

The Bulletin

Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans

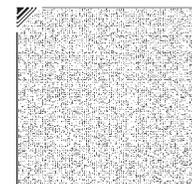


Summer 2021

OPERATION BASH 2021



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Cover Photo:

In this issue of **The Bulletin**, blinded veteran Zach Tidwell details the challenges and joys of Operation BASH 2021, a week of exhilarating adaptive sports activities he shared earlier this summer with fellow BVA members at Crested Butte, Colorado's Adaptive Sports Center. Pictured at right on Raft Day giving a "paddle high five," left to right: Scott Scieszinski, Monaca Gilmore, and Brian Harris. Also pictured following an already long Bike Day, Brian, left, and Jason LeFevers take on ASC's indoor climbing wall.

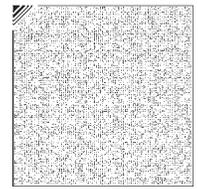
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EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor: STUART NELSON
Associate Editor: KYLIE FITZGERALD
Staff Writers: DONALD OVERTON,
BRIGITTE JONES
Design, Pre-Press, and Printing:
KAREN SMITH DESIGN, THE
VOMELA COMPANIES

1101 KING STREET, SUITE 300
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314
TELEPHONE: 800-669-7079
202-371-8880
FAX: 202-371-8258
WEBSITE: <https://bva.org>
E-MAIL: bva@bva.org

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Expressions of Thanks, Hope for the Future

by Joe McNeil

I wish to thank Dr. Tom Zampieri for his unwavering dedication and the years of educational leadership

that he has provided to us.

The vital roles he has taken on have been instrumental in my own development. I see that my role now as National President is to ensure that we continue making educated decisions to keep our BVA focused and moving in the right direction.

I will be reaching out to the membership to ask you to serve on committees and make use of the resources available to us. It's time we put the rubber to the road and benefit from the great talent we have right here within the organization.

I once heard an inspiring quote: "In order to lead, you must learn to lead from behind." I believe that it's time to combine a little bit of the old school with the new wave—in other words, our leaders need to start training their replacements.

We have a proud tradition that dates back 76 years. If we are going to be around an additional 76, we need to embrace the essence of our future. Everyone needs to reach out to prospective members. Our Blind Rehabilitation Center Alumni Associations need to ensure that their members are also BVA members.

BVA is a grassroots organization that has always grown from the bottom up and not from the top down. Regional groups can only

survive when they are actively recruiting and actively letting the public know they exist.

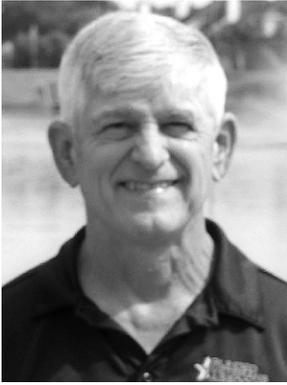
It is time for us, the membership, to begin helping BVA grow and prosper because, at the end of the day, we ourselves are BVA. If you have ideas, please share them. If you have questions, ask them. If you want to serve, step up.

We need to wear our title of "veteran" proudly but even more proudly our title of "blinded veteran," letting the world know who we are and that we are doing things. One way to accomplish this is to wear anything we own that has "Blinded Veterans Association" inscribed, especially when we attend civic organization meetings, local meetings of other Veterans Service Organizations, or events where the news media may be present.

The more we are seen, the more awareness and interest we create. When other blinded veterans or their family members see us in public as ambassadors for what we can do, the old myth that blind people cannot do anything is immediately discounted.

Although one person can surely make a difference, one person cannot do everything. We need to roll up our sleeves and help our leaders, whether that be in the capacity of a chapter or a regional group or on the national level. What we put into this effort is what we will get out of it. I'll say again and again that it's not what BVA can do for you but what you can do for BVA that really counts.

Thank you for your support. I hope I can live up to the faith and trust you have placed in me.



Challenges and Strategies Amid Turbulent Times

by Dr. Tom Zampieri

The 76th National Convention, the first of its kind for BVA as a full-fledged virtual event, is now history!

I hope that this issue of **The Bulletin** finds each of our BVA members well. I reflect on the difficult decision in March to postpone the convention in St. Louis and, in view of current circumstances, I am grateful that our Board of Directors made that decision.

I express additional thanks to the Board and the Executive Director, along with our BVA staff, who worked together diligently to provide a wide variety of Zoom educational sessions. Despite some challenges and uncertainties, we also successfully completed two virtual BVA business sessions that included voting.

The members have elected our new national officers and approved some bylaw changes so they will serve one two-year term. Another bylaw amendment will substantially restructure our District Directors in 2022 from six to four. The Board will work on a realignment of the geographic regions of these four District Director positions. This amendment responds to the major challenges we have with our declining membership and small regional groups that have difficulty functioning and meeting the requirements to remain in good standing.

Micheal Hudson, Director of the Museum of the American Printing House for the Blind and a scholar of the life of Father Thomas Carroll, was our virtual Father Carroll Luncheon speaker. He provided us with words of counsel that he believed Father Carroll

would give us at this time in history. He told us that the time is right for BVA to muster its “second wind” as we evaluate new strategies that will help us meet the current challenges that face many social and community associations with rich traditions—such as ours.

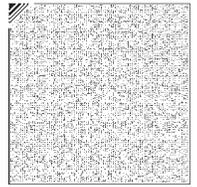
As our members review our current annual report, they will note that we face the loss of our older members at a rather alarming rate. At our Opening Business Session, we sadly reported the passing of 517 BVA members during Fiscal Year 2021. Additionally, we now have fewer than 1,000 members under age 65. BVA must attract another generation and perhaps another classification of veterans in order to sustain it in the future.

To continue helping our fellow veterans, I strongly encourage the approval of a Low Vision membership category through a bylaw amendment at our next opportunity.

As the outgoing BVA National President, I extend special thanks to our membership as a whole and to the Regional Group Committee, the Guide Dog Committee, and the Women Veterans Group, all of which have worked hard to complement other BVA services.

I expect the Board and BVA staff to continue to work successfully on reducing the deficits during this fiscal year and to provide BVA members with a balanced budget at the 77th National Convention in Washington, DC.

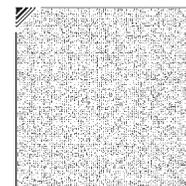
Serving as BVA National President since January 2019 has been an honor. I hope that we can indeed secure this needed second wind that Mike so wisely suggested. Doing so can mean a promising future for the Blinded Veterans Association.





Legislative Update

by Erin McConnell



Strength in Numbers

In case you missed it, the BVA Government Relations Team made a presentation to the BVA membership during the 76th National Convention on the importance of grassroots advocacy. The team was joined by Chazz Clevinger, Chief Executive Officer of OneClick Politics, the advocacy software BVA utilizes to carry out advocacy campaigns.

During this informational session, members learned about grassroots advocacy, its importance to organizations like BVA, and how OneClick politics assists in these efforts. For members not able to attend, a synopsis of the session is located below.

Grassroots advocacy is a form of citizen-based activism to raise public awareness on specific issues. It helps influence regulations and public policy at all levels of government, educates citizens to transform knowledge into action, and personalizes issues for legislators. Personalizing an issue by putting a face and a personal story behind it can really drive home its importance to legislators at all levels of government.

In the case of national legislation, personalization of issues can be achieved through face-to-face meetings on Capitol Hill or in district offices, through email or phone calls, or via social media posts.

While the Government Relations Team engages in direct advocacy efforts year-round on Capitol Hill, there are still many ways that your participation at the grassroots level can

impact BVA's success. First, legislators make decisions on important pieces of legislation that can positively or negatively impact your life every day. By getting involved in advocacy, you're ensuring that your voice will be heard by your representatives.

Additionally, while professional lobbyists and Government Relations Teams continually develop relationships within Congressional offices, constituents can often make other personal connections to the office or staff. These personal connections can lead to lasting relationships that help foster new Congressional champions for our organization.

Hearing personal stories from constituents on the importance of an issue carries more weight with representatives. While lobbyists can relay stories to the Representative or Senator, there is nothing more powerful than first-hand stories.

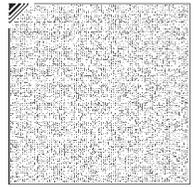
To give an example of effective grassroots advocacy campaigns, we took a look at BVA's July 4 campaign from 2020. In the summer of 2020, three of BVA's top legislative priorities, the Specially Adapted Housing grant legislation, the AbilityOne contract legislation, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) website accessibility legislation were stuck in the House of Representatives. Our Government Relations Team crafted targeted messaging to House leaders and Veterans Affairs Committee leaders, demanding passage of these three bills. This messaging was built into a OneClick Politics campaign and sent out to our membership to act upon.

While this campaign was active, our members sent nearly 600 emails to Representatives from 42 states and Puerto Rico. Shortly thereafter, all three bills were passed. Your participation in this advocacy campaign played a large role in these legislative victories!

OneClick Politics is the software that BVA utilizes to carry out these advocacy campaigns. This software is useful for many reasons. First, OneClick Politics allows BVA's Government Relations Team to complete the work ahead of time for our members. All messaging, advocacy targeting, and social media tags can be built into a campaign so that our members do not have to spend their own time conducting this research. Second, once a campaign is built, it can be sent

out to BVA's entire network over email, social media, and our website. This allows our members to share the campaign within their own personal networks to encourage even greater participation. The greater the participation a campaign receives, the greater impact the messaging will enjoy. We have the greatest strength in numbers!

Recently, the Government Relations Team has utilized OneClick Politics to advocate for the passage of several key pieces of legislation, including a renewable auto-grant, loans for vision research projects, and concurrent receipt. Keep an eye out for any emails in the future regarding OneClick campaigns. Please consider taking the time to participate and share!



A Universal Communication

by Warner L. Murray

Our 76th convention, what a start.
A virtual platform, of many parts.

BVA headquarters welcomed this trend.
Universal communication, tap-tap you're in.

Our Executive Director reassured the creed.
no blinded veteran ever left in need.

Directors, coordinators, executives, staff.
All are very astute, in their respective craft.

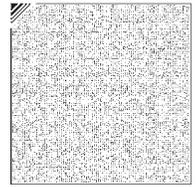
The BVA membership, march with pride.
To self-reliance, with a confident stride.

This association has much more to do.
Cherish and honor red, white, and blue.



Executive Director's Message

by Donald D. Overton, Jr.



Despite the hectic days and weeks that we experienced this summer as a staff in preparing for BVA's first ever virtual National Convention,

which was our 76th annual gathering since 1946, the educational sessions and meetings were productive, enjoyable, and at times uplifting for us at BVA National Headquarters.

We hope that those who registered and participated in the convention had similar sentiments as the week closed out. We invite those who were not able to attend to view as many of the recorded Zoom sessions as possible on BVA's YouTube channel. We plan to have these recordings available for viewing indefinitely. Links to specific sessions will also be posted on **bva.org** and social media.

As rewarding as we found the virtual convention experience, we turn excitedly now to the planning for next year: an in-person 77th National Convention celebration at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill Hotel in our Nation's Capital August 22-26, 2022. We anticipate still heavy lifts and many logistical moving pieces in that planning process much like we experienced this year. Nevertheless, we look forward to rising to the challenge!

In the meantime, we must focus also on some additional important dates and events on the horizon. To make the events meaningful, we should approach them with our own personal challenges and perspectives in mind.

Because we live in a visual world made totally for people who can see, we who are totally without sight, or who are legally blind

with some remaining sight, deal every day with new uphill climbs. Once conquered, there are invariably others that are placed before us shortly thereafter.

In my own case, I face challenges and obstacles as I navigate not only crowded spaces indoors but also sidewalks, street crossings, and outdoor diners during my walk home from BVA National Headquarters each evening on the busy streets of Alexandria, Virginia.

At any point during that walk, I can rather easily run into an unexpected obstacle that would be obvious to a sighted person. It has happened before, and it will happen again. Sometimes it is not pleasant and, once in a while, it is even a bit dangerous.

One of the vitally important mobility tools for me, a key to my independence and a symbol of that advanced independence, is the long, slender object that can be pointed forward to detect a potential hazard and with which we are all now familiar.

Although the blind and visually impaired have used similar traveling aids throughout history, the White Cane as we know it today has only been around since 1921. Technology and better materials continue to make it more effective in determining steps, unlevel pavement, and obstacles.

National White Cane Safety Day, designated in 1964 to be commemorated every October 15, is an opportunity to educate the seeing public about this vitally important tool and the etiquette that can maximize its effectiveness for a blind person. We join hands with our sister organizations in promoting the best ways to assist the blind and visually impaired in all walks of life.

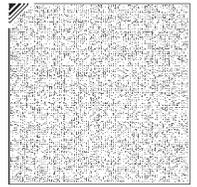


For Executive Director Don Overton, the sidewalks and crosswalks of Alexandria, Virginia are more like a previously set-up obstacle course complete with outdoor diners, bicyclists, joggers, honking and unlawful acts by motorists, and uneven pavement from start to finish.

Using the appropriate COVID-19 protocols, I hope that in the upcoming weeks we can utilize our BVA membership and our regional groups in creating opportunities to perhaps speak at schools, community centers, and at VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics. Hopefully, it will also be possible to set up display tables outside stores and inside shopping malls as so many of us have done in the past.

This year the approaching October 15 falls on a Friday. Obviously, White Cane Safety Day events do not have to occur

only on that day. Many of our regional groups have, in the past, arranged and scheduled them throughout the month of October. The rules this year may be somewhat different and the authorizations/invitations more difficult to secure where there are large gatherings, but your efforts will surely be rewarded.



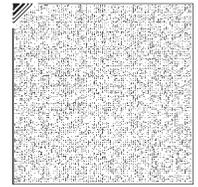
Turning to the next significant holiday following several military branch birthdays (see this issue's **Of Note** section), the Veterans Day National Committee of which BVA is a member chose to center the theme for this year's Veterans Day on the centennial commemoration of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Located at Arlington National Cemetery, the Tomb was originally dedicated by the Army on what was then known as Armistice Day, November 11, 1921, with the burial of an unknown service member from World War I.

Over the past century, additional unknowns have been buried at the Tomb and the site has become a people's memorial that inspires reflection on service, valor, sacrifice, and mourning.

We are yet to learn whether an in-person Veterans Day wreath-laying at the Tomb and Presidential address in the Cemetery's Memorial Amphitheater will actually happen. Last year's event was radically scaled down.

Regardless of the upcoming decision on that matter, I plan to reverence the day, just as I believe all BVA members will, in honoring the service and sacrifice of all of our nation's veterans—and, on this occasion, with those who have served in Afghanistan most particularly in mind.

Coast to Coast, Blinded Veterans Meet in First Virtual Convention



Blinded veterans, family members, a variety of guests from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and a host of sponsors from both the private and public sectors all participated in a memorable and historic BVA 76th National Convention.

The proceedings of the convention originated and were moderated from BVA National Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, but the convention site could best be described with the word “nationwide” or “everywhere the internet was accessible.”

Truly a convention like no other at a time like no other, the gathering of 240 total registered participants and friends from across the country in five different time zones featured 42 sessions, including two business sessions but not including daylong Board of Directors meetings held on August 12-13 and three Zoom training sessions held in June, July, and August to familiarize convention attendees with the meeting platform and the means by which they could use the various commands and functions to raise their hands, chat, unmute, and to join and leave meetings. A final review session kicked off the convention on August 16 with a session entitled “Getting Familiar with Zoom and Adaptive Technologies” moderated by Brian Harris, Kevin Jackson, and Paul Mimms.

Other highlights of the week included caregiving sessions presented by the BVA Auxiliary, VA Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS), VA Research and Development, the BVA Women Veterans Group, Operation Peer Support, the Government Relations Team and OneClick Politics Chief Executive Officer

Chazz Clevinger, adaptive sports groups, and a host of presentations by convention sponsors and organizations that have exhibited at BVA live conventions of the past.

Micheal Hudson, Museum Director at the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky, and now a scholar of the life of BVA’s first National Chaplain, offered the Father Carroll Virtual Luncheon address August 19. He used previous Father Carroll addresses and writings to BVA, especially the 1968 address during a particularly turbulent time in U.S. history. Drawing comparisons to the summer of 2021 and other recent events, Micheal spoke to what he believed Father Carroll would say to the BVA membership if he were here now.

Joe McNeil and Danny Wallace were elected National President and National Vice President, respectively, at Wednesday’s Opening Business Meeting on one unanimous vote cast by the National Secretary. Elizabeth Holmes was victorious in an election for

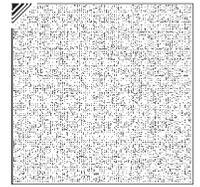


Women Veterans Group Committee Member and Mid-Atlantic Regional Group President Michaun Harrison during WVG panel presentation at virtual convention.

National Secretary while Tracy Ferro of Biloxi, Mississippi was elected to join the National Board as the new Treasurer (see first entry in **Around BVA**).

BVA members voted to pass three bylaw amendments while voting not to pass three additional amendments. The voting on the final proposed amendment was postponed until the 77th National Convention. For additional details about the amendments,

passed and failed, as well as voting, contact Administrative Director Brigitte Jones at **bjones@bva.org**.



Of the 240 registered convention participants, 161 were members registered to vote on their own behalf and/or as delegates. There were 18 registered as guests.

Sponsors Brighten 76th Gathering

The profiles of the 13 generous sponsors of the 76th National Convention will appear in this issue or subsequent issues of *The Bulletin*. BVA National Headquarters recognizes and sincerely thanks these organizations for their great support and good will toward our blinded and visually impaired veteran population.

Cerner Government Services

For more than 40 years, Cerner has worked at the intersection of health care and information technology to connect people and systems around the world. Cerner uses the latest technology to create solutions that let communities and people engage in their own health. Whether they are supporting the clinical, financial, or operational areas of a hospital or health system, Cerner's tools are designed to work for today and think for tomorrow.

Cerner supports its clients by surfacing data that enables them to make informed decisions for better management of operations, while arming their clinicians with the information they need to provide smarter care. Clients are empowered to know, manage, and engage with the people they serve, all to disrupt the industry and transform the way health care is delivered. Cerner's mission is to relentlessly

seek breakthrough innovation that will shape health care of tomorrow. Cerner believes that its services do not impact just health care—they impact the world. This is why Cerner believes, more than ever, that health care is too important to stay the same.

Cerner Government Services is leading the transformation of the electronic health record system across the Department of Defense, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. This transformation will provide one longitudinal, interoperable health record for all active-duty personnel, their families, and veterans. The revolutionary effort will enable these clients and community providers to access the right data, at the right place, at the right time to deliver better, more informed care.

“We are particularly honored to work alongside nonprofit organizations like the Blinded Veterans Association to ensure that

the needs of all end users, including veterans and DoD and VA employees, are incorporated into the electronic health record,” said Danielle Applegate, Cerner Director of Veteran and Military Family Engagement. “BVA represents the voice of the veteran, and we are very pleased to have the opportunity to work together.”

Even during these uncertain times, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, Cerner’s work has continued, and the company has achieved critical milestones to keep it on track. When the electronic health record deployments are complete, Cerner believes each service member, veteran, and family member beneficiary will be positioned for a lifetime of seamless care.

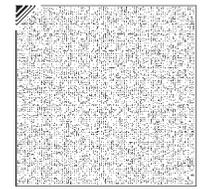
OrCam Technologies

OrCam’s mission is to harness the power of artificial vision by incorporating pioneering technology into wearable and handheld platforms, which improves the lives of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and have reading difficulties, by increasing their independence and confidence.

The original OrCam MyEye device was first introduced in 2015, and in 2018 the second generation MyEye was launched. The OrCam MyEye, a wearable multifunctional assistive technology, was recognized as a 2019 **TIME** Best Invention. The OrCam Read, a handheld reading device, reached the market in 2020 and won the CES 2021 Best of Innovation award. OrCam operates in 50 countries, and these assistive technology devices support 25 languages.

Both devices are dispensed by VA and veterans who have VA health care coverage and are low vision or legally blind may qualify to receive an OrCam device, fully

covered by VA. Please reach out to **veterans@orcaml.com** for more information.



Bookshare

A product of the nonprofit organization Benetech, Bookshare is an ebook library for persons with reading barriers, most notably blindness and low vision. It operates with the philosophy that reading should be for life and that vision loss should not be a barrier to that life.

Bookshare’s ebooks also make it easier for people with dyslexia, cerebral palsy, and other reading barriers to read and pursue their passions, whether that passion be entertainment, enlightenment of the intellect, advancing a career, or socializing with others. They can customize their experience to suit their learning style and find virtually any book they need for any purpose.

Bookshare offers unlimited reading with access to 1,047,109 titles, including **New York Times** bestsellers, fiction, nonfiction, literature, and upskilling books. The services are free for New York Public Library or Andrew Heiskell Library patrons and low cost for unlimited reading for non-patrons. They are also free for qualified U.S. students of any age.

Patrons of Bookshare read books in high quality audio, large print, and digital Braille. They read on computers, tablets, smartphones, and assistive technology devices. There is helpful support via email, phone, or training resources.

Bookshare’s service to its patrons with reading barriers is consistent with the mission of the organization that directs that service as a nonprofit tech company. Benetech focuses purely on developing software for

social good. More than two decades after its founding, the company has grown to include multiple program areas and initiatives that provide software to improve and, in many cases, even transform the lives of people across the world.

Benetech also holds strongly to the notion that access to information is a basic, universal human right despite the fact that 90 percent of books and published materials cannot be read by people with disabilities. Benetech's focus is on making information accessible so that everyone can learn, work, and pursue their dreams.

In addition to education, Benetech's priorities also include human rights, employment, and poverty alleviation. As a nonprofit tackling tough social issues, the funds to identify and develop new software solutions come from individuals, foundations, corporations, partner organizations, and agencies.

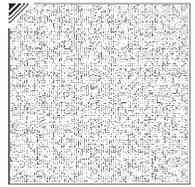
Florida Vision Technology

Florida Vision Technology was a proud sponsor of the 2021 Blinded Veterans Association Virtual National Convention. The presentation showcased the Envision Glasses in the following recording,

<https://youtu.be/0wwe2vjq6rE>.

Lesla Kretschmer, Founder and CEO of Florida Vision Technology, showcases dozens of assistive technology products throughout the United States, including the Envision Glasses. Kretschmer explains: "The technology theme is usually faster, smaller, and more powerful, and the Envision Glasses are right in line."

The Envision Glasses combine the powerful Envision App with the Smart Glasses, enabling an unprecedented experience of hands-free and unobtrusive experience of accessing the visual world. With features ranging from real-time text recognition to video calling, Envision Glasses opens the door for the future of wearable assistive technology. Furthermore, the best part is that it is lightweight and portable to take anywhere.



With all the new advances every year, Kretschmer and her team must stay current on assistive technology.

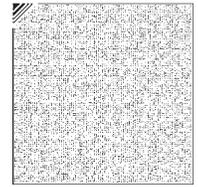
"My staff attends national conferences and trade shows throughout the year," she adds. "We also get to talk directly to the product manufacturers to tell them what veterans are asking for and what veterans need most."

Kretschmer also explains the availability, through Florida Vision Technology, of many solutions ranging from simple hand-held magnifiers to digital video magnifiers and wearables for magnification and audio feedback. She and her team are experts at matching the right assistive technology products to veterans' unique, individual needs.

"We are a great resource for veterans who want to compare several products at once to see what is best for them," she says. "Many veterans come to us not knowing what they need, but they walk out seeing what is possible again."

Operation BASH 2021 Unites Veterans

by Zach Tidwell



In mid-June, six members of the Blinded Veterans Association and past participants in BVA's Operation Peer Support initiative—Monaca Gilmore, Brian Harris, Jason LeFevers, Mike Murphy, Scott Scieszinski, and Zach Tidwell—joined together in Crested Butte, Colorado at the Adaptive Sports Center (ASC) for a week of exposure to adaptive sports opportunities.

The five-day program that ran June 21-25 was the 2021 version of Operation BASH (Blind Adaptive Sports Heroes) at ASC. Throughout the week, the members of the group were able to bond over family-style meals that they prepared together in ASC's lodging space in the mornings and evenings.

The age range of the veterans was 25-60. They arrived from all over the country, with some coming from nearly sea level to appreciate the wonderful, thin air at nearly 9,000 feet above sea level in the Rocky Mountains. The veterans' acuity levels varied from having some remaining peripheral vision to total blindness. Some in the group were experiencing additional disabilities.

Commonalities and differences aside, this unique group of veterans came together as a cohesive unit to accomplish their goals with each new challenge.

Each day, breakfast was on the agenda before departing for the day's activities, which consisted of top-rope rock climbing outdoors, whitewater rafting, two days of mountain biking (both tandem and independently), hiking, and indoor rock climbing. Although none of the veterans in the group were new to adaptive sports, each member was introduced



Water rafting, sun, and camaraderie make for a happy and successful blend for blinded veterans and ASC staff on Day 2 of Operation BASH. Left to right, staff and participants: Richard Paylor, Jason LeFevers, Zach Tidwell, Scott Scieszinski, Brian Harris, Monaca Gilmore, Mark Berens, Carrie Pressett with Mike Murphy, and Codi Wagner.

to a new sport or a new modality of a sport in which they had already participated.

On Day 1, the veterans made their way to Hartman Rocks just outside of Crested Butte to go outdoor rock climbing. Hartman Rocks is situated in the middle of an alpine desert. The gritty soil of the desert is a result of wind erosion of the very same granite rock faces the group climbed. It was a hot, windy day with nothing much to stop the wind other than a few hardy plants that had managed to cling to life in the area. Despite the adversity, the entire group made it up the rock face. Although the rock was mostly granite, a few

thin veins of quartz ran vertically through the face, serving as both a guide and a three-inch wide “ladder” to use on some of the routes.

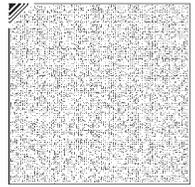
Climbing was an intimidating activity for members of the group who grew up in relatively low elevations. Many had never climbed outside previously. This made the experience even more meaningful as the group came together to summit the routes. Where one veteran or two may have found a sticking point that caused them to come off the wall, the next climber would communicate with them to see how that same spot might be passed. Progress was slowly made on each route of the wall, all independently aside from the adaptive sports professionals belaying the climbers.

Day 2 was spent on the river with the group separated into two rafts but still cruising the water together. While there were some choppy areas, the water was relatively low and slow, giving the veterans and the staff time to enjoy each other’s company and bond. It is not uncommon to hear that a favorite part of trips such as these is the bonding that occurs in the morning and evenings during the time spent in the homestyle common areas at ASC’s living quarters. Rafting was a perfect extension to the value of those mornings and evenings!

There was mention in the group that day about the difficult isolation of the past year, and the importance of leaning on your brothers and sisters rather than self-isolating. The group became closer that day, breaking down some of those walls that had shot up during the pandemic. It was a nice reminder that we are not alone when struggling with what is going on between our ears, and that it is both normal and okay to have those bad days. Equally important, however, is that we owe it to ourselves to reach out to

others during those times since one of those “others” to whom we reach out may well have experienced those same feelings and can perhaps offer help. We must keep in mind that help is out there but that the need for that help must be communicated.

Day 3 was the first day of mountain biking. The group was able to choose between riding stand-up or recumbent tandems. Two veterans opted to ride independently, following the commands of guides. Regardless of the equipment, these were no ordinary bikes but highly specialized pieces of equipment outfitted with reinforced frames and wide, knobby tires similar to those you might find on a “fat-tire” bike. The first half of the day was spent riding throughout the town, allowing the veterans and their pilots, or guides, to get acquainted with riding as a team and practicing basic skills. During the latter half of the riding session, the group rallied together and rode a gradual incline up and out



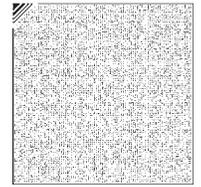
Mike Murphy, front, and Scott Scieszinski enjoy unique recumbent tandem biking experience during Day 4 of their challenging week at Crested Butte’s Adaptive Sports Center.

of town. As the stand-up tandems are better suited for climbing hills, they took the lead on the ride with recumbent tandems and solo riders following right behind. With the end of the scheduled programming window not far off, the veterans made their way back toward downtown Crested Butte with three of the riders taking a quick detour down a nearby single-track trail to appreciate the sounds and scents of a slow-moving river before joining everyone else back in town.

Day 4 proved to be the crux of the trip with Biking 2.0. Bikers were now able to put their newly honed skills to the test on a longer, more demanding ride out of town on a mix of gravel trails and asphalt roads. The vast majority of the outward leg of the ride was a steady climb as the travelers gained a few hundred feet in elevation over the course of five miles. Every rider made it! A couple of things made this day special: first, one of the veterans making it to the top as an independent recumbent rider; and second, two other veterans deciding to ride a tandem together, using their remaining vision and auditory cues from a sighted guide to complete the ride.

As the veterans were relaxing at the turnaround point, Crested Butte decided to add its own dose of excitement into the day, with dark, rolling clouds taking command of the sky over the mountain valley. As the thunder began to rumble and the rain began to pour, the veterans jammed a few snacks into their mouths before taking off down the mountain with one reportedly reaching 23 miles per hour on the descent back to town. As if the rain and wind were not enough, some hail began pelting the group about two-and-a-half miles from the Adaptive Sports Center's summer program building.

Nevertheless, the group pushed onward with everyone making it back soaked, safe, and still smiling.



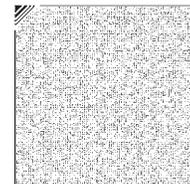
Having rushed headlong back to town, the veterans still had some extra time left in the day that was allotted for programming. They headed to the ASC's main building to do some indoor rock climbing on the state-of-the-art indoor wall. A hand-carved foam base surrounds a steel frame, all coated with concrete and creating a wall that feels like real rock, complete with natural handholds, cracks, and just a few small plastic handholds that are experienced on normal indoor walls.

Day 5, the final day of programming, was spent on more trails but the veterans were on foot this time, trekking through wildflower-covered fields and an aspen forest outside of town. They walked roughly two miles along the trails, stopping to eat a small lunch in a grass clearing on the distal side of the aspen grove before heading back down to their starting point. Again, the group made it back a little earlier than planned and was treated to another hour-and-a-half of indoor climbing upon return to the ASC's main facility.

All in all, the six participating BVA members were exposed to new opportunities and experiences. All made it home happy and safe the next day, June 26, having grown both as individuals and as a group.

Ask What We Can Do for BVA

by Tracy Ferro



At some point or another, each one of us has spoken to somebody about BVA. Often it is to answer questions about who we are, what we do, how much it costs to join, or what BVA will do for that individual. These are all good, fair, and honest questions. However, if we don't remember that there is more to it than that, we will shoot ourselves in the foot.

One of the overriding themes of BVA for me is the notion of volunteerism and enlisting one another's help.

It is entirely acceptable to look for volunteers to help with our mission and then ask them for help. No two of us are in exactly the same situations. For example, some of us still have some vision while others are totally blind. We also have differences in age, experience, interests, and aptitudes.

I am not suggesting that we ask our World War II veterans to be in charge of an Independence Day regional group barbecue—although certainly there could still be some of them out there who could and would do it. For such an event I would not ask them for anything but valuable wisdom.



Ingenuity, generosity, and a little persistence from the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group has resulted in a gift soon to be appreciated by dozens of blinded veterans at the Gulf Coast BRC in Biloxi.

needed. We have all been in the position of being told that we are going to lose our vision. Once having overcome that shock, it is our mission to let the newly blind know that it is acceptable and appropriate to sit back and let us row the boat while they learn how to go blind. At some point they will have to be mentors to the next persons who climb aboard, but for now we can do our part to be there for them.

What I am suggesting, however, is that we step up and encourage those who are capable to lend a hand with what they can do. That might be to encourage them to sign up for an Operation Peer Support trip or an activity to build their confidence so that they can then inspire others.

Volunteering as a representative of BVA to promote the organization and its various causes is something that is needed everywhere. Sometimes just lending an ear is what is most

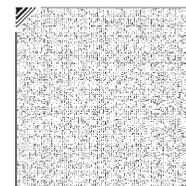
Although it may not be your thing, sometimes we need to step outside our comfort zones to help others. Can you volunteer your time at a VA Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC) or Vision Impairment Services in Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) clinic? How about going in and giving your Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinator a hand with mailings or talking to other veterans?

Meeting new folks and building friendships with those who are in the boat with you surely makes the rowing easier. Try speaking at a library or other Veterans Service Organization meeting, such as the local Veterans of Foreign Wars or American Legion. These are all things, easier for some than for others, that any of us can do to help grow the Blinded Veterans Association. At the same time, we let others know that they are not alone and that there are many services available to them.

I have been asked if there is anything good about going blind. The answer is a resounding yes! No, I wouldn't choose to go blind, but I don't believe any of us had that option. Given that, it is acceptable to say that there are things we never would have done had we not gone blind. One of them would be joining BVA although there are many sister organizations and supporters of the blind out there. We are also fortunate to be veterans. As such, we have perhaps been through additional hardships, be they in basic training or in actual combat. We are in the unique position to use our experience to persevere while at the same time paving the way and making things a little easier for those who follow us in losing their sight.

Although much of the country was shut down this past year, including our VA Medical

Centers, the Louisiana/ Mississippi Regional Group has been working on several programs.



In past **Bulletin** issues we have reported on our Bronze Braille Flag project with a goal to place one in every location that helps or works with veterans. Currently, we have donated ten flags with many more on the way.

We also worked with the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System BRC in Biloxi to provide feedback and encouragement for continuing some of the 18 virtual classes that were started during the pandemic. With simple e-mails and letters, justification was provided for the BRC leadership to gain two additional instructor slots for the virtual class.

In order to provide for a more receptive training environment for group classes, the regional group worked with the BRC to determine if a big screen television could be installed so that inpatients, along with those at home, could integrate and benefit from these classes along with some often much-needed entertainment. We asked members within our catchment area if they could donate toward this project.

Wow! Did they ever donate! Here is the result:

We purchased and donated to the BRC in Biloxi a 65-inch OLED television along with a Bose Sound Bar. The TV is now installed in the Veterans Conference Room on the second floor where we hold our meetings. Now, when veterans come for training, they can watch their favorite movie, sports event, or sitcom.

With that, a huge thanks goes out to the entire Arkansas Buddy Spivey Razorback and Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Groups. We also thank Mike Taylor, Kevin Jackson,



Not to be outdone even by a big screen television, the new pantry and donated range will enhance the entertainment/educational experiences at the Biloxi BRC.

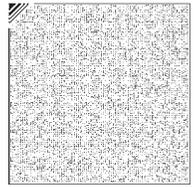
Corine Stanley, and Dale Titel. If you ever meet or run into them, please don't forget their generosity.

What if a veteran gets the munchies? We also have that covered!

In looking at how the world has changed, were we keeping up as best we could? Certainly, it's okay to learn how to do things safely but, if we could learn how to do the same thing on multiple different devices so that we could choose what works best for us, things might be just a little easier, and healthier too! So, the BRC upgraded the training kitchen upstairs with a new pantry and electric range, complete with WiFi capability. That was great but, as it was when we were kids, the kitchen closed at a certain time each day.

With that in mind, and inputs from the BRC and BVA members, the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group reached out to General Electric and asked for a donation of a range to be placed downstairs in our kitchen.

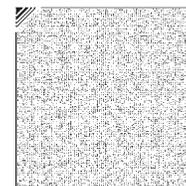
Did they ever step up! We were offered a choice and decided on a WiFi range with five burners, actually more than five if you consider that some have multiple rings. It also houses a full-size oven and one of the healthiest devices yet, its own Air Fryer!



All right—if neither the TV nor the range make a difference, the listening and camaraderie will certainly outclass everything else.

So, what does this mean for us blinded veterans? Imagine asking Alexa to preheat the Air Fryer so you that can make your favorite treat. Then go on up and watch reruns of Mississippi State winning the college baseball World Series. When you finish and return to bed, you stop along the way and feel the Bronze Flag on which the Pledge of Allegiance is inscribed. As you walk down the hall with a big smile and pride in what BVA has done to make your stay more enjoyable, reflect upon what you can do for your BVA. There is no job description. If what comes to mind strikes you as something you feel may be good for BVA and are not sure, ask one of your regional group officers. What you do can be for your regional group or for the entire BVA. Please don't limit yourself. Contact Headquarters, your District Director, or call the BVA representative at your nearest BRC.

It is time to shift the paradigm from asking “What can that BVA out there do for us?” back to asking simply: “What we can do for our BVA?”



Board of Directors Welcomes New National Treasurer

Tracy Ferro joined the National Board of Directors as an Executive Officer after his election as National Treasurer on August 18.

Tracy was born in New York City to Ralph and June Ferro. He graduated from Clarkstown Senior High School South, located in West Nyack 18 miles north of New York, and joined the United States Air Force at the age of 17.

After completing basic training and bypassing technical school, Tracy was assigned to the 90th Strategic Missile Wing, F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming. Initially assigned to the General Purpose Vehicle Maintenance Shop, he was later selected to be on the Mobile Maintenance Team due to his mechanical skills and ability to think outside the box and with minimal supervision while he was still junior in rank.

In 1982, Tracy received orders to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where once again he was put in the Mobile Maintenance position and as supervisor of the Minor Maintenance Shop. He took on a part-time job teaching Vehicle Maintenance for City Colleges of Chicago and worked his way up to Staff Sergeant.

In 1986, he was ordered to Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois, to become an instructor for the 3340th Technical Training Group. Having never gone through any type of technical training in the Air Force, Tracy brought a new perspective to the program and was one of only two instructors to be fully qualified to teach the entire basic course, every advanced course, and both

Mobile Training Team courses. During his final approximately 18 months he performed technical training in the field at more than 25 different air bases throughout the world.

Desiring to return to Germany, Tracy was able to do so in 1990, having been assigned to the 606th Tactical Control Squadron and later transitioning to an Air Control Squadron. He started out as a Vehicle Mechanic at Basdahl Complex in northern Germany, living on Karl Schurz Kaserne in Bremerhaven. In 1992, he moved with the unit to Bitburg Air Base, Germany, which was soon to close as a result of drawdowns. In 1994, the unit was once again assigned to a new base, Spangdahlem Air Base, 20 miles away.

During his tenure at the 606th he was promoted twice and went from being a Vehicle Mechanic to taking charge of the Combat Readiness Branch, which included Vehicle Maintenance and Operations, Security and Armory, Disaster Preparedness, Mobility, and the Independent Duty Medical Technicians. He was responsible for setting up unit level and individual deployments throughout the European Theatre and deployed all or part of the unit to a location as far north as Tromso, Norway, and as far south as Lecce, Italy; Zaragoza, Spain; and Poznan, Poland. In his capacity as Combat Readiness Superintendent, he was responsible for more than \$350 million in equipment at different times.

In 2010, Tracy retired from the Air Force and moved to Biloxi, Mississippi, where he married Kathy and took on being a father to Matthew. He worked as a mechanic in Biloxi

for ten years until his vision became so bad that he could no longer fix vehicles safely or drive, transitioning into a life without sight.

Tracy first attended the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System (GCVHCS) BRC in December 2015 and has returned on an inpatient basis two additional times. He enjoyed the program so much that he decided to volunteer in any capacity possible. As a BVA member in Mississippi, he was contacted by the Louisiana Regional Group with a proposal to merge the two groups. After working with the Louisiana leadership for a year, he was asked to run for president of the combined regional groups in 2019. He won that election and was re-elected in 2020 and 2021. He was also selected as the BVA representative for the GCVHCS BRC and a Deputy National Representative for VA Volunteer Services, now known as the Center for Development and Civic Engagement. At the same time, he worked toward his Veteran Service Officer certification.

He believes firmly in helping blinded veterans, regardless of where they live, and enjoys helping veterans who are not blind but who need assistance.

Training Commences For New Ambassadors

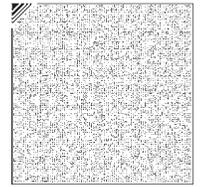
More than 40 BVA members began their training September 14 to become official “BVA Ambassadors” under a new initiative of the Association’s Veterans Service Program (VSP).

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Blind Rehabilitations Service (BRS) has identified more than 120,000 blinded veterans and 1.2 million veterans with low vision. A large percentage of these veterans either do

not know about BRS or they incorrectly assume that they are not eligible for assistance because their vision loss is not service connected.

“Once trained, BVA Ambassadors will be the key liaison between blind and visually impaired veterans and BVA’s Veterans Service Program,” said Jim Vale, BVA National Service Director for Veterans Benefits and Policy. “They will serve in key roles in the dissemination of valuable benefits information and crucial advocacy tips to help make the most of Visual Impairment Service Teams, Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists, Vision Impairment Services in Outpatient Rehabilitation programs, Vision Impairment Centers to Optimize Remaining Sight programs, and residential Blind Rehabilitation Centers.”

The 26-week Ambassador Training Program is a 60-90 minute weekly Zoom conference meeting with subject matter experts presenting on a variety of related topics, including but not limited to BVA Governance, Government Relations, Membership, the Veterans Service Program, VA Compensation & Pension Benefits, VA Appeals, VA Patient Advocate Services, the VA Caregiver Program, Special Adaptive Housing Grant Programs, VA Prosthetics, VA Burial and Survivor Benefits, Eye Conditions, VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement (Voluntary Service), and Ethics/Responsibilities.



Extended COVID Hiatus Invigorates Columbus Chapter

Notwithstanding a year without activities and without seeing one another, the industrious Columbus Chapter of the Georgia Regional Group picked up where it left off with a flurry of three major events this past spring and participation in a smaller-scale event in August.

The Columbus Chapter has historically and traditionally been among the most active and service-oriented of all BVA local groups nationwide.

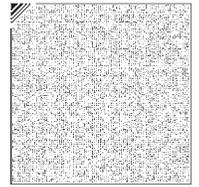
On May 13, the chapter got together for the first time at the local Speakeasy Restaurant in Columbus.

“After having only conference calls with fellow BVA pals for more than 12 months, the lunch at the Speakeasy was wonderful,” said Jerry Bentley. “We caught up on everything, laughed, and got to renew old friendships—a great day for food, thankfulness, and fellowship.”



Left to right, standing with chapter donations to benefit homeless veterans: June Miller, Liz Holmes, unidentified volunteer guide, Charles Miller, Clifford Jones, Ricardo Glenn, and a second unidentified volunteer guide.

Ricky Lynn, also a Columbus member, said that the event brought back pleasant memories of the past that, for a while at least, seemed unlikely to happen again because of the long separation.



Spring activities of the Columbus Chapter included a Memorial Day donation of a paver to the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center’s Heritage Trail. The presentation was attended by 12 members of the chapter, pictured here on bleachers situated next to the trail and a short distance from the Museum.

“It was a great day and well overdue,” said then 2nd Vice President Clifford Jones.

On May 19, Columbus members got together again, this time for the “Heroes Walk for Health and Homeless Veterans” for which the chapter donated \$200 for toiletries for the homeless veterans of the city.

“We are here to support veterans in their daily living needs in whatever way we can,” said Chapter Treasurer Ricardo Glenn.

On Memorial Day, the group paid homage to fallen service members and veterans by presenting a brick (paver) to be added to the National Infantry Museum & Soldier Center Heritage Walk Trail.



Ben Holmes and Clifford Jones celebrate their successful finish to the annual Country's Barbeque 5K Run/Walk Road Race in the wee hours of Sunday, August 29. Liz Holmes was not far behind the two!

Convention, Clifford Jones and newly elected BVA National Secretary Elizabeth Holmes entered the 40th Annual Midnight Express 5K Run/Walk sponsored by the Scott Ressemeyer-owned Country's Barbeque Restaurant, one of three locations in Columbus. The event began at 11:59pm August 28. Accompanied by BVA Auxiliary National Treasurer Ben Holmes, the two were the only blind or visually impaired participants among the approximately 600 others to complete a run/walk that would end at approximately 1:00am.

The event raises funds for the blind and visually impaired in the Columbus area, including the chapter.

"It was a great feeling to see and feel the brick sitting among the other bricks in the Georgia sunshine that day," said Jerry Bentley. "We could feel the pride that we had for being American veterans and being able to honor all who have paid the ultimate sacrifice."

The BVA chapter was one of only two organizations present that day at the Museum.

Following the participation of many of the chapter's members in the National

"In other years the Run/Walk has attracted between 2,000 and 3,000 participants and a host of sponsors that weren't there this year," said Liz. "You can see the impact that COVID-19 has had but it was nice for us to get out and contribute to something that also benefits us."

BVA Members Rejuvenate On Yellowstone River

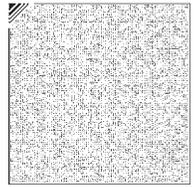
Six BVA members—Vincent Fee, Kennan Horn, Brian Harris, Lester Howard, Joey Martinez, and Mike Murphy participated in the Team River Runner (TRR) OuttaSight Whitewater Leadership Clinic July 16-23 on the Yellowstone River in the Paradise Valley, Montana community just north of Yellowstone Park.

Paradise Valley is a major river valley of the Yellowstone River known for its majestic scenery and community hospitality.

TRR has established OuttaSight Clinics in various venues for newly blind or visually impaired veterans who have no kayaking experience but who have a strong desire and physical ability to paddle twice each day in solo kayaks.

Instruction starts on flat water and proceeds to build skills up to running Class 3 wave train rapids on the Yellowstone River. Veterans who participate in the clinic are encouraged to take on leadership in TRR in their community or nationally using leadership ideas covered in daily discussions offered by Clinic Coordinators throughout the week.

Vincent Fee, Sooner Regional Group, recounted in writing the personal significance of his TRR kayaking experience with the following:





Left to right on banks of Yellowstone River, Mike Murphy, Vincent Fee, Joey Martinez, Lester Howard, and Ken Horn.

My name is Vince Fee. I am a blinded veteran who was blessed with the fortunate opportunity to go to Montana.

Thanks to BVA and TRR for communicating with me and getting me on this trip. TRR is an amazing organization that brought me and five other blind and visually impaired veterans on a week-long kayaking adventure on the Yellowstone River in Montana.

As a blinded veteran, I try to challenge myself and push toward greater independence. This was a perfect opportunity for me to get out of my bubble and experience something new. I was a little nervous before going but everybody embraced me.

I went with certain goals and exceeded them by far. The week really showed me what all I can do despite my disability. A big thank you to Lonnie Bedwell and Kennan Horn for encouraging me to do this trip and blessing me with the opportunity to be a part of this week. The TRR staff and crew were amazing and all the local people in Montana were extremely welcoming. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart.

Happy 102nd, Earl Forstall!

by Gary Schoelerman

World War II veteran and New Orleans resident Earl Forstall entered the military at the age of 22 as a Private in the Army Air Corps. As an engine specialist based out of Boise Air Force Base, his first plane was a B-17 flown by actor, pilot, and Brigadier General James 'Jimmy' Stewart.

Following that first placement, Earl was promoted to Crew Chief and assigned to the B-24 named "Queenie." Queenie flew 59 missions without one mechanical failure.

Earl was a member of the 8th Army Air Force, 445th Bomber Group, and rose to the rank of Master Sergeant. He is a two-time recipient of the Bronze Star Medal and was also awarded the Good Conduct Medal and Honorable Service Medal. His other citations include European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign, American Campaign, the World War II Victory Medal, and the Marksman Badge with Rifle Bar. His unit was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation that included a personal citation for him.

Born September 23, 1919, Earl married Elizabeth "Liz" Lou Cole in 1953 and together they raised a family of seven children. He opened a typography business in the city of New Orleans, Forstall

Typographers/The Ad Shop, with two of his brothers and became a leader in the field of typography regionally. He closed the business after 50 years of service to the city.

Earl lost Liz in 1994 after 40 years of marriage. He continues to live independently in the home in which he and Liz raised their family. There are now 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

In 2019, Earl celebrated his 100th birthday at the World War II Museum in New Orleans. The Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group sponsored the party with honors and citations from President Trump, Louisiana Senators Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy, Congressman Cedric Richmond, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, the World War II Museum, and then BVA National President Tom Zampieri. Earl is a long-time BVA member and has held many offices within the previous Louisiana Regional Group. Due to his hearing problems, he is currently unable to join in the monthly regional group teleconference meetings, but he does attend every banquet and other regional get-togethers.

Earl attributes his longevity to clean living and a good cocktail every evening!

Georgia Regional Group Highlights Oldest Member

by Elizabeth Holmes

The Georgia Regional Group proudly introduces the oldest member of our group, Jerrell L. McNutt. Jerrell is 94 years old and has been legally blind for eight years.

Jerrell was drafted into the Army at the age of 18 on April 7, 1945. He trained as an Infantryman at Camp Gordon near Augusta. His infantry training focused on Japanese warfare.

In February 1946, Jerrell was sent to Camp Reese in the now named Busan, Korea, an

abandoned Japanese Camp. General McArthur sent U.S. troops to gather all Japanese soldiers to ship them back to

Japan. The Korean people were liberated.

General McArthur demanded that all Japanese soldiers be treated with respect. While stationed at Camp Reese, Jerrell earned the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) badge.

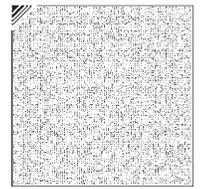
Jerrell also earned a GED and learned to speak two languages, Korean and Japanese. He returned to the United States on December 12, 1946. After his discharge, he earned a Bachelor's Degree and two Master's Degrees, along with three years of special training that qualified him to teach at the graduate level on Theo Ministry, which he did for 55 years. He also served as a Chaplain at the VA Medical Center in Tuskegee, Alabama from 1978 to 2005.

Jerrell moved to Georgia in 2015 with his daughter, Linda Jones, to be his caregiver. He has three children, six grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. He is the youngest of ten children, seven boys and three girls. All his brothers served during World War II.

Lonnie Bedwell Featured in Nat Geo's "Breaking Bobby Bones"

Lonnie Bedwell, **National Geographic** 2015 Adventurer of the Year, award winning author, motivational speaker, and member of the Indiana Regional Group, appeared in a June 27 episode of National Geographic's new series **Breaking Bobby Bones**.

The series, a brainchild of television and radio personality Bobby Bones himself, tests his personal motto of "fight, grind, repeat" as he travels to far-flung destinations across the country to learn from individuals who have overcome seemingly insurmountable personal



obstacles in acquiring unique jobs, skills, hobbies, and abilities.

Assisted by Team River Runner, Bones' episode with Lonnie has him blindfolded as the two, together, experience kayaking without sight for the better part of three days on the Payette River in southwestern Idaho.

Lonnie Bedwell is a former Navy Petty Officer critically injured in 1997 during a hunting accident that instantly took his sight. He is the first blind adaptive sports athlete to kayak the entire 226 miles of the Colorado River that stretches through the Grand Canyon. For that feat and others, several of which he has participated in through BVA's Operation Peer Support initiative, he was named National Geographic Adventurer of the Year.

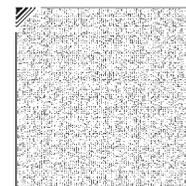
A Spotify podcast entitled "Bobby Bones and Lonnie Bedwell—Redefining Disability" includes interviews with both Bones and Lonnie. It previewed the airing of the **National Geographic** program, explaining how Bones learned about Lonnie and how the program was arranged. During the podcast Bones reflected that of all his challenging encounters in the series, it was Lonnie Bedwell who had inspired him the most.

To view the Bobby Bones-Lonnie Bedwell segment, search for Season 1, Episode 10 of **Breaking Bobby Bones** at nationalgeographic.com. A similar search will locate the Spotify podcast.

Healthy Hero Dining Experience Reboots with GCVHCS Event

Shortly before the onset and spread of COVID-19, **The Bulletin** reported on an innovation at the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System's Biloxi Campus in which the BRC would no longer be served with the pre-cooked meals delivered in thermal carts. The

change would involve not only the longstanding methods of serving but also new recipes and greater variety in food options.



On February 6, 2020, a new process was tried out for the first time: buffet-style meals served on real plates delivered in thermal carts. The process was to become permanent on March 20 but unfortunately came to a standstill as a result of the pandemic.

Nearly a year and a half later, this past July 21, the new dining experience was rejuvenated with an invitation only luncheon at the Biloxi VA Medical Center's Recreation Hall labeled the "Healthy Hero Dining Experience." The occasion was essentially a taste-testing event that included inpatient veterans and BVA volunteers, including National Treasurer Tracy Ferro.

"I can attest that these are restaurant quality meals presented in an inviting manner," said Tracy. "The chefs did an incredible job, asking each one of us for our opinion and what could have been done different, and I could only compliment them on their success."

The recipes in the Healthy Hero Menu are designed to effectively manage health-related issues such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Dishes featured at the July 21 event included Mediterranean Chicken, Dijon Baked Pork Chops, Southern Style Collard Greens, and Broccoli Salad.

The healthier dining options affect all veterans receiving inpatient meals in Biloxi. This includes veterans residing in the Biloxi VA Medical Center's Community Living Center as well as those in the Acute Care Hospital, the BRC, and Behavioral Health areas.

Johnson, Woodson Shine In Valor Midwest Games

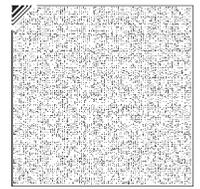
The Valor Games Midwest, a three-day Paralympic sport competition for disabled veterans, was held August 16-19 at historic Soldier Field in Chicago's Park District. Wounded or injured veterans from throughout the Midwest competed in discus throwing, shot put, cycling, archery, powerlifting, indoor rowing, biathlon, laser rifle, and table tennis.



Even with little remaining sight, Daniel Johnson finished second in his age category in the air rifle event at the Valor Midwest games August 19.

BVA Illinois Regional Group President Anthony Woodson placed first in the visually impaired categories for rowing and air rifle. Regional Group Treasurer Daniel Johnson placed second in the same categories in his age group.

Events were also held at various Chicago Park District locations and along Chicago's lakefront.



The event normally attracts more than 200 veterans each year but, due to COVID-19 protocols, only 60 veterans were allowed to participate this year.

O-K-I Member Donates Books

Blinded veteran and retired family therapist Dr. Paschal Baute of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Group is the author of 40 books, including **Blind Veterans Coping with Loss**.

On July 3, Paschal donated several hundred books from his professional library and a box of 14 books that he himself authored to a leisure room for veterans in residence at the Leestown facility of the Lexington, Kentucky VA Health Care System. The donation coincided with the refurbishing of the room and a need for books that would fill a couple of shelves. Paschal said staff promised to label the shelf "Books for Veterans by a Blind Veteran."

"They were very pleased to get our donation and I am happy that someone wants my books," he said. Paschal received a thank you letter just three days following the donation from Lexington VA Health Care System Voluntary Service Officer Patrick J. Sinclair.

Dr. Paschal Baute, 92, was enrolled in 2018 in the Kentucky Veterans Hall of Fame Honor Roll for both Outstanding Military Service and Outstanding Community Service. He served in the military for 24 years, enlisted and commissioned, active and reserve, in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. He served the longest as a Navy chaplain.

BVA Saddened by David VanLoan Passing

David E. VanLoan, Sr., BVA's Director of District 1 from 2008 to 2015, died unexpectedly on July 17. He and his wife, Pat, had been residing in Arcadia, Florida for a short time but their residence over most of their adult life was Moosup, Connecticut, and he was a member of the Connecticut Regional Group.

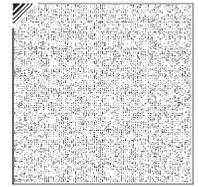
Dave took over for General Weeks in 2008 and subsequently served two full elected terms as Director of District 1, which covers the northeastern area of the United States.

Dave was known for his optimism and can-do spirit when it came to local and national BVA activities, most notably an annual Veterans Day parade in which he had recently enlisted the participation of grandson Austin Grimshaw. He was dedicated to the BVA members in his district and knew as many of them personally as he could. He and Pat were invariably the life of the party at convention social events.

Dave related several times that one of the highlights of his BVA service was personally meeting one of the organization's founding members, Nicholas J. Palermo, a Connecticut resident, at the 65th anniversary commemoration of Avon Old Farms Convalescent Hospital where BVA was established.

In addition to Pat, Dave is survived by a son, a daughter, five grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren. A celebration of his life was held on August 1 at American Legion Post 91 in Moosup.

VanLoan Sends Valued Father Carroll Transcripts



Only two weeks or so prior to his passing, David VanLoan called Director of Public Relations Stuart Nelson to see if BVA National Headquarters would be interested in a few transcripts of Father Thomas Carroll's convention luncheon addresses that he had in his possession.

Dave could not remember from whom or where he received the copies, but he was insistent that BVA have them if desired. Dave mailed them immediately upon Stuart's affirmative response.

The speeches were given in 1950 (Indianapolis, Indiana), 1951 (Boston, Massachusetts), 1952 (San Francisco, California), 1954 (Toledo, Ohio), 1955 (New York City), 1957 (Hartford, Connecticut), 1958 (Seattle, Washington), 1960 (Boston), 1961 (Hollywood, California), 1963 (Columbus, Ohio), and 1964 (San Antonio, Texas).

Also included in Dave's mailing was the transcript of an address entitled "Father Thomas Carroll: A Leader and a Legend" by Dr. Tuck Tinsley III at the 59th National Convention in Reno, Nevada, in 2004. At the time, Dr. Tinsley was the President of the American Printing House for the Blind.

BVA members or family members interested in receiving copies of any of these addresses should contact Stuart at snelson@bva.org or at 202-371-8882.

National Headquarters Recognizes 2021-22 Scholarship Recipients

This past spring BVA awarded six \$2,000 Kathern F. Gruber scholarships and one \$1,000 Thomas H. Miller scholarship for the recently begun 2021-22 academic year.

Gruber award recipients are Erica Minnich of Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania attending Penn State University's main campus in State College; McKenna Bright of Conway, South Carolina attending the University of South Carolina in Columbia; Alexandria Altamirano of Riverview, Florida attending the University of Central Florida in Orlando; Jace Buxton of Salt Lake City, Utah attending the University of Utah School of Medicine in Salt Lake City; Kaylee Tudor of Seymour, Indiana attending Indiana University in Bloomington; and Katherine Daniel of Panama City Beach, Florida attending Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina.

The Miller scholarship recipient is Isabelle Barrett of Haymarket, Virginia, attending George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

Scholarship information for the 2022-23 academic year will be presented in the upcoming Autumn and Winter issues of **The Bulletin**. The deadline to submit applications and supporting materials is **April 29, 2022**.

BVAA Feldman Funds Support Students

The Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary (BVAA) will award two \$2,000 Renee Feldman scholarships and one \$1,000 scholarship for the 2022-23 academic year. The annual scholarships are open to the spouses or children of blinded veterans.

Membership in BVA by the blinded veteran is not required.

To be eligible for a Feldman scholarship, applicants must have been accepted at the school of their choice. The institution in question may be a vocational school, community college, four-year college, or university.

The fees for the awards in all cases are paid directly to the school and are intended to defray the cost of tuition, books, and general fees.

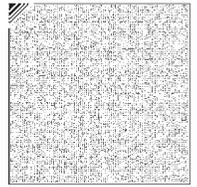
The application process for the scholarships includes supplying information about previous academic achievement, a statement of present goals and plans, a 300-word essay, and letters of reference. Completed application packets must be received no later than January 31, 2022.

For details and to request an application, contact Scholarship Chair Sherry Nelson at 479-414-2996, or billcounter3338@aol.com.

#See The Future!

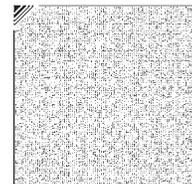
Beginning on Independence Day and continuing throughout the summer, BVA partnered with OrCam Technologies in honoring veterans and active members of the military via the social media platforms of the two organizations.

BVA friends and supporters were invited to relate inspiring stories and express appreciation for the sacrifices of those who have defended the nation's freedoms, making it possible for all generations to "See the Future." The invitation included the request to upload a photo and/or share a story about a service member or veteran who inspires Americans to overcome life's challenges and look ahead to a promising future.



Do I Realize I Create My Own World?

by Paschal Baute



My wife, Janette, had an aunt who had a fresh, warm gingerbread treat waiting for her every day as she walked home from school. Aunt Susan's place was a stopover before Janette had to cross a mountain to get home. This was in rural Appalachia in eastern Kentucky.

Aunt Susan was totally blind and poor, but she regarded herself as rich. She did everything without a fuss, including having to follow a string to get from the house to the outhouse. She was never one to criticize anyone. Janette said Aunt Susan was positive about everything. She never complained and she was a great role model for all her brothers and sisters.

Although born blind and poor, Aunt Susan coped every hour, minute by minute, with what she had, and she coped well. She knew she was creating her own reality by how she reacted.

It takes a long time, "a heap of living" as some would say, to wake up to the reality of ourselves. For many reasons, mortals tend to idealize themselves, pretending they are more than they are. Invariably, professors, politicians, and psychologists believe that they are in the upper half of their peer group. They are better than average in their own minds while a reality check reveals them to be average.

In like manner, we are not good judges of our behavior. Without setbacks, without failures, without some darkness, we cannot mature. Failure is the great teacher. This is why the realizations at midlife are so important and critical for our future wellness and happiness.

The basic axiom of Psychology 101 is that "all perception is selective," that is, we cannot view anything from an objective standpoint. We are bound to be influenced in our perception by our past experiences, our values, and the frame of reference we bring to any moment: Sad persons will find reason to be sad. The same is true of glad persons and angry persons, who will find things in their environment to be glad and angry about. Likewise, the happy person will find things to be happy about.

Janette has another relative who cannot go to anyone's house without finding some fault.

- Your grass is too tall.
- Did you know you have poison ivy there?
- That picture on the wall looks funny.

This relative is quick to give advice. He maintains his sense of being okay by finding fault with almost anything. Meaning well, and personally generous, he honestly thinks he is superior in his standards, but he is oblivious to the effect he has had on others. He can dominate a conversation without even realizing it. He looks for and finds something he has an opinion about. He must continue proving that he is "better than" by criticizing.

Still another of my wife's relatives thought the same but was more introverted. In her own mind, she was perfect. However, after a few beers and following a large family gathering, her critical judgments about the event would be shared. Because she was so ready to judge, she quickly but wrongly assumed others were being critical of her.

Each of these aforementioned persons maintained a sense of superiority by finding

fault. It was an inner world each was continually creating. Those who create such an inner world can only possess gratitude when it is based upon feeling that they are better than others.

When, according to my survey research, so many veterans (50 percent) arrive for their VA appointments with a negative attitude, could it be that, in their mind, they have decided they are somehow getting the “short end,” sucking on some grievance? The only way the few chronically angry veterans I have met could maintain that attitude was by finding new probable reasons for grievance. Each was creating the reality in which they live. In their mind, their anger was always justified.

A recent experience at a BRC dining room table confirmed that again for me. I sat next to a blinded veteran who carried a chip on his shoulder. He found many things to be upset about. Another veteran loudly announced to anyone listening as soon as he lifted the cover to his meal tray: “Another piece of s-bleep!”

Although we promise solemnly in our marriage vows to love the other “as long as we both shall live,” one-half of all marriages in the USA now end after seven years. Additionally, according to the Centers for Disease Control which tracks these things, the rate of divorce is not much better for second marriages.

What has happened?

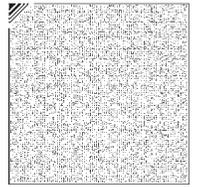
The answer is that we encounter parts of our partner that we did not know before and are not able to cope with that disappointment over time. Partners do not have the needed listening and conflict resolution skills. We end up harboring negative feelings that become resentment. Holding resentment slowly poisons the relationship.

We choose what we focus on every day. That is what makes our reality. We supply the content of what goes on between our ears. When we grasp this single important human fact, we become aware of how we focus our attention. Do we easily give free rent to bad stuff? What side of the bed do we get up on? More importantly, have we managed our lives so that we want to get out of bed to get started on something meaningful?

Remember Aunt Susan, who Janette says she cannot remember being negative about anything. Or, better yet, think of the Aunt Susan in your life who is weathering a setback or many yet they choose the positive at each moment.

In my book, **Blind Veterans Coping with Loss**, I ask 32 veterans with sight loss where they find meaning and hope. They reveal 12 self-care values that reflect an attitude of knowing they are responsible for each moment of their lives.

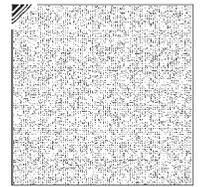
The perception of good stuff versus bad stuff is always before us. Both beauty and ugliness are each in the eye of the beholder. So, the choice of each moment is which side we will choose: The side of remembering the hurts and setbacks, or the side of counting each new moment as a blessing. Knowingly or not, we put our finger on the scale every day and every moment. It is up to each of us to decide to “dance,” that is, to find joy, celebration, and gratitude in our lives.





Auxiliary's View

by Patricia Hail



BVA's emergence as an organization during the final months of World War II has proven to be an evolving,

dynamic process that has continued up to the present. The inaugural meeting on March 28, 1945 was followed by the establishment of bylaws, the milestone recognition in 1946 by Omar Bradley that allowed BVA to represent blinded veterans before VA, and the Congressional Charter of 1958.

Important as those events were, no less significant were the principles upon which they occurred—the notion that blinded veterans were there to educate themselves and to help and advocate for one another in order to make life better for themselves and their loved ones.

The BVA Auxiliary was later founded so that friends and family could share in that same effort by supporting and promoting BVA and individual blinded veterans.

I have learned that many of our blinded veterans encountered various types of discrimination during the early, formative BVA years. The discrimination was not always limited to their disability and in some communities and circles involved race, both within and without the organization. BVA and its members struggled and had their differences, but they indeed found a common bond in their blindness as well as their military service. Within BVA blinded veterans had a safe place to which they could come together as equals, help each other, and send representatives to VA and

Congress to advocate for the accommodations and the care that would help them regain their independence and dignity.

All members of BVA are equal. The membership is the supreme authority. No one has any more power or voice than the other. Elected officials and their appointees answer to the membership, not the other way around. Respect for one another is the glue that holds the Association together. There is more than enough disrespect, power-grabbing, and conflict in the United States and all of society today without it seeping into an organization such as BVA.

Think of the BVA emblem that the organization has now had for the better part of 73 years. That symbol was actually presented to the Board of Directors of 1948 by President Harry S. Truman. A white hand and a dark hand are clasped together in friendship and camaraderie with the Christian cross and the Star of David above them. A few years ago, the emblem's interpretation was changed somewhat. The new interpretation is not limited to two ethnicities and two religions. Like the U.S. itself and the military, BVA and BVAA encompass many ethnicities, religions, and individuals identifying with a growing list of special populations. Still, our core values remain the same and the icons we revere, including Father Carroll, are instilled in our foundation and influence our work.

Let us think of our membership living and acting in a "World in Confluence" consisting

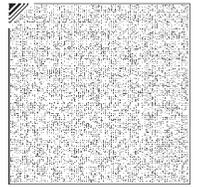


of respect, responsibility, and accountability. Our rights are guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and supported by the BVA and BVAA Bylaws. When we read and follow them, we can rise above the negative influences in our society.

With our worlds (the blind, our veterans, our supporters, VA, etc.) in confluence, each of us can be compared to a drop of water. When a few drops of water come together in nature, they form a trickle. When even more come together, the trickle may become a stream. The streams coming together form rivers, and rivers coming together form great rivers, eventually becoming a part of our oceans. With evaporation and use by all flora and fauna they complete the simple water cycle. This coming together and moving forward together is called a “confluence.” These drops, like our members, work together and go forward together onto greater accomplishments (also comparable to the real work of advocacy) that envelope the entire BVA and its supporters.

Our 2021 convention events were a really great example of the Confluence of Worlds. Those who participated learned a great deal. For those who were unable to participate, whom we missed, there is always next year. Maybe not all of what we learned was personally beneficial but, when we deal with the facts in a positive manner, we come out ahead, both individually and as a group.

Each of us should remember our responsibility as a member and participant – to respect others (Blinded Veterans **Helping** Blinded Veterans); and to be accountable for our own actions, words, and associations. Your rights cease when you infringe on the rights of others. Most of us prefer our **Worlds in Confluence** – where we can all (equally) have and exercise our freedoms, including Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—both within BVA and BVAA and within society at large.



Veterans Service Program Update

by Duayne Driscoll

How can I increase my monthly compensation payment?

I hear this question every day, yet the answer remains as unique as the person asking. Many possibilities exist depending upon the details. For some, the answer lies in the question—file an increase claim. Others fare better by claiming new or secondary issues, and more than a few should probably leave it alone. Many blinded

veterans benefit from increases in Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) due to involvement of other disabilities that also qualify for SMC, such as hearing loss.

However, before exploring, we must first establish the legitimacy of the question. I often meet reluctant claimants, veterans who easily meet eligibility criteria for various VA disability compensation benefits. For whatever reason, they feel as though they don't deserve the benefits and that claiming them would be like going on welfare or accepting charity.

I do my best to convince these folks that VA benefits were earned by virtue of honorable active service. Likewise, the maximum benefit allowed by law has already been paid for with your very own blood, sweat, and tears. Self-advocacy demands we seek such entitlement.

VA pays SMC benefits for a wide variety of qualifying service-connected conditions, including blindness, deafness, and loss of extremities (or loss of their use). When the rating contains no other qualifying disability than blindness, the ratings are fairly straightforward and include intermediate ratings in addition to those shown below:

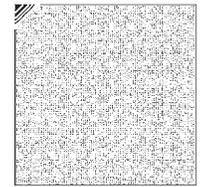
Level of Blindness	Level of SMC
Both Eyes	
5/200 or worse	L
Light Perception Only	M
No Light Perception	N

Throw in the issue of deafness in one ear along with 5/200 in both eyes and the SMC level increases by one half-step to L 1/2. There are too many variations to discuss here but consider that 5/200 or worse in both eyes with a 60 percent evaluation for hearing loss warrants SMC at the O rate, which pays considerably more than the L rate.

While pondering a claim of entitlement to service connection for hearing impairment due to in-service noise exposure, we must clearly define the phrase *hearing loss for VA purposes*. Many letters of denial state, "...veteran does not have hearing loss for VA purposes." This makes the veteran respond vigorously: "Of, course I have hearing loss. VA issued me hearing aids!" Ah, there's the rub.

For the purpose of establishing service connection, VA considers Puretone thresholds in the frequencies of 500hz through 4000hz only. So, if the need for a hearing aid is

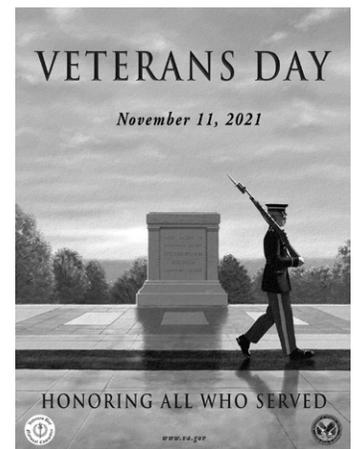
because of hearing loss at a higher frequency, it does not necessarily meet the rating eligibility criteria set forth by VA's **Schedule for Rating Disabilities**.



However, this discussion should raise a question for anyone receiving SMC based on blindness: Do I have a hearing or limb loss related to my active-duty service that should be service-connected? If you answer yes, or have any questions about your level of compensation, please contact the BVA Veterans Service Program for claims assistance. Self-advocacy demands we seek the maximum benefit.

For more information on compensation rates, visit <https://www.va.gov/disability/compensation-rates/>.

Matt Tavares of Ogunquit, Maine, author-illustrator of children's books and an advocate for military families, is the 2021 Veterans Day poster contest winner.

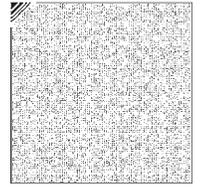


Tavares works closely with his publisher, Candlewick Press, to support an organization called United Through Reading. Its mission is to connect military families who are separated by deployment or other military assignment through the shared experience of reading together. His design idea for his year's poster theme came from an illustration he created from a book entitled **Twenty-One Steps**.



Chaplain's Corner

by Dr. Ron Lester



Senior Strength

The other day I was interviewing a man who is paralyzed from the neck down. As a Coast

Guard veteran, he took a run on the beach one day. The sand became very hot, so he jumped in the water, hit a rock, and broke his neck.

Now, after some 40 years, he is still writing and posting encouraging thoughts to inspire others. Although unthinkable circumstances came his way, this man has not stopped.

I once visited with a man who had lost his legs and arms. He has not stopped.

Throughout my life I have visited many veterans who are blind. They have not stopped.

We had a cousin who was totally blind. He was determined to live to be 100 years old. This man kept going through hard work and sheer determination until he died the day after his hundredth birthday. Despite the difficult situations in his life, he did not stop until he reached his goal.

In America, when people reach the 65-75 age bracket, their thinking seems to change. It's time to retire, apply for Social Security and Medicare, and transition to a different style of life. Sadly, with those changes comes a change in self-perception: "My productive years are over; my strength is waning; my best years are behind me."

As we see in the verse below, this is certainly not so of Caleb in the days of Moses and beyond! When Caleb was 40, he and Joshua helped spy out the Promised Land (Numbers 13). Then came 40 years

of wandering in the wilderness. By the time Canaan was divided among the tribes of Israel and Caleb received a portion as his inheritance, he was 85 years old (Joshua 14:10)! And how did he view himself? As strong at age 85 as he was at age 40 (Joshua 14:11)! He was ready "for war"—that is, ready for whatever he may be called on to do.

Retirement is not a Biblical word. Change and transition, yes, but we must remain available to the Lord until the day of our harvest comes (Job 5:26).

Corrie Ten Boom, through all of her unthinkable circumstances and struggles, wrote: "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

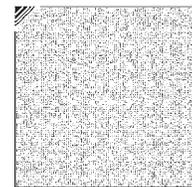
Sometimes, in the midst of our great suffering and unthinkable circumstances, we feel isolated and alone. Perhaps it is in these places where we feel most alone that we can best hear God's still, small voice. He talks with us and fellowships with us. In His timing, He will provide the human companionship we need.

Pastor David Jeremiah has said: "Only God can solve the problem of loneliness. He created us in such a way that we have an emptiness that can only be filled by an intimate relationship with Himself."

There is a warrior spirit and Holy Spirit in us that keeps us going. We can go the distance and be transformed.

Never, ever give up.





Father Carroll Story Now Available

A long-awaited, intensively researched account of the life and work of Father Thomas J. Carroll is now available in paperback and on Kindle.

Caution, Blind Priest Driving: The Story of Father Thomas J. Carroll, Changing the Public's Perception of Blindness was authored by Rachel Ethier Rosenbaum, Executive Director of the Carroll Center for the Blind for more than 33 years from 1976 until 2009.

Because the Blinded Veterans Association was an integral part of Father Carroll's life, not only as the organization's National Chaplain for 25 years but as both a voice and a sounding board for blinded veterans, the book references BVA throughout and dedicates Chapter 6 to the "birth of the Blinded Veterans Association and Hines Hospital."

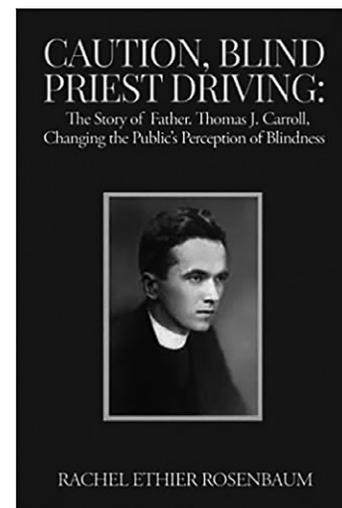
Many early BVA members are quoted in the book and Neftali Sanchez, Father Carroll's long-tenured successor of 37 years, is listed in Rosenbaum's acknowledgments. The author attended the BVA 69th National Convention in Reno, Nevada in search of blinded veterans with memories and stories of Father Carroll.

The Carroll Center for the Blind was founded in 1936 as the Catholic Guild for All the Blind. In 1938, Father Carroll became the Assistant Director of the organization and is now considered the founder of the modern-day Carroll Center. Although the agency struggled after Father Carroll's death in 1971, Rosenbaum rebuilt its programs for newly blinded adults and with federal grants established the first computer assistive

technology for the blind in the United States and constructed a new building to house the Technology Training Services.

Rosenbaum is also the author of **The Unmaking of a Nun**, published in late 2013.

For the time being, the paperback and Kindle versions of **Caution, Blind Priest Driving** can be ordered at <https://us.amazon.com/Caution-Blind-Priest-Driving-Perception-ebook/dp/B09DTCTXLB>. Availability as a National Library Service Talking Book will be announced in the near future.



Sailors, Airmen, Marines Celebrate Fall Anniversaries

For military historians among **The Bulletin** readership, this time of year also commemorates significant but sometimes overlooked dates in the history of the United States Military.

The U.S. Air Force, amazingly only two years younger than BVA, celebrated its 74th birthday on September 18 while the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps both celebrate birthday 246 on October 13 and November 10, respectively.

Although these anniversaries are not common knowledge, veterans who served in one or more of these branches remember them and frequently contemplate their significance in their lives.

World War II Veteran Celebrates 107th B-Day

Sydney Cole, a World War II veteran who served as an Army Captain and pilot, celebrated his 107th birthday September 1 with family and staff members at the VA Medical Center in Buffalo, New York.

The milestone was reported by WIVB-TV-4 in Buffalo.

Cole survived after being shot down during the Battle of the Bulge and taken as a prisoner of war. He is a resident of the New York State Veterans Home in Batavia.

Family members interviewed for the segment said they owed Cole's longevity to a healthy lifestyle that included working out 3-4 times a week and "playing handball for 55 years with the same group of guys."

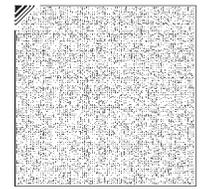
BVA Friend Joe Galloway Passes Away in North Carolina

BVA members tuned into the 76th National Convention's virtual Father Carroll Luncheon on August 19 were saddened to learn of the death from complications of a heart attack of noted war correspondent and popular Father Carroll Luncheon speaker Joseph L. Galloway. His passing marked two years almost to the day since his speech and informal conversations later in the day with BVA members.

Galloway's Tulsa address was a highlight of the BVA 74th National Convention. The September-October 2019 **Bulletin** remembered the presentation as an emotional one that captivated the luncheon audience as it addressed the sacrifices of men and women in battle and what they must go through following every conflict.

His wrenching account of the first major battle of the Vietnam War was the basis for the book **We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young**,

which became a best seller in its first printing in 1991 and the basis of a hit movie more than a decade later.



Galloway was the only civilian awarded a Medal of Valor by the Army for combat action in the Vietnam War for his rescue of wounded soldiers under fire while embedded with them at age 24. He was often referred to as a soldier's reporter and a soldier's friend who hated war.

Bulletin Available in Multiple Formats

The Bulletin is currently available in multiple formats. BVA members who are receiving the publication in one format but would like to try out an alternative format should contact Director of Public Relations Stuart Nelson (202-371-8880, Ext. 316 and snelson@bva.org) or Director of Membership Maria Ingegneri (Ext. 315 and mingegneri@bva.org).

Formats include a hard copy paper version sent through the United States Postal Service via Free Matter for the Blind, an audio-narrated version available on the **Bulletin** webpage, <https://bva.org/the-bulletin/> and on a compact disk that is also mailed via Free Matter for the Blind, a Microsoft Word version nearly identical to the audio script that is both emailed and made available on the **Bulletin** webpage, and a PDF document identical to the hard copy paper version that can be both emailed and also accessed on the **Bulletin** webpage.

Bulletin Submissions Earnestly Sought

The editors and staff writers of **The Bulletin** are continually seeking material worthy of inclusion in the quarterly

publication, especially content that highlights local activities of blinded veterans in their regional groups, adaptive sports programs, and community service projects.

Accompanying photos, preferably in a .jpg format, are also encouraged.

Please send potential contributions to Stuart Nelson at snelson@bva.org or to BVA National Headquarters via U.S. Mail. The submission deadline for the next **Bulletin** is Monday, November 15 immediately after this year's Veterans Day.

Large Increase Looming For Veterans Benefits

Veterans could see a major cost-of-living increase to their benefits this year.

On September 20, the House of Representatives passed S. 189, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2021. The critical legislation will increase the rate of disability compensation for veterans living with service-connected disabilities and their survivors.

The legislation this year came well ahead of the December 1 deadline. The amount of the increase is still unknown, but experts have predicted that this year's COLA could be the highest in decades. This would mean a sizeable increase in benefits for veterans as well.

Moody's Analytics estimates the 2022 COLA at 5.6 percent. The Social Security Administration's chief statistical analysts believe the COLA will be close to 6 percent. The Senior Citizens League said in August that its 6.2 percent estimated increase would be the highest in nearly four decades.

"The bipartisan Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021 will provide veterans with cost-of-living adjustments in line with skyrocketing

inflation," said House Committee on Veterans Affairs Ranking Member Mike Bost (R-IL-12). "Many veterans rely on disability compensation to make ends meet, and this was especially true during the pandemic."

Bost also said that the COLA adjustment in 2022 is more important now than ever before for millions of veterans and their families.

Center for Women Veterans Promotes "I Am Not Invisible"

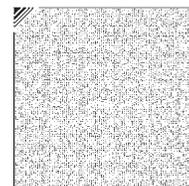
In an effort to mitigate barriers for women veterans and increase their access to benefits and services through new technology solutions, the VA Center for Women Veterans is highlighting a new campaign entitled "I Am Not Invisible" (IANI).

The initiative seeks to spotlight diversity across the veteran community, increasing awareness and dialogue about women veterans as well as highlighting their skills and expertise.

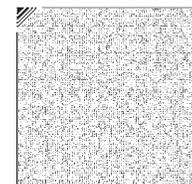
IANI also aims to make sure that women are comfortable in their service and to create a community of support as they transition out of the military. The Center for Women Veterans helps foster the goal by hosting networking opportunities to connect women veterans and ensure that their voices are heard.

VA is also launching new technology tools like call centers, new reproductive health capabilities, and telehealth to expand access to service and benefits.

"We're looking at how we can use artificial intelligence to make sure we can provide the capabilities we need to remove barriers and care for our women veterans," said Luwanda Jones, Deputy Chief Information Officer at VA's Office of Strategic Sourcing.



Letters to the Editor



True BVA Friends

We all have friends, and we are all a friend to someone else. Sometimes a friend will do nothing more than sit and listen to us blow off steam while other times they'll be there when we need a hand. Sometimes we know who our friends are and sometimes we don't. We've most likely all heard the term "paying it forward" and some of us have more often been paid forward while others have spent more of their time doing the paying.

I propose two key questions:

When and how does a person become a friend of BVA? Are acts of "paying it forward" a part of that friendship?

Stephanie Mermilliod is a friend of BVA and to BVA. Before describing what that involves, I must divulge that she has worked her whole life, raised a family, retired, taken in stray pets, watched out for the neighborhood kids, kissed boo-boos, and handed out lollipops as well as all sorts of normal things.

So, how is Stephanie a friend of BVA? She is not blind nor a veteran. Nor is she a military brat or spouse. Stephanie is simply a good old patriotic American who wants to do right and lives by a patriotic mantra.

To learn more about that patriotic mantra and how it guides Stephanie, ask blinded veteran Benjamin Miles of the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group if his little tootsies stay warm under that handmade quilt he won as a first-place prize at the regional group 2021 banquet.

Benjamin and Stephanie have never met. Perhaps one day they will. Stephanie simply has a special place in her heart to help others. She quilts as a hobby and through her neighbor has met several blinded veterans. She wanted to do something special, specifically for blinded veterans, and donated the quilt seen in the accompanying photo.

Stephanie initially created this patriotic themed quilt with the intention of having the regional group raffle it off at the 2020 banquet. As a result of COVID-19, that didn't happen, but the thought was still there, as is the friendship.

Stephanie and her husband Chuck will never be veterans and we hope and pray they will never lose their eyesight. They are, however, forever friends of BVA and for that we in the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group are eternally grateful.



Chuck and
Stephanie
Mermilliod



Benjamin Miles displays
his new quilt as Tracy
Ferro describes the
coveted prize.

Tracy Ferro
National Treasurer
Biloxi, Mississippi

RG Officer Urges Bylaw Approval

I hoped to write this letter to **The Bulletin** with a tone of happiness and good prospects for the future of the Blinded Veterans Association. Alas, that is not to be, and I now write this with some frustration and bewilderment.

The 76th National Convention is now behind us. As usual, various changes in bylaws are proposed and then voted on. One proposed bylaw change would have allowed veterans with visual impairment, but not declared legally blind, to join BVA. Sadly, the proposal was defeated by less than 1 percent, a total vote count of some 60 votes or so.

It is my understanding that this proposed change of bylaws has been proposed in the past. Now, however, the circumstances are very different than in the past and we face a situation that, unless we act, the actual existence of the organization could be in jeopardy.

BVA was organized just prior to the end of World War II by veterans who were blinded during that conflict. Bear in mind that at the end of the War, the U.S. had millions in uniform and BVA enjoyed a rush of veterans wanting to join. To these numbers were later added the Korean War veterans, the Vietnam veterans, those from the first Gulf War, and most recently the veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Even with all of those additions, the size of our Armed Forces has never come close to the number from World War II. As a result, the membership roll was extensive and BVA prospered.

The last time I checked, the World War II veterans were dying at a rate of some 360 per day. That comes to 131,400 per year. World War II ended 76 years ago. You can figure it from there. The number of blinded veterans has dropped and is dropping proportionately.

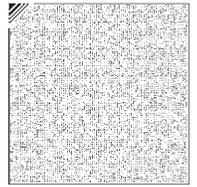
What does this mean for BVA?

None of the answers bodes well for the future. First, we are losing members rather fast from a high of nearly 12,000 at one point to now less than 6,000. The numbers of visually impaired veterans from conflicts after Korea are only a fraction of what we had from World War II and the Korean War. So, the recruitment base is much, much smaller. I don't have any figures of the number of new members annually but if they are something like what we have experienced in my group, it is not very much, and I'm sure it is below the number we lose every year.

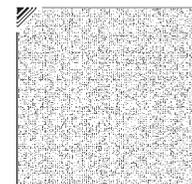
Where do we find enough new members to offset the annual loss or increase our member count? Where are these prospects? At what level of membership do donors and Congress decide we are small potatoes and ignore us? Where do the funds come from?

In past years and, sadly, also this year, a number of old-line veteran members of BVA have campaigned against allowing visually impaired veterans not yet legally blind to become members of the Association. These members are adamant that this group be excluded from BVA. While I have no objection to their right to hold that point of view, I do question why they insist on their viewpoint.

Consider: BVA was organized to help blinded veterans. The decision at that time was to require the veteran to be legally blind. Why did they not require the veteran to be totally blind? Why is this arbitrary point of legal blindness so crucial? The rules could have been very easily adopted in the beginning to include any veteran with a vision problem.



Consider: The mission statement of BVA is to assist veterans with blindness. Why is it so important not to assist a veteran who has not yet reached legal blindness but who will, no doubt, reach the point sometime in the future? Isn't it our goal to help the visually impaired? Why is the degree or point of impairment such an obstruction?



Finally, consider: If we do not take some serious action to build up the member body, the days of this organization are numbered. Will the last anti-low vision veteran be the one to please turn out the lights before leaving?

The time for serious deliberation over the future of BVA is now, not tomorrow, next week, or next year. It is now.

The last question I ask those anti-low vision fellow members is this: Are you concerned about the future of BVA or are you fixated on a dream of exclusivity? As our numbers continue to drop at an alarming rate, that exclusivity will soon be at hand.

The future of the Blinded Veterans Association should not end with the demise of any member or members. Our goal should be for BVA to always be there for the visually impaired veteran whose quality of life the organization can improve and enhance.

Charles Nemeth
Regional Group Secretary
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Team River Runner and Memorial Day Weekend 2021

I am a newer member of BVA and BVA's Operation Peer Support initiative. I would like to tell as many as possible all about how amazing Team River Runner (TRR) is. I was fortunate enough to get invited on a trip at the end of May and it was well worth it.

One of the best parts I like about this organization is the true generosity that is shared. Three other blinded veterans and I were shuttled by volunteers and the founders of the organization. This kind of attention is truly hard to find these days and that was just the beginning.

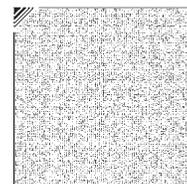
We met the first night in Bartlesville, Oklahoma and had an amazing welcome from the community. On our first day we were able to get out and fellowship with all of the participants of the annual Team River Runner Golf Tournament.

The next two days were spent on the water in true TRR style. We were first welcomed to the new whitewater complex in Oklahoma City and made a couple of runs in the rafts. In the evening, the pumps were shut down so that we could introduce Oklahoma and all its veterans to



kayak football. There was some solid instruction; then the games were on. The water play continued the next day as we worked on technique and played some more games of kayak football.

All in all, the activities of the weekend were fun, but the best takeaways for me from these activities are the memories made and the friendships created. During every event I have attended with TRR, I feel normal again. I encourage you all to check out your local TRR chapter if you are looking for an amazing organization.



Michael Murphy
Rocky Mountain Regional Group
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Convention Format Praised

A wonderful BVA 76th National Convention commenced August 16, 2021. What a joy to have available this technology to meet present and future challenges. The format of this convention was consistent with BVA's true mission, which includes equipping blinded veterans with the knowledge and skills for greater independence in order to meet the challenges of this world.

Our opening day was a routine occasion between BVA National Headquarters and the membership. The Zoom platform was working properly, a great inspiration to the moderators. As the week progressed, the program's agenda and dialogue were well prepared and presented with the greatest of professionalism by the host and all parties involved. Our Executive Director, Mr. Donald D. Overton Jr., inspired the membership with his arousing voice of confidence that the Blinded Veterans Association is navigating on course to brighter days.



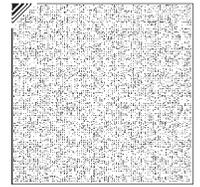
The business sessions of the convention were well planned, and the objectives were achieved. The election of national officers and voting on proposed amendments to the bylaws had the familiar feeling of our weekly conference calls. The governmental departments, independent agencies, and other guest speakers were a wealth of knowledge, expressed with compassion and care. I truly felt that the warmth in their delivery was directed at me as I needed that information and encouragement.

I hope our gratitude is reflected in the words written here. We truly appreciate the tireless efforts of Mr. Stuart Nelson and staff in prior weeks of training to the membership so that this virtual platform could be launched. We give thanks to all executives, coordinators, representatives, and members for a successful BVA 76th Convention.

Warner L. Murray
New York Regional Group
New York, New York

In Remembrance

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



Alabama R.G.

Bernard White

Arizona Central/Northern R.G.

Roger Dale Brooks

Alva Howe

Connecticut R.G.

David VanLoan

Florida R.G.

Philip Armstrong

Gordon Crofut

William Erickson

Robert Porta

Robert Schott

Clayton Simons

David Walters

Gem State R.G.

Jerry Harr

Georgia R.G.

Dixie O'Neal

Heartland R.G.

Randy Fratzke

Dwight Rodgers

Indiana R.G.

Johnny Young

Massachusetts R.G.

Norman Edwards

Philip Fisher

Mid-Atlantic R.G.

William Crumb

Mary Cutlip

Joseph Wallace

New Mexico R.G.

Leopold Aragon

Ralph Mora

New York R.G.

James Corcoran

Frank Floyd

Ohio R.G.

Ronald Bell

Glenn Martin

Stanley Root

Pennsylvania R.G.

John Busby

Richard Hay

Robert Klock

Edwin Seace

Fate Spears

Puerto Rico R.G.

Luis Ruiz Javier

Pedro Barnes Lugo

Juan Rodriguez Rigual

Olimpio Oquendo Rivera

Rocky Mountain R.G.

Bob Groot

Robert Mooney

Teofilo Romero

South Carolina R.G.

Andrew Ford

Glenn Forrest

South Texas R.G.

Bonnie Durkee

Southern Arizona R.G.

Raymond Frazier

Southern Nevada R.G.

Andrew Wilson

Spokane Inland Empire R.G.

Ellen Price

Wisconsin R.G.

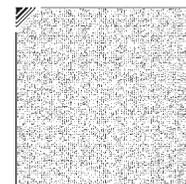
Sylvester Regan

Joseph Sukowaty

BVA Members At-Large (No Regional Group Affiliation)

Philip Bunnell

Louis Nadell



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Director District 4 – **KENNETH ASAM**, Newhall, CA
Director District 5 – **DARRYL GOLDSMITH**, Pensacola, FL
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Treasurer – **BENJAMIN HOLMES**, Midland, GA
Reporter – **PATRICIA HAIL**, Deer Park, WA

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Final Thought

Newly sworn-in BVA Director of District 4 and Air Force veteran Ken Asam, pictured here, is a champion of voluntary service, a successful leader, and a master of innovation and self-reliance.

Several years ago, Ken suffered a retinal vein occlusion and lost vision in his left eye. He received an OrCam visual assistance device by VA but, because he found the manual inadequate even for himself and his background, he wrote a training outline using the skills he learned as a technical instructor during his military service.

Doing so, he says, turned adversity into both a learning and teaching opportunity. Ken meticulously taught himself how to use the device and wrote a lesson plan that was, he was told, adopted by VA as the OrCam training document.

