an honor to the fallen for their families and should be a reminder to the people of the United States of America, he said also thanking Barb and Bob Smith “for their dedication to remembering our war heroes.”

Another ceremony, with a local veterans honor guard taking part, is scheduled at Calvary Cemetery, 555 North Ridge Road in Lorain at 11 a.m. Monday, Barb Smith said.

The Search Continues

Pvt. John Gonas' father, John died in 1974, and his mother, Mary,

died in 1981. They are buried next to him and his brother Albert Frank Gonas, who survived three ship sinkings in the Pacific Theater before dying in a car crash in February 1946, his nephew and namesake said.

Brother Edward J. Gonas, the U.S. Army Air Corps veteran, died in 2006.

He and his wife Mary, also buried in Calvary Cemetery. Barb Smith said she was in contact with one of the couple's daughters.

Their sister Agnes (Gonas) Schmetzer died at 104 in 2014, according to her published obituary.

Another brother, George William Gonas, died in 1981. His son, George Jr., was a resident of Vermilion and Lorain who died in 2020.

George Gonas Jr.'s son George Gonas III is the great nephew of Pvt. John Gonas and a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel living in Watertown, New York. “It's a small world,” he said in a phone interview Friday, talking about Barb Smith's discovery of his great uncle's name on the Dutch monument.

He said his father once told him that the night his great-uncle died in 1944, his grandfather had a nightmare and woke up screaming that “Johnny passed.”

George Gonas III said the similarities between his great uncle and himself don't end there.: He also trained at Ft. Knox and now Fort Polk at the start of his Army career. Now retired, he works as civilian logistical support with the 10th Mountain Division based at Fort Drum, New York.

Like his uncle Albert, George Gonas III said he had no idea Pvt. John Gonas was buried in Lorain until Barb Smith contacted him. He had also heard that the war hero had been buried in Europe and his body never returned to American soil, he said.

George Gonas III said he has a number of family photos and fond mem-

ories of “Uncle Eddie,”-the late Edward J. Gonas-and his wife, who enjoyed his visits “and gave me extra spaghetti” when he visited the American Slovak Club in his Army uniform.

Barb Smith said she would like to find Pvt. John and Margaret Grace Gonas' daughter, Martha Ann, who would now be in her 80s and grew up in the Johnstown, Pennsylvania, area.

George Gonas III said he'd once seen Martha Ann's Johnstown High School yearbook photo, but hadn't seen her or her children in person since grandfather's funeral in 1981, when he wasn't yet a teenager.

Martha Ann had three daughters who would be close to George Gonas in age, he said. He said he'd welcome a chance to meet up with that side of the family again after all this time. *

In conclusion, Niek Hendrix wants all Americans to know how grateful Dutch citizens are for the ultimate sacrifice that WWII American Heroes made in liberating the Netherlands, grateful enough to show his gratitude in granite.

“Gonas. Rest in honor with your countrymen amongst a sentry of US flags.e Americans will remember.”

In a blog posted on 3/2/19, by Adrian Pratt, “When I asked Niek why he does this, he raises his hands to the countryside around him, “It's about all this,” he said. Everything that the Netherlands is today-free-wealthy-tolerant-it is because of the sacrifices the liberators made, he says. These American boys came from a free country, many of them voluntarily, to help rid the world of the scourge of Nazism. And this cannot be forgotten.

For many further updates regarding my research on Pvt. John J. Gonas and his family, contact me, Barb Smith: barbsmith@ncwcom.com



The author visiting two gravesites.

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Plan to attend CSA's Third Annual Golf Outing
Sunday, May 21, 2023 at
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More info will be coming soon about how you can secure a foursome, become a sponsor, or just support the event with a donation.

ANY support helps our previously homeless Veterans!

So save the date for May 21, 2023!



Freedom House

Transitional Housing Veterans - Portage County

Freedom House renovations are almost complete – Freedom House has served us well over the past 15 years, but the space did not meet the number of emerging needs we are experiencing – specifically accommodating women veterans, creating safer spaces for physical distancing and COVID mandates for all

veterans served. Thanks to funding provided from the VA and the community FCS has been able to take on renovations at Freedom House, creating individual bedrooms/bathrooms for each veteran. These improvements will help us meet the two major needs of women veterans: 1. Safe, transitional housing to reside in while searching for permanent housing 2. Programming that targets the specific needs of homeless women veterans and their children.

Donor Tree of Life Sponsorship Levels

Freedom House has three levels of giving that will be recognized on our **Donor Tree of Life**, which will be displayed in the main living area. All donations will be used toward the capital campaign to help us reach our fundraising goal of \$125,000.

Contact Matt Slater, Director Veteran Services at mslater@fcsserves.org or 330-687-8136



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Judge Sara J. Harper Village Grand Opening

By Don Stark,
DD214 Publisher

Thursday, November 10, 2022

The festivities at the Grand Opening of Judge Sara J. Harper Village, began at 3pm on November 10, with opening remarks from Rob Gilmore, partner of Kohman, Jackson and Krantz, and Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana Board of Directors Chair. Mr. Gilmore brought forth Volunteers of America's standards of Offering Hop, Restoring Dignity, and Transforming Lives. Quoting Mr. Gilmore's closing comment, he proclaimed that "every corner of this facility is filled with love".

Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana designed and built the project in Glenville to support women veterans. According to the U. S. Veterans Affairs, there are more than two million women veterans, the fastest growing segment of the homeless veteran population. An estimated one in four female veterans experienced military sexual trauma. The \$2 million project includes 12 efficiency-style affordable housing apartments. Guests invited to the ribbon-cutting included donors, board members, staff, supporters and female veterans who will move into the facility in November.

Yolander Wilson, SFC (Retired) U.S. Army & JROTC Instructor (AI) JROTC Glenville High School, led the Presentation of Colors & Pledge of Allegiance. Immediately following, John R. von Arx III, President

and CEO, Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana remarked that the Village will help these ladies achieve self-sufficiency. He then introduced, Major General Deborah Ashenhurst, the Director of Ohio Department of Veterans Services, who reminded one and all that "women can make a difference".

Angela Shute-Woodson, the Director of Community Relations, City of Cleveland, read and presented a Proclamation to the VOA. Then, Jill Dietrich Mellon, Executive Director of the VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System, stated that the VA System is "proud to be a partner with Volunteers of America, and that it is an honor and pleasure to support veterans".

Speaker Councilman Kevin Conwell (Ward 9), said he will be walking the neighborhood, "to make sure his new bosses are OK". Constance Trumbo Haqq, a daughter of Judge Sara J. Harper, shared that "We came here to celebrate the service of the women who will live here". Reverend Harris of Mount Olive Baptist Church blessed the audience with his commentary that "We take our time to honor those who have set a pathway and shoulders to stand on! God makes these grounds sanctified, well done, my good and faithful servants". Raising the United States Flag, that had recently flown over the Ohio Statehouse in tribute to the occasion, was sponsored by Swagelok Veterans Resource Group.

Judge Sara J. Harper Village was developed with support from public and private foundations, corporations and individuals including Federal Loan Bank of Pittsburgh and its member bank PNC, The Home Depot Foundation, and local community foundations and corporations. The community is invited to support the veterans through donations, that can be made online at voahin.org /harpervillage

Volunteers of America is one of the nation's largest established, comprehensive, human services organizations with 16,000 mission-driven professionals, dedicated to helping those in need rebuild their lives and reach their full potential. Founded in 1896, the faith-based nonprofit has programs in 46 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, and serves more than 1.5 million people a year.



L to R: Amani (veteran and future resident of JSJHV), Constance Trumbo-Haqq (daughter of Judge Sara J. Harper), Kathleen Atkins (Senior Vice President of Program Operations, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer, Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana), Rhonda (veteran and future resident of JSJHV)

Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana is dedicated to helping people achieve well-being by offering hope, restoring dignity, and transforming lives to ensure that communities thrive. For over 125 years, they have worked to uplift individuals, families, and communities, including veterans, homeless individuals and families' men and women returning home from incarceration, and those recovering and healing from addiction. VOA's work touches the mind, body, heart, and ultimately the spirit of those served, integrating deep compassion with highly effective programs and services.

To learn more about VOA's work, visit VOAHOIN | Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana | Volunteers of America

The Judge Sara J. Harper Village is a brand-new jewel in Glenville, and it was my distinct pleasure to work with the VOA!



The beautifully finished, Judge Sara J. Harper Village front doors.



Family and dignitaries share cutting the ribbon to the Village

"Big Red One" Soldier Tape-Recorded Tet Offensive Rocket Attacks 55 Years Ago

By Louis H. Pumphrey

"The pictures of corpses in the garden of the American embassy cut through the haze of argument and counterargument, giving flat contradiction to the official optimism about the slow but steady progress of the war. Those who had long held doubts and reservations now felt their doubts confirmed." --- from a chapter in Frances FitzGerald's Pulitzer Prize winning book "Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam"

In the early morning hours of January 31, 1968, I was asleep on an air mattress on the floor of an office tent at the headquarters basecamp of the 1st Infantry Division ("The Big Red One") in Lai Khe (Lie-KAY) South Vietnam. A loud explosion woke me. Lying on my back, staring at the tent's "ceiling," I thought the sound must have been one of our outgoing howitzer shell as part of the nightly routine of artillery batteries' harassment and interdiction fire in an effort to keep the enemy from getting close to the basecamp's perimeter.

Seconds later I noticed a bright flash of white light out of the corner of my right eye, quickly followed by a loud rocket explosion..

"Oh, oh, this is it," I thought to myself, as I switched on my small reel-to-reel tape recorder. My plan was to leave the recorder on the tent floor to capture sounds of the attack as I sought safety in a nearby bunker. The plan worked perfectly.

January 31st is the 55th anniversary of the beginning of the Tet Offensive, a lengthy attack on military bases and cities in South Vietnam which, though not a military victory for the National Liberation Front, was an enormous psychological success. If any single event of the war had to be chosen as a turning point, the Tet Offensive would be it, in my opinion. Less than a month later, esteemed CBS reporter Walter Cronkite indicated he no longer supported the war, saying in a televised commentary that "it seems the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate."



Drafted into the army in 1966, I was a 25-year-old Specialist 4th Class (Spec 4) assigned to the 1st Infantry Division's Public Information Office at the division's headquarters basecamp about 20 miles north of Saigon. (Luckily, the army kept me in a job that mirrored my civilian experience as a reporter for newspapers in Geneva, Ashtabula and Painesville.)

Shortly after my arrival in South Vietnam in July, 1967, I bought a small tape recorder at a PX (Post Exchange). (I recorded what the Red Cross called "living letters," mailing comments on completed reels of tape home to my parents in Painesville to play on their tape recorder.)

On the evening of January 30th one of my fellow GIs said we were under a yellow alert, meaning there was a possibility of an enemy attack timed with the beginning of Tet--the lunar new year.

I was assigned CQ (Charge of Quarters) duty that night, which involved taking any messages that arrived by phone and to call in division activities that day to USARV (U.S. Army Vietnam) headquarters at Long Binh. The reports included such information as enemy body counts and number of bags of confiscated rice. Because of the yellow alert, a second CQ was assigned, Spec 4 Gary Mahre, a native of the Minneapolis area.

Just before retiring that evening, I set up the tape recorder within easy reach, on the tent floor, thinking that it would be pretty cool to record the attack if there was one. Immediately after the rocket attack began, I switched on the recorder, leaving it on the tent floor, and dashed into a nearby bunker.

By dawn the shelling had subsided and I and about eight other GIs climbed out of our bunker, but we could hear explosions in the village of Ben Cat, not far from Lai Khe.

I rewound the tape and played it for fellow GIs who were intrigued by the sounds of the exploding rockers, one explosion being especially close, sounding like our office tent was about to take a direct hit. I had to play the recording over and over at the behest of fellow soldiers captivated by the sounds.

A week or so later an opportunity arose to record another rocket attack, this time while on guard duty outside a bunker. Sharing responsibilities that night was Spec 4 Randy Woods, of California. At dusk, the officer of the day, Captain Coffey, stopped by our post to brief us, saying an attack was expected that night. In the fading evening light, I held the battery-operated tape recorder behind my back with my left hand and cupped the small microphone in my right hand, to capture the officer's briefing without him knowing it. If he had spotted the microphone, Captain

Coffey likely would have asked me to turn off the recorder.

Randy and I took turns standing guard in two-hour shifts, sleeping on a cot in a nearby bunker when off duty. Fortunately I was standing guard when a rocket attack began. I quickly turned on my tape recorder, which was resting on a sandbag, and scampered into the bunker.

That was my last recording of a rocket attack. Weeks later, when Saigon was relatively safe, I moved to the city where I assumed duties as editor of the First Infantry Division newspaper, staying in a room in a military hotel. A Vietnamese print shop, the Kim Lai An Quan Printing Company, produced the newspaper. (I had brought the tape recorder with me to Saigon, keeping it in my hotel room, to make more "living letters" for my parents.)

Each week I or my commanding officer, Lt. Bill Sonnett, of Ada, Ohio, had to take page proofs to the head of the division's Public Information Office, Major Phillips, for him to review before publication to make sure there was no sensitive information in stories that might somehow find its way into the hands of our adversaries.

Such an exercise involved being driven by Jeep from Saigon to the DiAn (ZEE-ahn) basecamp, then flying to the Lai Khe basecamp via a Huey helicopter, with an overnight stay in Lai Khe on any available bunk bed, returning to Saigon the next morning.

On one occasion a few buddies at the Lai Khe PIO who also survived the Tet Offensive, told me they were expecting a big attack that evening.

I said, "Oh, shoot (or words to that effect). I left the tape recorder in Saigon."

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Photographer Gifts Veterans With Professional Head Shots On Their Special Day

By Jerri Donohue

On Veterans Day, one vet after another arrived in Hartville Marketplace sporting a cap announcing his military branch, ship, or VFW post. Some caps identified the wearers as Vietnam veterans.

"I think these hats are cool," said professional photographer

Andrew Eicher, who usually discourages clients from wearing hats when they sit for a headshot, a photograph of the subject's head and shoulders. This was a special occasion, however. Eicher was offering free headshots to veterans as a "thank you" for their service.

Eicher holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Photo Illustration from Kent State University and he can do all types of photography, but he

especially enjoys taking headshots. He credits New York photographer Peter Hurley with mentoring him, and he joined Hurley's Headshot Crew.

In July 2020, Eicher participated in the 10,000 Headshots initiative, in which 200 professional photographers provided photos for anyone who lost their job during the pandemic. According to the social media platform LinkedIn, potential employers are nine times more likely to request connection with job seekers

whose profiles include a professionally taken headshot.

"I always tell people that headshots are your first impression," Eicher said. "Because somebody is probably going to look you up online. They're going to see that picture on

transition to civilian life. After making arrangements with the Hartville Marketplace, he set up his equipment in its lobby early on the morning of November 11. Aaron Sattler, a realtor and former Marine, treated veterans who participated to lunch onsite.

Some vets registered after reading about Eicher's project in local newspapers. Fox News 8 also covered the story, prompting others to come as walk-ins. Eicher was glad to see all of them.

He took multiple digital photos of each individual who then looked over the results on Eicher's laptop computer and chose a favorite. Eicher sent that shot to the veteran's cell-phone or email address.

Each photo gift ordinarily would have cost \$335 at Eicher's Hartville studio. The 30 participants fell into two groups: retirees and vets still in the workforce. A dentist, a cybersecurity expert and others wanted a good headshot to use in

promoting their careers or businesses. Many older veterans wanted the picture for their families. Retired Army Lt. Col. Gregory Just (1970-1996), for example, signed up because of his daughter's urging.

Eicher helped the vets relax before the camera, placing them in various poses and making comments to elicit smiles.

"I don't do mug shots; I do headshots," Eicher said! There's a

switch that flips when they're not thinking about what their face looks like."

He advises anyone sitting for a headshot to wear plain colors like black, white or gray. Women should skip dangly earrings, large necklaces and heavy makeup.

"You can always add a little makeup, but it's hard to take it off," Eicher said. "Less is basically more in a headshot."

Air Force veterans Deborah Evans (1986-1994) and David Evans (1980-2000) operate a toy store on the second level of the Marketplace.

"She's from the Pacific Northwest," David Evans said. "I'm from Ohio and we met in Maryland at Andrews Air Force Base."

After leaving the Air Force, Deborah Evans taught school and David Evans became a project manager. The couple plans to share their pictures with their children.

"We like to enjoy Veterans Day and when somebody provides something, we appreciate it and take advantage of it," Deborah Evans said.

Eicher acknowledged that it wasn't easy to transport and set up his photo equipment at the Hartville Marketplace.

"And I have more control in my studio," he said. "But this is a landmark. I would love to do this every year!"

By Nancy Peacock,
Book Editor

Edward Horvath, M.D. was medical director at General Electric Lighting world headquarters in Cleveland when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center on 9/11. Two years later, corporate downsizing left him out of work, but the 57-year-old physician had an epiphany.

"I would rejoin the military as a physician," he wrote in his newly released memoir *Good Medicine, Hard Times: Memoir of a Combat Physician in Iraq* (Ohio State University Press, 2022) Back in the 1970s, Horvath had done a two-year stint in the Navy as a military medical officer.

"The Vietnam War was over at the time," he said. "I missed that and in a perverse way, I felt like I had missed my war. I should have been there. But because of circumstances surrounding my training as a physician, it didn't happen."

Following the terrorist attack, Horvath encouraged his grown sons to join the Navy. But when he tried to re-enlist, he was disqualified due to a past spinal surgery. The Army had no such qualms, however.

"On April 19, 2004, I raised my right hand to take the oath of office for the second time in my life," he wrote. "I was joining the US Army's 256th Combat Support Hospital."

Not too surprisingly, Horvath's wife Joy was less than thrilled. But as the daughter of a career Air Force officer who grew up all over the world, she understood a military lifestyle.

"When I told her I was going to take care of the neighbor's kids, the kids that grew up with my own children, she relented," he said. "I hoped I would be there for someone else's kid and as a trade-off, there would always be a physician who would take care of my kids. I felt I had to do it and play my part."

Playing his part turned into three deployments in Iraq. On arrival, his first assignment was to be Saddam Hussein's physician.

"He was on trial in Bagdad at the time," Horvath said. "And there were probably 10 million people in Iraq who wanted him dead yesterday. The possibility of a car bomb being driven into the courthouse and killing him and his physician was very real."

Fortunately, the Army changed his orders and sent him to be the medical director of Camp Bucca, which included a prison with 12,000 detainees. He

Good Medicine, Hard Times, and Life-Changing Insights

began journaling his perceptions and sent them home as a blog.

"I never intended to write a memoir," he said. "I wrote at least two thirds of it while I was there in Iraq and in the war. Most memoirs are, by definition, retrospective. You're looking back on something. I was writing it when it was happening."

The book deftly captures the immediacy of Horvath's experience. He describes the primitive living conditions in detail, such as the night he spent in an old jail cell at the infamous prison Abu Ghraib. He heard the cell door lock behind him, was handed a key and told not to sleep at the cell's entrance in case any terrorists attacked during the night. As darkness fell, he lay on a cot in a twelve-by-eighteen cell and stared through the prison bars.

"I tried not to dwell on the misery and suffering these walls had witnessed but then noticed a large hook embedded in the ceiling," he wrote. "How it had been used left little to the imagination. I spent a restless night."

Not all Horvath's experiences were troubling. In addition to being the chief physician of the hospital at Camp Bucca, he initially saw patients in the Troop Medical Clinic. He treated military personnel, contractors, Iraqi corrections officers and police cadets for every condition from colds, injuries, appendicitis, asthma, and depression.

After one soldier's attempted suicide by ingesting Sterno, Horvath was concerned when another teenage soldier reported to the clinic and confessed he had swallowed something awful. As it turned out, the young soldier's buddy bet him \$50 that he wouldn't drink an entire bottle of Tabasco sauce in the mess hall. Although he had won the bet, the soldier's throat and stomach were still burning and he was afraid he was going to die.

"I gave him milk of magnesia and an acid blocker and asked if he's ever heard the Johnny Cash song 'The Ring of Fire,'" Horvath said. "He hadn't but I told him he'd experience it firsthand in the latrine later that day."

Horvath's personal mission to take care of the neighbors' kids eventually came true. A young soldier named Chris from Lakewood, a suburb near Horvath's home in Bay Village, sustained a ruptured spleen after jumping out of a Black Hawk helicopter. Horvath's quick reaction saved his life. Several months later, an airline employee at the Cleveland airport told Horvath about her son being saved by an Army doctor after he fell out of a helicopter.

"I quickly realized this woman was the mother of the injured soldier I'd cared for that day in Iraq," he wrote.

When Horvath asked how "Chris" was doing, the woman looked at him in astonishment, then embraced him and started crying.

"You saved my son's life!" she explained. "My little boy came home to me because of you."

The real test of Horvath's medical quest came back in Iraq in 2008 when the

Continued on page 24



Andrew Eicher photographed his grandfather, Air Force veteran Ronald Eicher, his father, Army veteran Bryan Eicher, and 28 other vets on November 11 in the Hartville Marketplace. Andrew Eicher was born in the Army hospital at Fort Hood Texas when his father was stationed there. (l-r) Ronald Eicher, Bryan Eicher, Andrew Eicher



Edward Horvath, M.D., in Paris

Good Medicine, Hard Times...
Continued from page 23

wounded arriving for treatment included two enemy prisoners. Through an interpreter, one of the prisoners said he wanted to kill Horvath. The prisoner was treated by another medical officer and was taken away.

A few days later, that same prisoner was returned – this time with his hood and clothing stained in blood. One of the military police explained that the prisoner had been turned over to the Iraqi police and they tortured him. The MPs rescued him and brought him back for treatment. Horvath began to peel off the bloody hood covering his face.

“As the hood slowly came off, instead of staring at what I imagined evil incarnate would look like, I found myself gazing at a battered youngster, a teenager,” Horvath wrote. “As I stared at the face of my enemy, he looked back at me with a boyish smile. My God, I thought, I can’t hate you. You’re just a kid, someone’s child.”

Horvath said his fatherly sense kicked in and he put his hand on the young man’s face. “I’m an American Army doctor,” he told him. “I will take care of you.” The young man began to cry, Horvath said.

“He took my hand and wiped his tears away,” he said. “And that changed everything for me. I lost the capacity to hate and I transferred it into forgiveness.”

After sharing his war experiences with medical colleagues over the course of the last 14 years, Horvath turned his writings into a memoir that was published in July. He will be the featured speaker at the monthly veterans’ group at 2 p.m. on January 23, 2023 at St. Mary of the Woods, 35755 Detroit Road in Avon, 44011. The public is invited to attend. RSVP by 1/20/23 to Shannon Shupp at 440-937-2735 or 71-market@atriumlivingcenters.com.

Jon Reiss, Executive Director, Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission

by JC Sullivan

After difficulty pinning down this busy man, DD214 Chronicle finally caught up with Reiss in the studio of WHK Radio, 1420am.

A U.S. Army veteran, Jon began his military service at 17 by joining the U.S. Army Reserves while still a junior in High School. After 4 years of college and Army Reserve Officer Training, Jon served many Signal Corps assignments, the most notable being as a Signal Corps Officer in Kuwait as OIC of communications for the Coalition Forces Land Component Command. He also served as Operations Officer for Task Force Thunderbird in Iraq. Since leaving active duty as a Captain, Reiss’ service to the Veteran community extends beyond his position at the VSC but is too expansive to mention here. Suffice it to say, he has served as co-chair for the Northeast Ohio Veterans Community Task Force.

His education includes: BBA in Information, a Masters Certificate in Nonprofit Management; a Masters of Public Administration and a Masters of Political Management from George Washington University.

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Support is available 24/7. Your access is confidential and free. The Veterans Crisis Line serves Veterans, service members, National Guard and Reserve members and those who support them.

For additional information see their monthly ad each month at www.dd214chronicle.com.

Sullivan is a U.S. Army veteran who served with the 2nd Armored Division in the U.S. and Europe.



The Samuel A. Felton, Jr. Valor Home of Lorain County Transitional Housing Program for homeless male veterans and Veteran Service Center for all local veterans and families. Contact: 440-387-4293. Facebook: Valor-Home-Lorain-County.



Veteran's Haven of Warren and Youngstown Counties goal is to promote housing stability, to male and female veterans and their families. Through transitional housing for male veterans, Transition-In-Place housing for veteran families and a Service center which is open to all veterans in the community. Contact: 330-409-9139. Facebook: Veteran's Haven.



Honor Home of Stark County Transitional housing facility for homeless single male veterans and women veterans with children. Support is provided via the Advisory Committee. Contact: 330-631-3075. Facebook: Honor Home.



The Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home of Summit County Transitional housing program for homeless male veterans. Contact: 330-773-7000. Facebook: Harry Donovan Jr. Valor Home of Summit County.



Freedom House of Portage County Transitional housing program for all single veterans. Contact: 330-673-0705. Facebook: Freedom House



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More information at Family & Community Services, Inc., <https://fcsserves.org/> or 330-676-3069

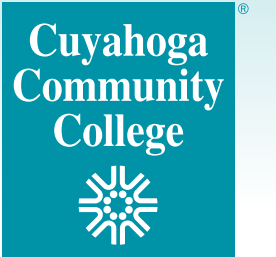


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