

THE COMBAT VETERAN

A Quarterly Newsletter by the Department of Maryland

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WHAT IS "THE COMBAT VETERAN"

"The Combat Veteran," published by the VFW Department of Maryland, stands as a vital conduit for the voices and experiences of those who have borne the weight of service. Within these pages, we honor the sacrifices, celebrate the camaraderie, and address the unique challenges faced by Maryland's combat veterans. From updates on legislative efforts impacting veterans' lives to personal narratives of resilience and healing, this publication serves as a dedicated platform for connection, information, and unwavering support within our community.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Maryland VFW: Climbing the Ranks, Serving Our Communities



Fellow Veterans of Foreign Wars of Maryland,
I am incredibly proud to share some exciting news and to express my sincere gratitude for your unwavering dedication. Through your hard work and commitment, the Department of Maryland has achieved a remarkable milestone: We continue to be ranked 11th in the nation across all VFW departments!

This achievement is a testament to the collective efforts of every member, every post, and every district within our great state. We have demonstrated a powerful commitment to our mission of serving veterans, their families, and our communities. This ascent in the national rankings reflects our strength, our unity, and our unwavering dedication to the ideals of the VFW.

However, we cannot rest on our laurels. While 11th is a significant accomplishment, we are within striking distance of achieving even greater success. We are currently just 860 members away from reaching 102% membership. This is a crucial goal, as it not only strengthens our voice on a national level but also provides us with the resources necessary to expand our programs and services.

I urge each and every one of you to join me in this final push. Let's reach out to eligible veterans in our communities and share the benefits of VFW membership. Let's show them the camaraderie, the support, and the purpose that comes with being part of our organization. Every new member strengthens our collective voice and allows us to better serve those who have served.

I am also incredibly pleased to report that our posts are excelling in their administrative duties. Your diligence in submitting all mandatory reports and documenting your community service hours is truly commendable. This commitment to transparency and accountability ensures that we are fulfilling our obligations and showcasing the positive impact we have on our communities.

The accurate reporting of community service hours is particularly important. It allows us to demonstrate the tangible difference we make in the lives of our fellow veterans, their families, and the wider community. From supporting local food banks to participating in patriotic events, your contributions are invaluable.

I want to personally thank each and every one of you for your dedication and hard work. Your commitment to the VFW's mission is the driving force behind our success. Let's continue to work together, to support one another, and to strive for even greater achievements.

Let's close the gap of 860 members and push Maryland into the top ten! Let's continue to serve our communities with pride and dedication.

Thank you for your service, and thank you for your continued commitment to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Sincerely,
Joseph Cicchillo
Department Commander
VFW Department of Maryland



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

Maryland



DEPARTMENT SR VICE COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Winter is still here. Some may have not been able come out to the posts. We have not forgot you. You are still part of the VFW. Check on the people that have not made it out. Believe me they appreciate it. Nominations, Elections and Maryland convention registration is around the corner. Check on dashboard and make you are getting credit for things you are turning in. These posts do so much hard work, to keep things moving forward. If you need help with dashboard reach out to the department or myself. I have been out in the state visiting Posts and attending functions. If you have an upcoming event or meeting please notify me, so I can attend. I would love to attend your event. The VFW team is here to help you if you need help. How can I help you, to help me?

Bruce R. Edwards Jr.
State SR. Vice Commander
srvice@vfwmd.org
443-206-1588

DEPARTMENT JR VICE COMMANDER'S MESSAGE



Dear Comrades and Friends,

As we march into the spring months, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you for your unwavering dedication to our community outreach, veteran support, and camaraderie. Your efforts have made a significant impact on the lives of many, and it is truly inspiring to witness the strength and unity within our organization.

Our recent initiatives have brought us closer to our community and have provided much needed support to our veterans. From organizing food drives and fundraising events to offering assistance, your commitment to service has been nothing short of remarkable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our members for their tireless efforts. Your contributions, whether big or small, have not gone unnoticed, and they are deeply appreciated. Together, we are making a difference and upholding the values that the Veterans of Foreign Wars Organization stands for.

As we look ahead, let us continue to work together with the same spirit of camaraderie and dedication. There are many more opportunities to serve and support our community, and I am confident that we will rise to the occasion, as we always have.

Thank you once again for your incredible support and for being a part of this wonderful organization. Let us continue to strive for excellence and make a positive impact in the lives of our veterans and community.

Yours in Comradeship,
Todd Walter
Wally5953@outlook.com
240 925-0201

Greetings from your Department Judge Advocate

Comrades,

Some of you may be aware that I worked for the National Cemetery Administration for a long time. One thing that a lot of us do not think about is our Burial Benefits.

Burial Benefits:

- Burial benefits available include a gravesite in any of the VA national cemeteries and State Veteran Cemeteries with available space, opening and closing of the grave, perpetual care,

Government headstone:

- For a headstone, grave marker, or wall marker, fill out the Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker (VA Form 40-1330).

Marker, or medallion:

- For a medallion to be placed on a privately purchased headstone or marker, fill out the Claim for Government Medallion for Placement in a Private Cemetery (VA Form 40-1330M).

Burial flag:

- If you go to your local Post Office with a copy of the Veterans DD 214, you can get a Burial flag free from the Post Office

Presidential Memorial Certificate:

- A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved paper certificate signed by the current president.

Burial benefits available for spouses and dependents buried in a national cemetery include burial with the Veteran, perpetual care, and the spouse or dependents name and date of birth and death will be inscribed on the Veteran's headstone, at no cost to the family. Eligible spouses and dependents may be buried, even if they predecease the Veteran.

The Veterans family should make funeral or cremation arrangements with a funeral provider or cremation office.

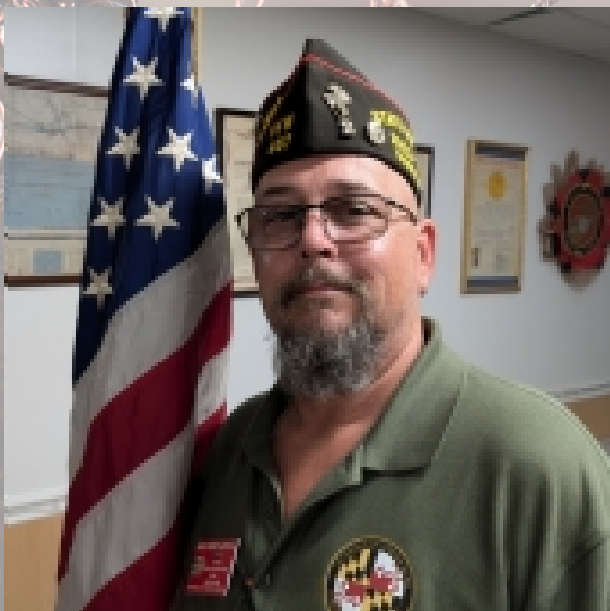
Any item or service obtained from a funeral home or cremation office will be at the family's expense

Please feel free to contact me.

Keep your Powder Dry,

Mike "Trike" Lecza

Department of MD JAG



DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN'S MESSAGE

As we are experiencing loss so abundantly in this season, this month's training was on Grief. A valuable resource and support group is www.griefshare.org, enter the ZIP code you are in to find the closest group. My church offers a virtual service if you desire to join us use ZIP code 20601.

John 14:27 KJV

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

/r

Dr. T. Daniel
In His love, learning to
Always Say A Prayer
(ASAP)

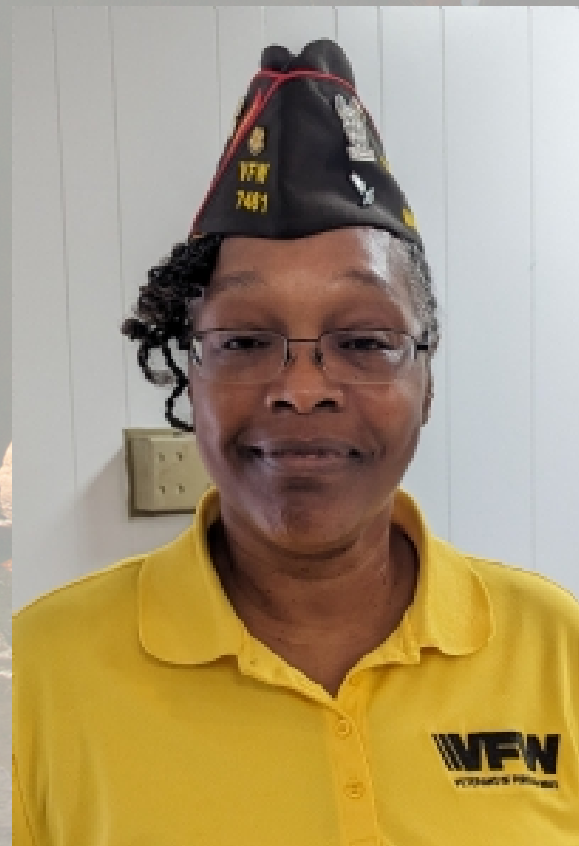
Grief Understanding and Assisting
Those Who Grieve Presentation

[Click Here](#)

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Protecting Maryland's Veterans: Key Priorities and Future Focus

By Service Officer Joseph Thornton, Department of Maryland

As your Service Officer, I'm deeply committed to navigating the evolving landscape of veterans' affairs. Three critical areas demand our immediate and continued attention: the future of VA benefits and healthcare, the persistent crisis of veteran homelessness, and the employment challenges faced by our disabled veterans.

1. The Evolving Future of VA Benefits and Healthcare:

The VA is undergoing a crucial modernization. We must stay informed about:

- **Expanding Telehealth:** This vital service increases accessibility, especially for rural veterans. We must champion its continued growth.
- **Streamlined Claims Processing:** Efforts to reduce wait times and improve transparency are ongoing. We'll work to ensure veterans are kept informed.
- **Prioritizing Mental Health:** Increased focus on PTSD and related conditions is essential. We must advocate for comprehensive mental health services.
- **Presumptive Conditions:** The VA's expanding list of service-related illnesses is crucial. We'll help veterans navigate these changes.

2. Addressing the Urgent Plight of Veteran Homelessness:

Veteran homelessness remains a national concern. We must:

- Recognize the complex factors contributing to this crisis, including PTSD and economic hardship.
- Strengthen collaborative efforts between the VA, local governments, and community organizations.
- Focus on preventative measures: affordable housing, job training, and mental health support.
- Increase awareness and utilization of programs like HUD-VASH.

3. Tackling Employment Concerns for Disabled Veterans:

- Disabled veterans deserve access to fulfilling careers. We must:
- Educate employers about the valuable skills veterans possess.
- Support job training and placement programs tailored to their needs.
- Ensure enforcement of the ADA and related legislation.
- Promote the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) programs.



Our Unwavering Commitment:

We are dedicated to ensuring Maryland's veterans receive the support they have earned. Stay informed, stay engaged, and please, do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. Your service is deeply valued.

BROTHERS AFTER WAR



The long-awaited release comes seven months after Director Jake Rademacher addressed VFW convention delegates

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – From Executive Producer Gary Sinise and Director Jake Rademacher, “Brothers After War” combines footage from Rademacher’s time embedded with elite soldiers and Marines during the height of the Iraq War with present-day reunions, capturing the resilience and humanity of those who serve. Through moments of humor, vulnerability and reflection, the film speaks to audiences in the unique language of veterans to shed light on their struggles — PTSD, depression, suicide, loneliness, and the search for meaning — while inspiring dialogue, connection and hope for military families, veterans and supporters alike.

Rademacher addressed delegates to the 125th VFW National Convention last August, providing insight into the need for the film and how he would go about achieving its production. He went on to share the “Brothers After War” trailer which received rousing applause by the nearly 3,000 VFW and Auxiliary members in attendance.

Following his appearance at the VFW National Convention, Rademacher worked with several VFW Department commanders to ensure the film is brought to their communities on its opening weekend. For those who’ve seen its advanced screening, the impact is lasting. One VFW member cited the film saved his life.

“Brothers After War” invites audiences on a raw and moving journey as veterans explore themes of loss, identity and hope as they transition from the battlefield to civilian life.

“The battle doesn’t end when they leave the war. ‘Brothers After War’ is an insider’s look at the extraordinary journeys veterans undertake to heal and move forward,” said Director Jake Rademacher, a military family member himself. “The production was an intimate opportunity to witness veterans’ sacrifices, unseen battles and post traumatic growth. With ‘Brothers After War,’ we want to have Americans see our veterans as they really are and walk beside them on their journey home.”

Executive Producer Gary Sinise added, “This film is a beautiful portrayal of the journey from warfighter to veteran. It’s important that we do all we can to ensure the public does not forget about the men and women who have served and the families who supported them. This film is a tribute to their sacrifices, their resilience and their character — and that is why I and the Gary Sinise Foundation supported the creation of this important film.”

“Brothers After War” will receive a full theatrical run from Regal Cinemas on 100 screens beginning Feb. 28, 2025, with additional openings at major chains across the country.

“I had the privilege of seeing the film and it does exactly what the title says, it shows the effects of combat on warriors after they return, and just as importantly the effects on the family which are often overlooked. It gives permission to those watching to realize and engage their own emotions,” said Past VFW National Commander (2020 – 2021) and Executive Director of the VFW Foundation Hal Roesch. VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt, an infantry platoon leader during the Vietnam War shared this anecdote after viewing the film: “Seeing some of my men from our unit some 40 plus years later at a reunion was surreal. It was like zero time had passed though it was years later our physical appearances had changed yet we remained the 20-somethings that I left in the jungle. The last time we were together was 1968, it was now 2013. I resisted going to other reunions for fear of recalling the hell we endured and the nightmare that was the Vietnam War. In a town hall with Joe Galloway of the Battle of Ia Drang Valley, from the movie ‘We Were Soldiers Once and Young,’ someone asked when he was in Vietnam and his answer shocked me because I thought I was the only one who answered, ‘when was I in Vietnam? It was last night.’

“I have learned to deal with those memories but it was not until I connected with battle buddies of the VFW and the VA that I really began to heal. I continue to heal thanks to the camaraderie of the Veterans of Foreign Wars because conflict, branch of service, MOS, or gender, we are permanently impacted by what we saw, by what we did, by what we heard, by what we smelled, by the inhumanity that is war.”

“Brothers After War” will be released in Nashville, New York City, Los Angeles, San Diego, Washington, D.C., Chicago, San Antonio, Denver, Colorado Springs, Albuquerque, Atlanta, Seattle, Columbia, Norfolk, and many others. For more information please visit <https://brothersafterwar.com>.

Staying Safe in the Digital Age: A Message from Your VFW Department of Maryland IT Director



Hello fellow Veterans and valued members of the VFW Department of Maryland, In today's increasingly digital world, it's more important than ever to be vigilant about our online security. As your IT Director, Patrick Pierson, I want to address critical areas that can significantly impact your safety and well-being: scams and computer maintenance.

Beware of Scams: The VFW Will Never Ask for Gift Cards

Unfortunately, scammers are becoming more sophisticated, and they often target vulnerable populations, including veterans. One of the most prevalent scams involves requests for gift cards. It's crucial to understand this: the VFW Department of Maryland, or any legitimate VFW organization, will NEVER ask you to send gift cards for any reason.

These scammers may impersonate VFW officials, claiming you need to pay for dues, donations, or even assist a fellow veteran in need. They might contact you via email, phone, or even social media. They may use convincing language and even provide seemingly legitimate information to gain your trust. However, their ultimate goal is to steal your money.

Here's how to protect yourself:

- Be skeptical: If you receive a request for gift cards from anyone claiming to be with the VFW, treat it with extreme suspicion.
- Verify independently: If you're unsure about the legitimacy of a request, contact your local VFW Post or the VFW Department of Maryland directly using contact information you find through official channels, not information provided by the suspicious contact.
- Never share personal information: Do not provide sensitive information like bank account details, credit card numbers, or social security numbers to anyone you don't fully trust.
- Do not respond: If you suspect a scam, do not engage with the sender. Simply block the contact and report the incident to the appropriate authorities.
- Spread the word: Share this information with your fellow veterans and family members to help prevent others from falling victim to these scams.

Maintain Your Computer's Security: Updates and Antivirus

- In addition to being wary of scams, it's essential to maintain the security of your personal computers and devices.
- This involves two key components: keeping your software updated and using reputable antivirus software.

Vendor Updates:

- Software vendors, like Microsoft, Apple, and others, regularly release updates to patch security vulnerabilities and improve performance. These updates are crucial for protecting your system from malware and hackers.
- Ensure that your operating system and applications are set to automatically download and install updates. This will help ensure that you always have the latest security patches.
- Regularly check for updates manually, especially if you've disabled automatic updates.

Antivirus Definitions:

- Antivirus software is your first line of defense against viruses, malware, and other online threats.
- It's essential to keep your antivirus definitions up to date. These definitions contain information about the latest threats, allowing your software to detect and remove them.
- Most antivirus programs automatically update their definitions, but it's always a good idea to check for updates manually.
- Make sure you are using well known and reputable antivirus software. Free software is not always the best option.

By staying vigilant about scams and maintaining your computer's security, you can significantly reduce your risk of becoming a victim of cybercrime.

Your safety is our priority. If you have any questions or concerns regarding IT security, please do not hesitate to reach out to the VFW Department of Maryland.

Thank you for your service and for your continued dedication to the VFW.

Sincerely,
Patrick Pierson
IT Director