

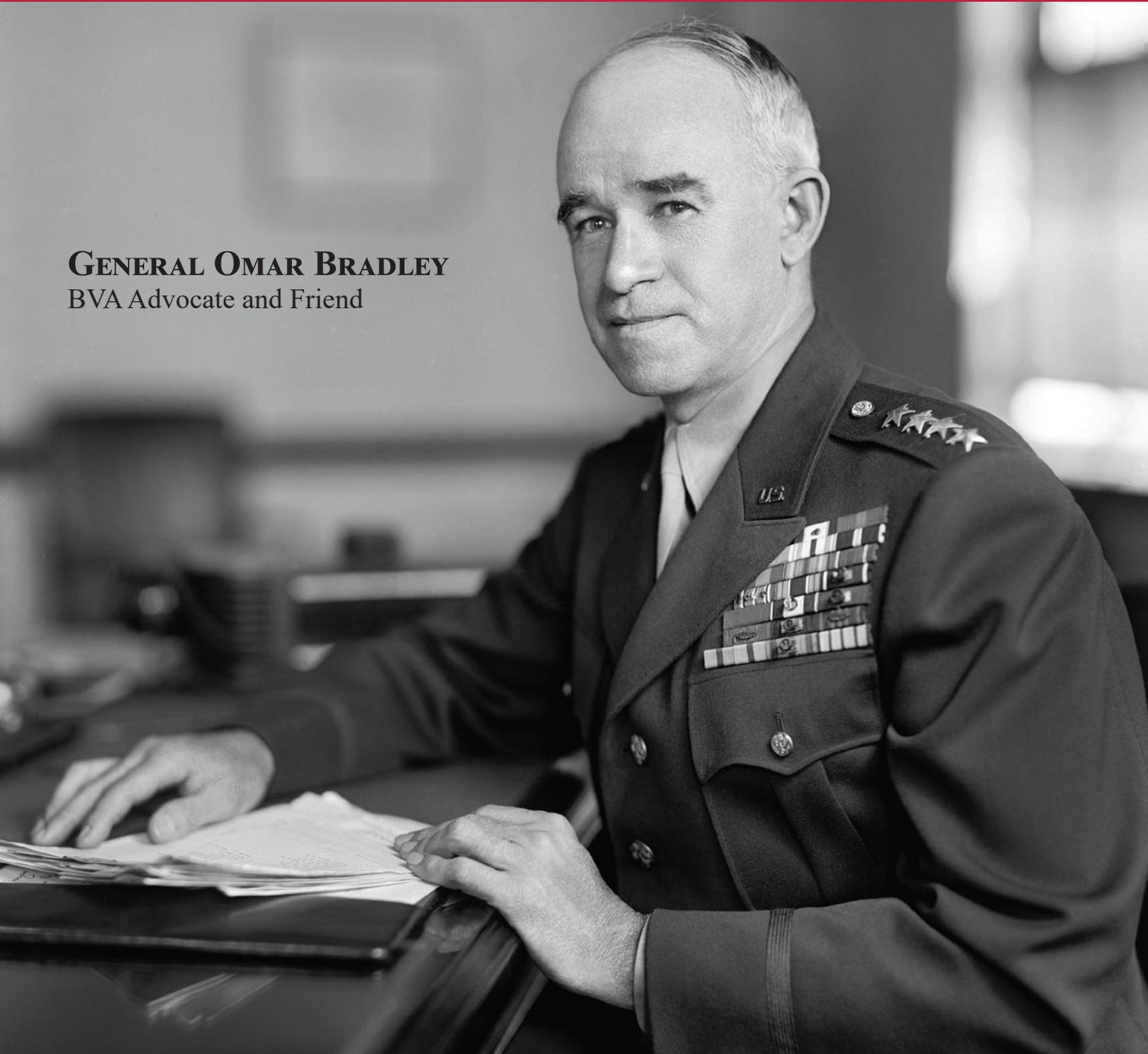
The Bulletin

Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



May-June 2020

GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY
BVA Advocate and Friend



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Cover Photo:

A momentous determination in November 1946 by General Omar Bradley, at the time head of the Veterans Administration, changed forever the future of the Blinded Veterans Association. The historic decision is remembered in this issue of **The Bulletin**. See page 8.

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Please send **Bulletin** submissions to snelson@bva.org or kfitzgerald@bva.org.



President's Page

by Dr. Thomas Zampieri



As we navigate these uncertain times, I wanted to share how we are approaching things at BVA. On March 18, BVA staff started working from home. The Board had to make many decisions during our March mid-winter meeting, and the safety of our employees was vital.

Working remotely is critical to continuing BVA's efforts, which is a new adjustment for many; physical group meetings are gone, but we can still hold phone meetings. How we go about our work, how we treat each other, the impact of our efforts – all these are significant to our well-being, individually and collectively in BVA moving ahead.

We would like to hear how you, at the regional group and chapter level, are adapting and rising to new challenges. What's working? Please share by sending an email story of successes and how you have worked through this pandemic to Stuart Nelson at snelson@bva.org.

I hope that each of you, your loved ones, and your community, are well, in body and mind.

What can we do in the middle of it? I do urge everyone to follow the advice and procedures recommended by our medical professionals and local officials. In the past 20 years since I have been a member of BVA, we've gone through the 9/11 attacks, recessions, hurricanes, fires, and many other disasters together. What's worked has been this:

- Taking care of ourselves. All of us need to tend to our physical, mental, and emotional well-being.
- Looking after those peers in BVA by extending some of our time and making phone calls or sending emails to them. If you need help, ask for it, and know that there are many willing volunteers to help.
- Taking care of each other. In the context of our mission and goals, this can mean lending an extra hand in a regional group project or an ear for listening to another veteran.
- Remembering to say thank you and to practice patience, kindness, and openness to fellow veterans and recognize that caregivers are also stressed. These things make a tremendous difference, even in small doses!

Additionally, I've found that when times are tough, volunteer work feels good. It provides daily structure and purpose for the day today. Volunteering for BVA is a gift – a gift to and for the organization and a gift to us as we are rewarded personally for our service and sharing of ourselves. If we already serve BVA and its members, we need not ask, "How can I help?" The answer is this: Just keep doing what we're doing.

Finally, what always brings me the greatest comfort, energy, and gratitude is this – that whatever we do, we do it together. I extend my appreciation to members and thank our staff for their commitment and dedication to our mission.



Executive Director's Message to Members

by Joseph Bogart

To all our BVA family and friends, I hope you are enjoying the warmer weather while being safe. We are facing challenging times never experienced by any of our generations. The COVID-19 pandemic is not only changing ways we do business but also how we connect as blinded veterans.

We are seeing many of our members embracing newer technologies for virtual meetings, discussions, town halls, and staying connected. Our species is one that thrives on communication and personal interaction. While some of us need that personal connection more than others during this challenging time, we all feel the strain. Your BVA is stepping up to help keep everyone informed.

From the latest factual information coming from VA to making sure we turn over every stone before we act, your BVA Headquarters and leadership is doing everything possible to ensure that we all stay informed, safe, connected, and served. We all deserve a brighter tomorrow and have a vital mission to continue serving all veterans and their families coping with sight loss.

Many events within BVA have been cancelled or postponed because of the current pandemic. Others are being scrutinized on whether we can safely conduct them or

must also postpone them. The 75th National Convention has been suspended but the Veterans Day 2020 at Arlington National Cemetery is still a go.

Most of our readers know that I decided to resign as Executive Director to catch my breath and determine what comes next. While this is my last **BVA Bulletin** article as your Executive Director, I will remain in service to our great organization. While my wife and I take a break to determine our next adventure, we are still in the BVA family. I am eager to continue serving my fellow blinded veterans and their families in any capacity that my skills will be of value.

BVA Headquarters is in good hands going forward. Don Overton, your Director of Government Relations, stepped up as the Interim Executive Director. He is the right person to bridge us in this transition. We have worked together well and he will continue taking us onward and upward for a BVA that will endure the trials and tests of time. Don works well with the other leaders of BVA to continue providing the highest class of service to all our BVA families and friends.



Legislative Update

by Donald D. Overton, Jr.



We hope this message finds you and your loved ones well. As the world gradually emerges from this unique period of crisis, BVA's Government Relations team remains fully operational and engaged with our elected officials and public servants. We would like to recognize and thank the countless service professionals who continue reporting for duty – risking their health and welfare – to ensure that our families are safe and provided for.

We particularly wish to acknowledge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Frontline Health Care Workers, Blind Rehabilitation Service professionals, and our colleagues within the Military and Veterans Service Organization community. Collectively, we partnered to ensure that our global stakeholder communities were cared for – and well represented – during a chaotic and unprecedented frenzied reaction to the global pandemic. As we craft this message, the country remains in isolation, so we won't fully realize the results of our efforts, but rest assured, we continue fighting the good fight for all those we have the honor and privilege of serving.

Much of the traditional congressional legislative calendar has been scrapped so that our elected officials can focus on recovery efforts. However, BVA remains focused on three of our legislative priorities poised to clear the final congressional hurdle. First, the modernization of VA's Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant program, mandating that eligibility criteria be inclusive of legally blind veterans. Second, the mandating of

VA's compliance with website accessibility as required by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. And third, the continuation of VA contracting with AbilityOne programs that employ blind and visually impaired veterans.

An important new initiative BVA is championing calls upon Congress, VA, and DoD to request that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (ASDHA) – working with our United Kingdom (UK) Defence Medical colleagues, universities, and non-profit associations – sign a five-year agreement establishing a Joint International Ocular Trauma Task Force. Ocular casualties continue to account for approximately 14.9 percent of combat casualties, with a higher incidence during increased combat activity. Moreover, VA reports show that upwards of 70 percent of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) patients suffer from visual symptoms.

Legendary British-American shared military battlefield cooperation has resulted in a unique level of interoperability and familiarity. This extends to ocular casualty care, beginning with early battlefield treatment guidance provided by the UK in World War I – and blind rehabilitation programs at St. Dunstan's – for U.S. casualties.

This level of cooperation continues today, but largely through individual, unofficial efforts. The Task Force would improve the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of ocular injuries and TBI-associated vision loss. It would also enhance vision research exchange (another new initiative we'll share with you soon). Until then, stay safe, stay healthy, and remember to practice self-care.

Historic National Convention Now Casualty of Coronavirus



Due to the risks inherent in the current COVID-19 crisis, the BVA National Board of Directors announced on May 8 the cancellation of the organization's milestone 75th National Convention, which had been scheduled for August 17-21, 2020 at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill Hotel in Washington, DC.

"The Board has arrived at this most difficult determination with the health and safety of our members, their caregivers, and other convention participants foremost in our thoughts," said National President Dr. Thomas Zampieri. "We also had to consider the travel restrictions that had been placed on Blind Rehabilitation Service employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), who always meet with us simultaneously at our hotel and who often attend our organization's educational sessions, social events, and exhibit hall activities."

BVA's decision follows similar determinations made by other Veterans Service Organizations and Military Service Organizations planning to host events in various parts of the country this summer.

"We express our sincere appreciation to Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill Director of Sales and Marketing Ray Messina and Senior Sales Manager Kate Sullivan for their understanding and concern for our members," said Tom. "Plans are underway to build on this challenging experience, strengthening the BVA-Hyatt partnership starting with a scheduling of the August 2022 convention at the Hyatt."

Tom also indicated that BVA's existing convention and education committees are now

in the planning stages to develop web-based educational seminars, classes, and workshops that will serve both its general membership as well as the BVA Auxiliary, which also holds its annual meetings and caregiver sessions in conjunction with the general BVA gathering in August.

In accordance with the national bylaws, aside from the Director District 5 and 6 elections which are conducted prior to and outside national conventions, BVA will not conduct any business, such as elections, nor consider any bylaws or resolutions outside of the convention. Current national officers will remain in their positions of responsibility until the next convention in St. Louis in August 2021 and there will be no approval of annual minutes or budgets. There will be no discussion this year regarding future conventions.

The National Board of Directors will request that regional groups in their local areas present the annual awards to recognize the recipients, including the Maas, Diener, and Schnair Awards, the regional group gavel presentations, and Certificates of Appreciation to those who have served blinded veterans with unusual dedication the past year. The presentations will also include Gruber and Miller scholarship recipients whenever possible.

Additional information about the upcoming BVA summer educational activities online will be uploaded to the BVA website, www.bva.org, as it becomes available.

Virtual Meetings Assume New Role, New Importance



Events of the past two months with respect to COVID-19 have brought the concept of virtual meetings using personal computers, laptops, and electronic devices to previously unimagined new heights. Once thought to perhaps be a luxury and even a fad, holding meetings that allow each participant to be both seen and heard has now become a necessity.

Indeed, video conferencing software is now the cornerstone of any successful and productive team.

Several platforms allow for full face-to-face interaction among participants, division of the main group into several smaller groups, presentation of PowerPoint slides that can tap into the Internet and show pictures and videos, and whiteboard privileges that allow the host to add written comments to anything formally presented orally or in writing.

One such cloud-based conferencing tool is Zoom, which has already been used by several BVA regional groups holding spring meetings to elect officers and delegates and to conduct other business. It is a platform with accessibility to the blind and visually impaired.

The number of Zoom users has increased rapidly during the first two months of 2020. The company estimates that 2.22 million monthly active users have been added so far in 2020 while in all of 2019 it added 1.99 million users. More than half of Fortune 500 companies are using Zoom.

To set up a Zoom room, or meeting, all that is needed is the following:

- A computer to sync and run Zoom meetings

- A tablet or telephone for attendees to launch the Zoom meetings
- A microphone, camera, and speaker for the meeting organizer
- 1 or 2 HDTV monitors to display remote meeting participants and screen or presentation sharing
- An HDMI cable to share computer screens on the television display and an Internet cable to hard-wire the connection

A free version of Zoom is the best option, especially if the proposed meeting is to test out the platform or the users are not experienced using it. Users can hold an unlimited number of free meetings but group meetings with multiple participants are capped at 40 minutes.

Each meeting has a unique 9, 10, or 11-digit number called a meeting ID that will be required to join a Zoom meeting. An option is to join via telephone, in which case a teleconferencing number provided in the invite can be used.

To join a Zoom meeting other than by phone or tablet, the potential attendee needs an invite from the person or organization running the meeting. This invite is usually delivered via email. It includes a description of the meeting, followed by the date, time, and links (or phone information) to join it. The link will work on a computer and a smartphone. If clients do not have Zoom or a mobile app thereof installed, they will be prompted to download the Zoom software for their device.

Linking into a meeting is simple. Click on the app or the invitee link to do so. Below

the meeting configuration is a “Join” button. Once that button is activated the user is in the meeting.

According to Assistive Technology Specialist David Goldfield, it is a good idea to download the Zoom software on electronic devices prior to joining a Zoom meeting. While it is true that there are prompts to download and install the software, performing the prior download offers a little more control to the process. Things will be quicker and smoother once the client joins the meeting.

Zoom for Windows will download automatically when the client starts or joins their first Zoom meeting but is also available for manual download.

For Zoom on Smart Devices, which allows the client to start, join, and schedule meetings, or to send group text messages, images, and push-to-talk messages, download the mobile app in the Apple Store or in Google Play as appropriate.

A Zoom PlugIn for Skype allows the user to start Zoom instant meetings and invite contacts directly from Skype.



Once in a Zoom meeting, users have features at their disposal such as turning their video and microphone settings on and off, inviting other participants, chatting with other meeting participants, recording the meeting, and sharing the screen.

Accessible platforms such as Zoom make meeting remotely much more human, an essential characteristic for users to feel and stay connected.

Look for Zoom to be used in meetings of your regional groups and in other BVA settings in the very near future. It may not rival the in-person gathering but it may at least be close to working as the next best thing!

A Look Back: BVA Wins VA Recognition

Editor’s Notes: The following was extracted from the front page of the December 1946 *BVA Bulletin*. The event reported was a milestone action, never to be rescinded, with implications nearly 74 years later. BVA remains today the official representative of blinded veterans within and before the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The renowned war hero General Omar Bradley, who granted this recognition at the time, was the newly appointed VA Administrator less than two years after his successful command of the Invasion of Normandy. He became the first ever Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1949 and the last ever to become a Five-Star General. Please note a major stylistic difference of the 1940s—exclusive use of possessive pronoun “his” rather than the more generic “their” or “his/her.”

General Bradley Approves

In order that the BVA might be the official representative of the blinded veteran in his appeals and claims, official recognition of the

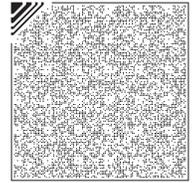
organization by the Veterans Administration was desired. After a comprehensive investigation, the BVA was allowed to make application for official recognition.

Lengthy statements of the purposes, services, and objectives of the BVA were prepared by National Headquarters, as was a special audit of the BVA's finances. On October 21, these statements along with the application were submitted directly to General Omar N. Bradley by the Executive Director, after which they were reviewed by the legal department of the Veterans Administration and declared in order.

Official recognition was granted to the BVA on November 19, 1946 in a special letter from the Administrator of Veterans Affairs. This allows the blinded veteran to have his own organization handle the preparation and presentation of his appeals to the Veterans Administration.

The BVA, though numerically smaller, may now claim equal prestige with the great national service organizations of the country. The Veterans Administration has listed only seven organizations in this class to date. The BVA is the eighth!

The contents of the letter from General Bradley to BVA are reproduced below. Two graphics, one the VA logo at the time and the other a small logo promoting the purchase of war bonds and stamps, are not included here.



VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

Washington 25, D.C.

November 18, 1946

Mr. Lloyd H. Greenwood, Executive Director
Blinded Veterans Association
80 Warren Street
New York 7, New York

Dear Mr. Greenwood:

I am pleased to inform you that I have approved your request for recognition of the Blinded Veterans Association, under the provisions of Section 200, Public No. 844, 74th Congress, in the presentation of claims before the Veterans Administration.

There are enclosed six copies of Form P-21, applications for recognition of accredited representatives of your organization. It is suggested that one of the attached forms be executed by you as Executive Director. You will hereafter be recognized as the proper certifying officer for the Blinded Veterans Association.

The appropriate services of the Veterans Administration will be advised of this recognition.

Very truly yours,
OMAR N. BRADLEY
General, U.S. Army
Administrator

Encls.

BVA and BVUK Pursue Joint Ocular Trauma Task Force



The Blinded Veterans Association and Blind Veterans UK, already partners for some nine years in a series of initiatives that include residential and recreational rehabilitation, mentorship, and adaptive technology through Project Gemini, are now joining forces in an effort to gain support for a United States-United Kingdom Joint Ocular Trauma Task Force (JOTTF) that could move eye and vision research to even greater heights within the two countries and internationally.

Dr. Robert Mazzoli, U.S. Army Col. (Ret), former consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army and a current member of the BVA Legislative Committee, is also working with a group of military and civilian eye trauma university ophthalmologists to establish the American Society of Ophthalmic Trauma (ASOT) and have recently filed articles of incorporation. The new ASOT has some prominent representation, including the Wilmer Eye Institute from Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University in New York City, and Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

As mentioned in the March-April **Bulletin**, BVUK Chief Scientific Officer Dr. Renata Gomes accompanied BVA's Legislative Committee on a series of visits with Members of Congress and Committee Staff members responsible for defense and veterans' issues February 24-28. The group divided into two groups to maximize the time available.

Dr. Gomes' group, which included Tom Zampieri, held a briefing at the British Embassy with senior defense staff. There was also a meeting at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.



Rand Europe President Hans Pung, far left, discussed proposed BVA-BVUK International Ocular Trauma Task Force with Renata Gomes, Tom Zampieri, and James Jorkasky in London March 2. Rand Europe seeks to improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

The following week, March 2-6, Tom and Dr. Gomes were joined in the United Kingdom by James Jorkasky, Executive Director of the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR), for BVUK's Research Week. Accompanied by BVUK President Nick Caplin at several points during the week, the group informed senior UK officials, American Embassy London Defense Staff, leaders in UK research, and other UK-based Veterans Service Organizations of the desire of the two organizations to promote research together in the two countries. The group also visited with Rand Europe Chief Executive Officer Hans Pung, University

of Oxford Professor Russell Foster, and Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organizations (COBSEO) Director of Operations Ian Cawes.

A major purpose of all the meetings, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, was to take the effort a step further, garnering support for U.S.-UK JOTTF that could enhance the research efforts in both countries. The task force has been recommended by UK defense officials as a means of advancing ocular trauma care and research. Emerging from a 2017 Joint U.S.-UK Task Force Charter establishing an international partnership to advance interoperability between the allied military services, the U.S. government has not yet supported the task force.

“Our two nations fought together, and our veterans have rehabilitated together,” Tom has said. “Now let us research together.”

Indeed, the British and American military have experienced more than a century of shared battlefield experience. This includes ocular casualty care that began with the early treatment guidance provided by the UK in World War I and rehabilitation programs for World War I wounded American soldiers at what was then known as St Dunstan’s and now BVUK since 2012. The shared experience was extended to UK guidance in the establishment of the first U.S.-based vision rehabilitation programs through the

then Veterans Administration (VA) with the establishment of the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center.



“Part of the ongoing Project Gemini goals of fostering continued relationships between the allied nations has been highlighting the importance of vision rehabilitation services, improving military trauma management, and ocular trauma research,” said Tom. “This great effort reflects the best example of the efforts of two non-governmental nonprofit organizations in support of our service members and veterans, along with their families, which began in May 2011 with the first Project Gemini exchange.”

Tom has also emphasized BVA’s collaborative efforts with additional organizations in this new frontier of international research, including but not limited to the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), the American Optometric Association (AOA), NAEVR, and the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO).

“The really important thing emerging from our recent work is that BVA is now widely regarded in the UK and here in the United States among professional medical organizations for taking a lead in advocating for vision research and effectively networking with many organizations that are part of this field,” Tom said.

Ceramic Tips “Amazing” in Cane Navigation

by Mike Taylor, Florida Regional Group



The long, white canes for the blind become an even better tool for mobility when a ceramic tip is attached. Ceramic is clay that is hardened by heat; while this process has been around for a long time, modern ceramics are hard enough to withstand conditions in a jet engine. Tips for white canes are currently being made available, and this cane user of over 40 years has found them quite amazing.

Ceramic tips are very hard; the incredible hardness of ceramic tips causes them to last longer and stick less than any other tip, in my experience. The long, white cane is a wonderful tool for mobility if properly employed. However, like any other tool, its usefulness goes hand in hand with the user's skill. Long canes have been favored by the blind in this country since after World War II. Such canes extend one's sense of feeling two steps ahead. Sensing changing conditions in the walking path gives a blind person time to react accordingly. Obstacles in one's path or changes in the surface or level can be felt. With training and practice, individuals learn to recognize signals and react.

Training begins with learning how to hold and position the cane. The blind person extends an index finger along the grip and uses the other three fingers and thumb to hold the cane, which is moved with the carrying arm extended and centered on the body. The rigid tip of the cane is moved to the opposite side of your leading foot when walking. That is, when you put your left foot forward, you move the cane tip to the right. When the right foot comes forward, the cane tip is moved across to your left.

One of the first things I was shown when being instructed in the proper use of a long, white cane was to lift the grip when the cane tip stuck. Many years ago, cane tips got stuck frequently. It is not recommended for blind cane travelers to attempt to continue on their path with a stuck tip. Failing to lift the grip with a stuck tip can result in the traveler being impaled. There have been many attempts to find designs and materials for tips that don't stick but the ceramic tip is the best I've experienced.

When blind persons are lax in executing the proper techniques of cane travel, they can find themselves running into obstacles that are best avoided. Generally speaking, they are rewarded when using proper cane techniques by arriving at their destination without much drama or mishap. Conversely, there are tragic stories of blind travelers that missed, or ignored, signals of hazardous conditions ahead.

The long, white cane has also provided the least expensive solution for blind people to protect themselves when traveling independently since World War II. Long canes can be made from a variety of materials and are available in different configurations, including long rigid, collapsible with a stretchable cable inside, or telescopic. The blind and visually impaired may choose to forego the sturdiness of a ridged cane for the convenience of a folding cane for some or all applications. The type of cane chosen may be made better by the addition of a ceramic tip.

Resolving mobility problems is important to a blind person's success. Becoming proficient in using the tools available to

be able to move about safely is one of the first steps one must master to obtain or regain independence. The newly acquired independence lets you do things for yourself on your time schedule and in your own way.

If you are not as proficient in independent travel as you would like to be, I encourage

you to get acquainted with your VA Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinator. The rewards of greater independence are available for those who master proper cane skills.



Hasbrook Counted Among BVA Early Stalwarts

by Stuart Nelson

During the past 19 years, I have been fortunate to field a few calls from some of the early BVA pioneers who have become legends—the likes of Irv Schloss, Michael Commini, Ray Frey, Al Therrien, Jack Shapiro, Curt Ralston, and Bob Bottenberg. Irv once called while he was still in good health with personal information that he said we at National Headquarters could use “for future obituary purposes!”

A few of these truly extraordinary World War II veterans I also met in person at the national conventions in the early 2000s.

Our **BVA Bulletin** issues of yesteryear affirm that these individuals from The Greatest Generation, all of whom lost their sight before the age of 25, were indeed a distinguished group—distinguished not only by their youth but by what appears to be a superhuman work ethic, high levels of energy, and a hunger and determination for a productive and full life.

One legend whom I have known only by name until recently is Thomas C. Hasbrook, BVA’s third national president, elected in 1948. Meeting him vicariously through a

phone conversation with his son, Dan, and grandson, Matt, I learned that Tom Hasbrook was no exception to the greatness of BVA’s early pioneering efforts. He, together with George “Buck” Gillispie, who followed him as national president, put BVA on a map to a prosperous future. The two of them, incidentally, passed away within two weeks of each other just two months following BVA’s historic 50th National Convention in 1995.

Both Dan and Matt Hasbrook are well-qualified to tell the life story of their father and grandfather, having both observed his adversities and his accomplishments. Dan is a partially retired Indianapolis attorney and one of the six Hasbrook children of whom there emerged three attorneys, one doctor, and two teachers. He was 17 years old when his father was named Blind Father of the Year by the American Foundation for the Blind. Matt is a Managing Director of Mass Mutual Workplace Solutions and Chairman of the Board of Bosma Enterprises, an organization of and for the blind and visually impaired which has recently provided BVA with consultant expertise on the latter’s strategic plan and fundraising activity.

“I have lots of great memories of travels on Penn Central Railroad as my Dad’s guide,” said Dan. “He worked all his life until age 70, never unemployed—a great record of overcoming his adversity and accomplishing a lot, creating a great tradition and name for all his family.”

Thomas Hasbrook’s amazing life story began at his birth in 1920 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. At age 13, his family moved to Indianapolis, where he attended a public middle school and public high schools. Following high school, he attended Indiana University, receiving a Bachelor’s Degree in Business in 1942.

In February 1943, Tom was commissioned as a Marine Second Lieutenant. On January 6, 1944, while serving at Camp Lejeune and Parris Island, he was blinded in a training accident that involved a landmine explosion.

Without the benefit of blind rehabilitation, Tom went to work immediately after his discharge from the service at Eli Lilly and Company as a staff writer in the organization’s public relations department. He credited his wife, Dan’s mother, with motivating him to believe he could do anything he set his mind to, despite his blindness.

“My only exposure to blind people was that they sold pencils and brooms,” he was reported as saying in a 1995 **Bulletin** article reporting his passing. “Mary Jane told me there was no reason that I couldn’t do most of the things everyone else does.”

Indeed, Tom did most of the things everyone else does and much, much more. Besides going on to build a 34-year career with Eli Lilly, he became a popular local politician, a tireless national advocate for the blind and visually impaired through work for

BVA and other organizations, and a successful father and husband.

After Tom demonstrated the use of a guide dog to the Indiana General Assembly in 1945, the legislative body passed a law making it mandatory that blind persons and their dogs be allowed into all public places and buildings—an act that was largely before its time in much of the rest of the country.

He was an active member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and was selected as one of the ten most outstanding young men in the country by the Chamber in 1949.

Tom Hasbrook went on to serve in the Indiana House of Representatives from 1951 to 1954, in the State Senate from 1955 until 1958, and on the Indianapolis City-County Council from 1960 to 1975. He spent the final eight of those years as Council president. In 1975, he took a leave of absence from Eli Lilly to become deputy mayor of Indianapolis under Richard Lugar, who later became both Senator and presidential candidate Lugar. He served under Lugar for one year and another two years during the administration of Mayor William H. Hudnut. At one point, his good friend and fellow local politician, Joseph Barr, urged him to run for the U.S. Congress, something he contemplated but decided against after conferring with Mary Jane.

“Dad was the brains of the family, but Mom was the hard decision-maker,” said Dan.

In addition to his many victorious elections and leadership positions in government, Tom’s political acumen is also on display in a cover photo in the **Eli Lilly Magazine** showing him shaking hands with President Dwight D. Eisenhower.



Tom became president and executive director of the Marion County Health and Hospital Corporation from 1978 until 1983. He was a member and chairman of its board of trustees from 1984 through 1992. In 1993, the County Health and Hospitals Building in Indianapolis was renamed the Hasbrook Building in his honor.

Tom served on numerous boards of nonprofit organizations of and for the blind. For his service to Bosma Enterprises, the organization now hosts the annual Thomas C. Hasbrook Award Luncheon celebrating the accomplishments of the people who help make the Indianapolis community great. In 2018, perhaps not so coincidentally, Bosma was awarded a \$5 million grant by Eli Lilly and Company, an award promoted by Matt Hasbrook and current Bosma executive director and blinded veteran Jeff Mittman, who has also been a BVA member since 2006.

Tom demonstrated the same dedication to BVA as he did in all his other pursuits. In the summer of 1946, just two years after his accident, he organized the Indiana Regional

Group and served as its first president (the position was a chairmanship at the time). During his term in office, he traveled through Indiana at his own expense to personally visit every blinded veteran in the state.

He was elected National Treasurer in 1947 before his election the following year as National President. His “Messages from the President” in the **Bulletin** during his tenure were unusually persuasive, opinionated calls to action directed to BVA members.

“In all his activities, especially as a legislator, Dad was always promoting BVA and other organizations that helped the blind,” said Dan. “He was always acutely aware of what issues were important to the blind and visually impaired, and he was a loyal advocate.”

In recognition of his massive business and community successes, Tom received the 1965 Melvin J. Maas Award for Professional Achievement at the BVA 20th National Convention in New York City.



Did You Know?

- In his MESSAGE from the PRESIDENT in the August 1949 **BVA Bulletin**, Thomas Hasbrook stated the following, a reminder that important BVA topics of discussion and the challenges of 2020 may not be too different than those 71 years ago.

Gentlemen: Let’s talk for a few minutes about regional groups. At the meeting of the Indiana Regional Group recently, it was brought home to me just how important they can be to the BVA set-up. Nationally, we have one convention each year which sadly enough everyone cannot attend. The only other tie we have between our members as a national group is our BVA Bulletin. To provide the needed closer association between members, our regional group scheme is the answer. In the regional group meeting problems of blinded veterans can be taken care of on a local level.



Laissez Les Bon Temps Roller!

“Let the Good Times Roll” was the overriding call as BVA members joined forces with Eagles Lodge 4535 and the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center to celebrate Mardi Gras.

The fun began with the Gulf Coast Health Care System’s Mardi Gras Parade on February 13, attended by members of the Louisiana-Mississippi Regional Group and Robin Robinson of the Georgia Regional Group’s Dublin Chapter. Robin was named queen of the celebration while Tracy Ferro, president of the Louisiana-Mississippi Regional Group, was selected as the king for blind rehabilitation. Although Tracy had been selected, the eventual honoree was World War II veteran and former Prisoner of War, Paul Andreas.

The king, queen, and court member rode in a parade of corvettes, tossing beads and throws to several patients and staff. Following the parade, the celebration moved into the



The LA/MS BVA Regional Group and Eagles Lodge 4535 join forces to celebrate Mardi Gras.

recreation center, where all the participants were honored in some way.

On February 25, Fat Tuesday, the Eagles Lodge donated eight spots on its float to the Blind Rehabilitation Center, where four veterans and four staff rode in the City of Biloxi’s Mardi Gras Parade that featured more than a hundred floats.

“The Eagles treated our blinded veterans very well,” said Tracy. “Starting at 8:30 a.m. and lasting all day, our veterans and staff were treated to food, drinks, music, and many throws to distribute.”

Michael Johnson, Greater Houston Regional Group, was an attendee at the Mardi Gras event.

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” he said, despite being argued on that point by Tracy.

“I could tell by the glint in his eye that he’d like to come back and do it all again,” he said.

Biloxi Blind Rehabilitation Specialist Alecia Jarrett also supported the event.



Left to right, Jester Tracy Ferro, Queen Robin Robinson, and King Paul Andreas.

“The veterans really enjoyed themselves and would love to come back again next year,” she reported.

Eagle Lodge 4535 President Dean Martel expressed pride in his lodge and said he appreciated the chance to honor the veterans with vision loss.

BVA and Eagles Lodge 4535 work together throughout the year on several events to strengthen the bonds between the community and blinded veterans.

Innovative Video Offers Tips for Running during COVID-19

The new social distancing rules in place due to COVID-19 can make getting outdoors and staying active difficult. Rich Hunter of Folsom, California, a member of the Northern California Regional Group, has come up with a creative and ingenious video tutorial on how to abide by the rules of social distancing while running with a sighted guide. He and his guide, Matt Linderman, also demonstrate the art of making a simple tether that can connect runner and guide on any running course. Check it out! <https://bit.ly/RunningTipsCOVID19>

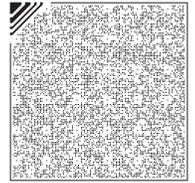
Full-Court Press for Blinded Veterans Day by Tracy Ferro

What is the new normal? At this unpredictable time, we need to maintain some stability and predictability. Like the sun rising and setting every day, so too shall we celebrate holidays. One of those special to us is the 28th of March every year.

As we all know and try to pass along, it is Blinded Veterans Day. This day is set aside by presidential proclamation to honor blinded veterans specifically. It is a day of special recognition during which we must go out in

public, get on our soapbox, and become the town crier.

We have the opportunity to go to our state, county, and local governments to request their support for Blinded Veterans Day via proclamation.



Left to right, Randy Bosarge, Ken Taylor, Jackson Mississippi Board of Supervisors; Mark Carver, LA/MS Regional Group; Supervisor Barry Cumbest.



LA/MS BVA Member and Gulfport resident Rosey Monticue with Gulfport Mayor Billy Hewes.



Here in the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group, we also requested from both states that every county, parish, and many major cities support us with proclamations. Between flooding, tornados, and now COVID-19, we have not received all of them back yet, but through discussions with many elected officials, it is evident that we have their full support. We asked for and looked forward to getting our photos taken with these officials but had to cancel many due to the virus. Some BVA members who were out spreading the word for us did get some photos.

Things will return to normal. Just be aware that normal will be different.

Greater Houston Regional Group Launches Southeast Texas Chapter by John Lee

The Blinded Veterans Association of the Greater Houston Regional Group (GHRG) launched its South East Texas Chapter (SETX Chapter).



Left to right, George Pate, Jerry Killion, Lanie Brown, Congressman Babin Staffer; John Lee, Jerry Myers, and Mike Nicholas. Photo by Angela Brandon.

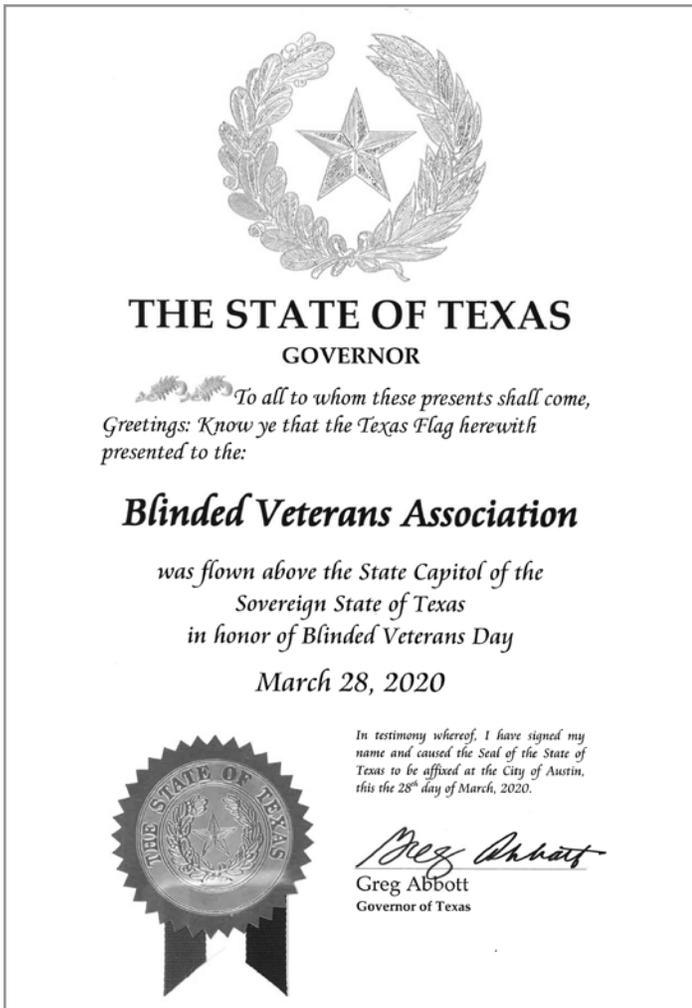
The chartering chapter officers are: John Lee, President; Jerry Myers, Vice President; Jerry Killion, Secretary/Treasurer; Mike Nicholas, Sergeant-at-Arms; and George Pate, Chaplain. They were administered the BVA's oath of office by Ms. Lanie Brown, a representative from Congressman Brian Babin's office.

Proclamations from Governor Greg Abbott and Beaumont Mayor Becky Ames were presented to the chapter officers. Congressman Babin's office also presented the SETX Chapter with a flag that was flown over the United States Capitol "In Recognition" as well as a Challenge coin for each chapter officer.

Special guests attending from the Greater Houston Regional Group were Wade Davis, President, and Eddie Tardy, Secretary. Wade Davis gave a brief history of the Blinded Veterans Association.

Other honored guests attending were Blake Hopper, representing Congressman Randy Weber; Lanie Brown and Dana Young, representing Congressman Brian Babin; W.L. Pate Jr. (LTC Ret.), representing Beaumont Mayor Becky Ames; Martha McKinney, representing the Veteran Affairs Beaumont Outpatient Clinic; Mrs. Ivy Pate, representing the St. Elizabeth's Foundation; and Susan Landry, representing the St. Elizabeth Hospital. Finally, a special "thank you" to the Beaumont Westbrook High School (ROTC) Honor Guard, who posted and retired the colors of our country and state.

The SETX Chapter of the GHRG will serve blinded or visually impaired veterans in nine counties surrounding the Beaumont area. Individuals wishing to support BVA



Veterans Day March 28, 2020.
 In testimony whereof, I have signed my name and caused the Seal of the State of Texas to be affixed at the City of Austin this the 28th day of March, 2020. Signed, Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas.



Lanie Brown presenting President John Lee with proclamation and flag.
 Photo by Angela Brandon.

by volunteering to serve in our auxiliary or to support the SETX chapter with cash donations, please contact Secretary Jerry Killion at jdkillion@msn.com or call 936-402-0741.

Pictured above is a certificate from the Texas Governor. At the top of the certificate is the Texas Star, and at the bottom left is the Texas Seal. Below the Texas Star is the following text provided here due to the reduced size of the graphic:

The State of Texas Governor: To all to whom these presents shall come, Greetings: Know ye that the Texas Flag herewith presented to the Blinded Veterans Association was flown above the State Capitol of the Sovereign State of Texas in honor of Blinded



Lanie Brown swearing in chapter officers George Pate, Jerry Killion, John Lee, Jerry Myers, and Mike Nicholas.

New National Chaplain Assumes Helm

National President Thomas Zampieri announced May 18 the appointment of Dr. Ron Lester of the Southern Arizona Regional Group as the new National Chaplain.

“We thank Chaplain Johnnie Busch, Sr. for his service to BVA and welcome Dr. Lester

to this important responsibility,” said Tom. “The appointment comes at a time in which we hope to better engage our regional group chaplains and support them with the resources that can help them in reaching out to our more isolated BVA members.”

Dr. Lester will be assisted in this effort by Dr. Paschal Baute, a former Navy Chaplain, author, teacher, member of the Kentucky Veterans Hall of Fame Honor Roll for Outstanding Military and Community Service. He is also a member of the Kentuckiana Regional Group.

At right is a letter of introduction from Dr. Ron Lester.

Regional group chaplains who have not recently submitted their contact information to their District Directors or to National Headquarters should forward that information to Dr. Lester at ronlester45@gmail.com.



May 14, 2020

Dear Fellow Chaplains –

My name is Dr. Ron Lester, and it is my honor to have been recently appointed the BVA National Chaplain. I am a disabled Vietnam-era veteran with retinitis pigmentosa, a hereditary eye disease resulting in total blindness. Despite this challenge, I hold degrees in business, education, and administration, and have served as an ordained minister to diverse populations in the United States and overseas. I am the author of two books and current host of a faith-based online radio program for those with special needs. My experience as both chaplain and service officer in organizations committed to veterans will help me to serve and support you in my new role.

My desire is for us to come together to encourage one another, so we can in turn engage those veterans who lack connection and support. I am asking for your suggestions to improve our outreach to blinded veterans. What resources and training would be effective to equip those within each region willing to serve this population? I am confident we can find a way to build one another up and improve the emotional and spiritual well-being of our struggling brothers and sisters.

Paschal Baute, former Navy Chaplain, BVA member, is eager to help with this project. In the next few days, he will send out a list of listening skills useful in relating to our veteran community. We look forward to your questions, comments, and ideas.

In His Service,

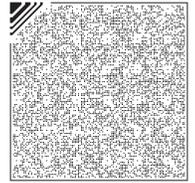
Dr. Ron Lester
520-741-1217
ronlester45@gmail.com

Regional Group Important Dates

BVA Administrative Director Brigitte Jones typically publishes and posts a list of important dates and deadlines for regional groups leading up to each national convention. The lists are printed in the first three bi-monthly **Bulletin** issues of the calendar year and are uploaded to the BVA website.

With suspension of the 75th National Convention, the only remaining relevant dates in the list are June 8, the latest date for National Headquarters to mail ballots for

regular elections of Directors of Districts 5 and 6; June 15, when National Headquarters mails annual financial report forms (three copies) to treasurers of regional groups; July 3, when ballots for regular elections of Directors of Districts 5 and 6 are due at National Headquarters; and July 13, when National Headquarters is scheduled to count ballots for the elections of Directors of Districts 5 and 6.



Choose a version of The Bulletin

Would you like to receive a Word, PDF, or CD version of the **Bulletin** as well as a hard copy? Or a combination of all of the above? Are you signed up for our monthly email newsletter? Do you know any members who haven't received their copy? Please let us know by calling BVA Headquarters.

2020 National Summer Sports Clinic Cancelled

As of June 2020, the San Diego VA Medical Center and the National Veterans Sports Program scheduled for September 20-25, 2020 has been cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns. "VA made this decision out of an abundance of caution for the health, safety, and well-being of veterans and their families, our employees, and community partners." This event will be held in 2021 in San Diego.

The National Summer Sports Clinic exists to "promote the value of rehabilitation utilizing a variety of summer leisure activities and adaptive sports." Sports include sailing, surfing, kayaking, cycling, and more. The program serves as a glimpse of the many recreational sports awaiting veterans.

For more information on the cancellation of this event, visit <https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/national-veterans-summer-sports-clinic/>.

Dole Foundation Selects Devoted Caregiver, BVA Friend



Barb Webb of Columbia, Missouri, ardent supporter of the Blinded Veterans Association, and the mother of Mark Wilson, secretary/treasurer of the Heartland Regional Group, has been selected by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to represent military caregivers in the state of Missouri as a 2020 Dole Caregiver Fellow.

Barb is among 30 military and veteran caregivers joining the 225 past and present caregivers who represent all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia to bring attention to the challenges facing America's 5.5 million hidden heroes—the spouses, family members, and other loved ones who provide \$14 billion in voluntary care for service members and veterans every year.

Mark Wilson is a former combat engineer who served two tours of duty as an expert in explosives tasked with locating and disarming improvised explosive devices. He was injured in a nonservice-connected firearms accident that cost him most of his sight.

Barb's selection to this prestigious group, now in its eighth year, is based on her expansive experience and insight into successful caregiving, and her capacity to assist other caregivers with the challenges and opportunities with which they are faced.

Barb and Mark are regular attendees of the BVA national conventions and staunch supporters of Operation Peer Support activities. They have also supported BVA through Mark's masterful woodworking craftsmanship, a passion of his both before and after his injuries. Over the years, Mark has produced award plaques, signs, and other



items that have been of impeccable quality.

"I look forward to sharing my caregiving journey and empowering 'hidden heroes' across the nation," said Barb. "I want to get communication out to the rural areas and let caregivers know that they are not alone, offering resources and help in any way I can."

Hidden Heroes is the campaign behind the work of the Dole Foundation. It represents the work involved in bringing vital attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and seeks solutions to their continuous challenges and long-term needs.

The goals of Hidden Heroes are three-fold: To raise awareness of the issues military

caregivers and their families confront every day; to inspire individuals, businesses, communities, and civic, faith, and government leaders to take action in supporting military caregivers in their communities; and to establish a national registry, encouraging military caregivers to register at **HiddenHeroes.org** to better connect them to helpful resources and support.

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation, founded in 2012, is the pre-eminent organization empowering, supporting, and honoring the nation's 5.5 million military caregivers—the spouses, parents, family members, and friends who care for America's wounded, ill, or injured veterans. It also seeks increased research and effective public policy that will genuinely affect caregivers' lives for the better.

Dole, a former U.S. Senator, Secretary of Transportation, and head of the Red Cross, is a caregiver herself as the wife of former Senate Majority Leader and presidential candidate Bob Dole, who was wounded in World War II combat.



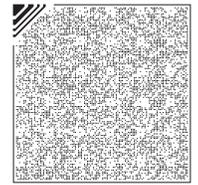
“It was quite an honor to have Bob and Elizabeth Dole call me personally and welcome me to the fellowship,” Barb said. “I was so surprised and amazingly calm—I felt like I had known them forever.”

Barb will have the opportunity to meet the Doles in the Nation's Capital later this year. She is the third Dole Foundation fellow with a BVA connection. The first class of Dole Foundation caregivers in 2012 included Melissa Johnson, wife of Sean Johnson (Midwest Regional Group) and Debra Schulz, mother of BVA member Steven Schulz (Greater Houston Regional Group).

Did You Know?

- At a meeting held on November 19, 1976, the BVA Executive Committee, acting on behalf of the Board of Directors, sanctioned the beginning of the organizational process for a BVA Auxiliary (BVAA). Renee Feldman, for whom the Auxiliary scholarships were later named, was one of the major catalysts for the Auxiliary's start. Renee had earlier organized a meeting at the 31st National Convention and followed it up with a letter to those who had attended the meeting. By February 1977, when several spouses met during BVA's mid-winter Board meetings, plans were already in motion for the new BVAA, including Auxiliary activities slated for the 32nd National Convention in Washington, DC.

Operation Peer Support News



Operation Peer Support (OPS) is a program designed by the Blinded Veterans Association to assist blind and visually impaired veterans and their families with educational resources and adaptive sports to help them regain independence, social skills, and confidence through rehabilitation. The accounts below include two from the same event but are described somewhat differently by Brian Harris and Raquel Welch.

Steamboat Springs

by Brian O. Connell

From March 1 to March 5, 11 blind veterans and two caregivers went to the Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports (STARS) advanced ski clinic.

This was the second event that was held at the STARS Ranch this year. Unlike the first clinic, the participants and caregivers were responsible for their travel expenses to and from Denver, Colorado. Just like the first event, everyone stayed at the new STARS Lodge and spent three days skiing, snowboarding, snow biking, and enjoying camaraderie, laughter, and exercise. The STARS program is designed to enable persons with disabilities of all kinds, including visual impairment and blindness, to expand their horizons, learn new skills, and enjoy activities



they might have previously enjoyed.

Every person involved with the STARS program at Steamboat Springs provided exceptional support and friendly service. The staff at the STARS Ranch hosted us as if we were family. The STARS staff on the mountain at Steamboat Springs provided exceptionally professional and supportive skiing, snowboarding, and snow biking guidance and instruction. Each veteran and their guide became immediate and lifelong friends. The weather was great, the companionship was fun, and the overall experience was absolutely superlative.

Social contact of all kinds is so important to those of us who have limited or no vision. We sometimes find ourselves in a difficult place, unable to establish and maintain a normal social life due to our inability to drive, for instance. Gathering together at the STARS



Ranch and on the mountain in Steamboat Springs was not only an invigorating on-the-mountain experience, but it reinforced the importance of taking part in social and athletic events. Thanks to everyone involved who supported, provided financial assistance, encouraged, and participated in this wonderful program.

Kayaking the Florida Keys

by Brian Harris

BVA Operation Peer Support collaborated with Team River Runner for a week of kayaking, fellowship, and mentoring with others. The following BVA members attended the event: Hugo Gonzalez, Raquel Welch, Don Bickham, Carlos Pere, and team leader Brian Harris.

The event was held in South Florida and participants stayed at the Amoray Resort, which was footsteps away from the crystal clear, blue waters of the Florida Keys.

The veterans were given an opportunity to swim with dolphins. They were paired with their guide and a certified dolphin trainer to do tricks with the dolphins and to free swim.

“This event was so amazing,” Raquel said.

The veterans were treated as guests of honor at the American Legion and the Elks Club in Key Largo. The people of the community came out and thanked the veterans for their service and sacrifices. Hugo Gonzalez stated: “It’s events like these that make me feel like I am not alone and that I have a brotherhood.”

On the third day of kayaking, the veterans were introduced to Sean Hannan, who started a foundation called **Guitars for Heroes** for which he started raising money to purchase

guitars for veterans and provide them with a basic lesson before gifting the guitar to them. The vets were so impressed by his offer that the entire group was enthusiastic and eager to learn the lesson. After teaching them how to tune the guitar and explaining to them keys and chords, the vets practiced one hour each day. On the last day of the event, all team members were presented with a guitar of their own.

Three staff members also received BVA coins. The first coin was given to Jamie Jackson for his knowledge and expert navigating through the Florida mangroves and seas. The second coin was presented to Sean for blessing the veterans with the guitars and lessons. The last coin went to Jennifer Eaton for being the only visually impaired mobility instructor. Jennifer came from Pennsylvania to assist with mentoring, kayaking, and helping guide other visually impaired vets.

In my opinion, it is events like these that challenge vets to step outside their comfort zones and to see the progress they’ve made at the end of the event.

One Paddle at a Time

by Raquel Welch

Days before the trip, I was excited to go even though it was out of my comfort zone. I was up for the test even if it was going to be challenging. The trip to Key Largo took place March 1-8, 2020 and was with Team River Runner.

This trip included the trip leader, Bill Finger; the trainer, Jenn Eaton; the tug boat was provided by Colin Drew; the wonderful guides included Bill Finger, Jamie Jackson (the mangrove/spiritual guide), Jenn Eaton





of the kayak. When being in a kayak, you can't make any sudden moves. That is where I messed up. Kayaks are like animals as they seem to sense fear. Ever since I lost my sight, I have had a fear of putting my head under water. I panicked, stopped paddling, and this caused me to lean a little bit too far to the right so I fell out of my kayak. My fear was automatically gone. Because I was already wet and I'm a soldier, I got back in my boat in open water. After that incident, we kayaked to an island called John Pennekamp.

again (250 kayak rolls), Deborah Reyes (River doc), Celiann Gonzalez (Cell), Mark Fratoni, David Hernandez, and Colin Drew (my guide).

My flight experience was good, but the energy of Key Largo was A-MA-ZING. The very first morning, my group and I were walking down the street to get fitted for our kayaks and a complete stranger pulled up and gave us a blank check. This is just an example of the love Key Largo has for its veterans.

Getting on with the week, on Monday we were fitted for our kayaks and personal protective equipment. We also learned to index our paddle and got used to both the water and our guides.

Tuesday, we went for our first kayaking trip. We kayaked 3.8 miles and I flipped out

Wednesday, we kayaked 6.8 miles to the Florida Mangroves. We were around many different species of jellyfish and swam over a few friendly manatees. Then we learned how to play the guitar.

I would like to just give out a BIG thank you to Sean (Hannan), the guitar guy also mentioned by Brian. I would like to thank him first for giving us the guitar at his own expense then teaching us how to tune it.

Thursday, we went swimming at Dolphin World. It was a pleasant distraction from a challenging week. Other peaceful activities included arts and crafts, yoga, and lunch. That night, we went to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Lounge. We were treated to a barbecue dinner and Painkillers, a local favorite rum beverage. We were the guests of honor so everyone wanted to come up to talk and introduce themselves. Hugo got on stage and spoke to the crowd of his experience of being injured, recovering, and his appreciation to veterans and their support. It was a wonderful, heartfelt speech.

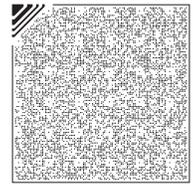
Friday was an easy day. We had a short paddle to John Pennekamp, cleaned up the boats, and had dinner in town. Saturday was



very windy and not safe for us to go on the water. We cleaned up all the equipment, did some souvenir shopping, and started packing. We had the opportunity to meet the founder of Team River Runner, Joe Mornini. We had lunch, said our goodbyes to the group, and headed to Miami for our early morning flight home.

I highly recommend this trip that included remarkable instruction, fascinating weather, and priceless bonding time with my fellow blinded veterans.

Recent and Upcoming



OPS Events—April 2020

OPS looked forward to sponsoring two BVA members in the Heroes New Hope Foundation Veterans Turkey Hunt April 21-25. Travel, lodging, license fees, tags, meals, and a professional guide were included

Unfortunately, blinded veteran participation in the event had to be suspended for this year due to COVID-19.

All other OPS events are currently on hold pending changes in local and state policies regarding travel, recreation, and congregating in large groups.

2020 Wheelchair Games Cancelled

The 2020 National Veterans Wheelchair Games event is canceled due to COVID-19. The 2021 National Veterans Wheelchair Games will be held in New York City on August 8-13. The application period for the 2021 National Veterans Wheelchair Games will open the first full week in January 2021 and will close April 2021.

Mark your calendars! If you have any further questions, please go to <https://www.wheelchairgames.org/athletes/faqs/> to view their frequently asked questions.

2020 TEE Tournament Cancelled

On June 8, 2020, the National Disabled Veterans TEE (Training, Exposure, Experience) Tournament announced that the 2020 Tournament is cancelled to protect the health, safety, and well-being of even participants. VA and DAV are looking forward to hosting the TEE tournament in 2021. For further information on the cancellation, visit <https://www.veteranstee.org/>.

Auxiliary's View

by Patricia Hail, BVAA Reporter (and Past National President)



Opinion v. Advocacy

An **opinion** is a “view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter” (Webster). Expressing one’s opinion is, therefore, talking about that which is formed in the mind, and is frequently quite personal. Opinionated is unduly adhering to one’s own opinion.

Advocacy is the “act or process of pleading, defending, and/or maintaining a cause or proposal, especially before a tribunal or judicial court” (Webster). An advocate, therefore, must have the facts in order to support a particular cause.

Opinions may or may not be based on fact. An advocate’s support has no basis unless it can be substantiated with education, fact, repeated experience, or research.

People are often emotional about their opinions because they own them. Advocates usually speak passionately because they learned, lived, and/or studied their causes.

When, as a blind person or caregiver, you are asked what you think about a topic related to a blind cause, consider your answer – and don’t be shy about identifying whether you are responding with your opinion or advocacy.

When a veteran is declared legally blind a whole set of opinions (mostly negative) arise about what the now blinded veteran can and cannot do; and what they know and do not know.



Hilariously funny is that the blind can no longer hear, so others talk louder; talk around rather than to the blind. Suddenly, the blind can no longer hold leadership positions in the community or other organizations. They are often barred from holding particular jobs or positions because others believe that the blind are beneath the sighted in abilities to learn and do. Generally, these opinionated persons lack the knowledge or understanding needed to even enter a conversation about blindness.



Advocacy for the blind has proven that the blind individual can do almost anything a sighted person can do – just differently. BVA and BVAA are advocacy organizations. In their 75 years, BVA has advocated successfully for the VA VIST, BROS, and BRC programs, among many other blinded veteran issues. More recently, they successfully advocated for changes in the VA caregiver program.

Expressed opinion or advocacy? Do you want emotion or information – or both? If you want an opinion, it’s easy to get. If you want information, be specific with your question or ask the person whom you believe has the facts.

Be conscious of this fact: The better you are as an advocate, others, in order to devalue and overpower you with their negative, emotional opinions, will attempt to “maintain” their imagined power by referring to your advocacy as being opinionated.

Advocacy is empowerment and independence. A successful advocate can rise above the self-generated opinions of others.

Reality says it’s the difference between emotion and facts. The best part is that you can get involved. Advocate for yourself! Get educated! Be sensitive and passionate in your advocacy for our veterans and their families!



Headquarters Receives Carroll Correspondence

Rachel Rosenbaum, Executive Director at the Thomas J. Carroll Center for the Blind from 1976 until 2009, has shared several business letters between Father Carroll and BVA National Officers dating back to the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Rachel has been working on a biography of Father Carroll for several years and located the letters in files that she only recently discovered and sent to BVA in early January. Father Carroll founded the Catholic Guild for the Blind that later became the Carroll Center that continues to bear his name.

Most of the correspondence Rachel located was between Father Carroll and BVA’s first National President John (Jack) F. Brady. A few letters are copies of letters between individuals, usually members of BVA, that were given to Father Carroll as a reference to a problem or issue.

The letters reveal and outline some of the accomplishments, problems, frustrations, and conflicts that were part of BVA’s early history, including challenges in working with the then Veterans Administration (VA). In 1945, Father

Carroll served on an Honorary Civilian Advisory Committee, Program for the War Blinded of the U.S. Army, that transitioned a year later into VA’s Committee on the Blinded Veteran.



The same letters point out Father Carroll’s dual and often conflicted role as BVA’s National Chaplain while representing VA’s interests as the agency worked toward developing services for blinded veterans for the first time.

For more information about the correspondence or to receive copies, contact Stuart Nelson, BVA National Headquarters, at 202-371-8880, Ext. 316, or at snelson@bva.org.

From the Veterans Services Staff

by Claudia Baldwin



Understanding the Blue Water Navy Act

We discussed this act in a previous **BVA Bulletin** but we wanted to provide some updates on it.

The legislation, which became effective on January 1, 2020, has provided \$140 million in retroactive benefits for these Blue Water Navy veterans and their survivors. This new act extends the presumption of herbicide exposure such as Agent Orange to veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, as well as veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone between September 1, 1967, and August 31, 1971.

Formerly, eligibility to receive disability compensation based on a presumption of herbicide exposure applied to veterans who served on the ground in Vietnam or within Vietnam's inland waterways. Veterans are encouraged to apply in three ways:

1. If a veteran has never filed for this presumption of benefits, VA Form 21-526EZ, with the diagnosed presumptive condition, should be filed.
2. If a veteran previously filed for Agent Orange presumptive conditions and was denied benefits, the veteran can reopen the claim with VA Form 20-0995. This is the same for a surviving spouse who was previously denied Death Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits.
3. If a surviving spouse has never claimed DIC benefits and the spouse died from a presumptive condition due to Agent

Orange exposure, the surviving spouse can file for benefits on VA Form 21P-534EZ.

COVID-19 has changed the way we do business. It is the same for VA. Compensation and Pension exams are being done virtually in situations where a physical face-to-face isn't necessary.

Veterans are encouraged to provide any relevant external medical records to be submitted in the development of a claim. Hearings are being conducted virtually with new technology on the application, "VA Video on Demand" whenever available, as well as through teleconferences.

Additionally, VA has extended financial relief to veterans who currently have a debt with VA. This relief act is in effect until further notice and states the following:

- Suspending all actions on veteran debts under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department.
- Suspending collection action or extending repayment terms on pre-existing VA debts, as the veteran prefers.

For benefit debts, veterans can contact the VA Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648 to make arrangements.

For health care debts, veterans can contact the Health Resource Center at 1-877-222-8387 to make arrangements.

The benefits and claims relief actions have also allowed extensions for the following:

- perfecting claims
- challenging adverse decisions
- submitting Notices of Disagreement
- submitting Substantive Appeals

- responding to Supplemental Statements of the Case

Veterans who wish to request claim extensions can simply submit them with any late-filed paperwork. They do not have to proactively request an extension in advance. For added convenience, VA will also accept typed or digital signatures instead of wet signatures on its forms due to the current social distancing guidelines. Those with questions can call 1-800-827-1000.

If a veteran has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and has a claim at the Board of Veterans Appeals, the claim will be advanced on the docket for determining a decision on the claim.

Another change in VA benefits is the discontinuation of the use of Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs).

The **VA.gov** website states that DBQs were designed to assist veterans living overseas to obtain medical evidence in support of their benefits claims where limited options were available. Today, VA works with contracted providers in more than 30 foreign countries to conduct disability medical examinations. Therefore, eliminating these long and tedious forms for providers who aren't trained on how to complete them effectively was necessary.

We highly recommend that you contact our National Service Officers for assistance in filing for any benefits discussed in this article.



Extraordinary Feats without Sight

by Ed Henkler

It is my firm belief that you can thrive with vision loss. I always like to point out that I'm sighted, so while I believe you can thrive, I cannot claim to have walked that journey. My belief starts with observing my mom, who lost her sight to age-related macular degeneration. When she was diagnosed, there were no treatment alternatives. My family also had no experience with vision loss.

It took time, and it wasn't easy, but she learned to thrive. She traveled outside of the country for the first time. She became an active user of public transportation, independently traveling to the Philadelphia Flower Show and other densely crowded settings. She loved sports, and we would routinely take her to live events. She couldn't see the action on the field, but she could soak

in the atmosphere. She also became a frequent spokesperson for associations for the blind.

Not quite as close to home, but I suspect many of you know the name, is Brad Snyder. He's a Naval Academy graduate who lost his sight to an IED in Afghanistan. Sudden, dramatic loss of sight. There's much more to the story but, one year to the day after he lost his sight, he won swimming gold at the London Paralympics. Granted, Brad was the Swim Team Captain at the Naval Academy, so he didn't go from zero to 100 in one year; nevertheless, he did go from thinking he'd never swim again to setting world records. Not bad.

Many of you know Erik Weihenmayer and Lonnie Bedwell, or at least know their names, Lonnie is a BVA member. They are

well known for adventuring anything from mountain climbing to extreme kayaking. These are amazing people who are blind and doing things most people wouldn't even consider, with or without vision.

Right about now, you might be thinking that's all great, but I'm not worried about setting world records or even kayaking. My needs, especially as our world struggles with a global health issue, are much simpler, you say. Perhaps this is your story. You live near one of VA's Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC's) all of which are shut down for the near future. The BRC staff has been redeployed to what are deemed more pressing needs to control the spread of the pandemic.

You are also used to spending time not only with friends and other blinded veterans but also just your normal circle of friends. Now we are practicing this thing called social distancing. Sounds simple in concept, but why would you want to lose contact with your friends during a uniquely stressful time?

The answer is that you don't need to lose contact with your support network. In fact, I understand there's a push to switch from the phrase social distancing to physical distancing. That makes so much more sense. To stop the spread or flatten the curve, as they like to say, it is essential that we greatly reduce physical interactions. In no way does this suggest that we cannot talk with our friends. In fact, it is the perfect time to reconnect with people, especially those who live alone or who are feeling vulnerable.

If you still have some level of vision, videoconferencing technology has become astoundingly good. You can interact as effectively online as in person. Some might argue that you can be more effective online. There are obviously many other ways to

connect virtually, with or without accompanying video.

BUT, there's one caveat, and it applies to business meetings as much as a social call with your friends. You must be present. This is not a time for multi-tasking. You need to focus every ounce of your energy on that person or meeting, even if you're not physically with them.

Last year was the first time I attended a BVA annual conference. I hope to make it to the next one. The energy I felt in Tulsa was palpable. BVA is a wonderful group of people who don't know how to quit. I've never been as moved as when I saw someone who was blind leading a pack of other people who were blind. A lot of white canes in one place! That was extraordinary, but it was the spirit that moved me. People thriving with blindness and helping others newer to the journey is what it's all about.

If you're already thriving with blindness, reach out to others by phone, email, or videoconference. Even just sharing a joke says I'm thinking of you. If you're struggling, don't wait for someone to call you. Take the initiative and call them. Better yet, if you have the energy, find opportunities to help others. Sometimes we just need to help ourselves. There's nothing wrong with that. However, helping others takes your mind off your challenges and maybe releases just a little bit of karma.

Ed Henkler is the Founder of The Blind Guide (theblindguide.com). He publishes a weekly blog on topics ranging from new technology and employment initiatives to home modifications and thriving with blindness. His April 8th post features a free printable about his Thriving Levels. Print it out, personalize it, and begin (or continue) climbing those levels.





Chaplain's Corner

by Johnnie E. Busch, Sr.



Greetings to my fellow veterans, their families, and all our BVA friends and supporters. I approach you during this challenging time, a time that is unprecedented in the history of our organization and, for that matter, our nation. Each of us is dealing with the challenges of COVID-19 in different ways but I'm sure there are difficulties no matter where we are or who we are. I trust that all of us are coping the best way we know how.

My first instructor in Birmingham in 1988, Lynn Hedl, recently passed away very suddenly on April 9. Blind from birth, she was a fantastic person who taught us veterans how to function in the world and how to use the technology that could assist us. She was both a Living Skills Instructor and a Computer Access Training Instructor. This was an additional piece of sad news that many of us in the southeastern United States have been coping with as we will most assuredly miss Lynn.

Like many of you, I have been pretty much housebound, performing household duties and exercising indoors. I have stayed away from others and followed all the government edicts. I have been able to conduct a prayer group over the phone.

I have not done any volunteer work since March 14. If you have read my past columns, you know I'm always promoting volunteerism. For that reason, it has been frustrating to be stuck in the house. I'm sure many of you share the same sentiments.

Notwithstanding all the frustrations, there are still so many ways we can be of service

to others at a time when they perhaps need us the most. One of the things I've tried to do is stay in touch with the members of my regional group. I talk to some of them every day. About 40 percent of my calls are with veterans. I also call my fellow church members, and one of them even called me to see how I was doing. FaceTime has been especially helpful recently!

Another thing we can and should do is to read our emails regularly. Please don't ignore them as someone out there may need our help.

Don't overlook other opportunities to be as self-sufficient as possible. This allows us to serve others more effectively. One opportunity I've had with my son is to get out and donate some masks. It's a way of helping people practically while encouraging people to stay positive and encouraged. Just like we cannot allow our disability to hinder us or our situation, we should also not allow our conditions to do so. When possible, contact your church for food or use Instacart for groceries. Try to secure medications online first, also using Instacart. Practice social distancing if you need to utilize Lyft or Uber.

As the National Chaplain, the best advice I could provide to all of us would be to stay positive. This crisis will eventually pass but, in the meantime, we must also take care of ourselves by using good judgment and by following all of the guidelines we have been given by our local state, and national leaders. Stay focused, and trust the process. Other crises have come and gone so we must have faith that this one will also.

Remember that there is something bigger and better than your past and present.

Interviewing: A Healing Act

by Dr. Paschal Baute, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Group



In my project to create a guide or handbook for veterans coping with sight loss, conceived in 2015 (because none existed), it took me about two years to learn which questions to ask and how. I will share the secret to doing so effectively.

To live in darkness or semi-darkness as a blind individual is a huge challenge to one's sense of well-being. We depend so much on our vision. Not being able to see the food on our plate in front of us, or how to get it on a fork or spoon and get it to our mouths without spilling or dropping it, is like climbing Mt. Everest on one leg – or worse. This is not to mention our tendency to bump into things and knock things over. To be forced to give up driving is maybe the ultimate insult to our sense of independence. Perhaps this is the reason VA calls our legal blindness “Catastrophically Disabled”.

Now, to ask the blind and visually impaired in a caring way, “Where do you find meaning and hope?” is a compliment, believing they have done so or can do so. The question implies that we believe they have come to terms in some way with their blindness, with all its stress and discouragement, and have done more than accept it. They have found meaning and have something to share with me and others about their lonely and unique journey.

Such a focus by a caring interviewer willing to listen with empathy is an act of healing in and of itself. The grieving process needs a witness in order to be validated and affirmed socially. That affirmation communicates the worth of individuals in their personal struggles and journeys.

As the blind person, the affirmation tells me that what I have endured is valuable to someone else and perhaps others too! To have

someone daring to really listen and wanting to know about me in this way is healing in itself—courage evoking courage, and vulnerability embracing vulnerability, creating a moment that can be seized for a deep human connection. My unique journey then feels affirmed and worthwhile.

With this boost from another, we raise a glass to resilience and to surviving no matter what. And, for the moment, I can feel reconnected with that deep sense of tribal loyalty I felt in my military life. I again possess a brief sense of my “warrior soul”.

A new work by David Kessler, **Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief** (2020), suggests that finding meaning in our loss and our trauma is the ultimate stage in the grieving process—after denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. To be asked that same question about meaning and hope helps affirm our passage through the darkness.

So, I suggest that to be interviewed in this way is a healing act for both persons. As the interviewer of some 32 published stories in my book, **Blind Veterans Coping with Loss** (2020), I can say that I am very much healed and encouraged by these stories of blinded veterans. The stories have motivated me to keep on risking and dreaming big myself—to continue forward at age 90, and to keep giving back.

Even greater value results from knowing that one's story has been published in a book available to the public, or from knowing that the story is being broadcast to the online world through smartphones or some other electronic means. This recognition can become a public validation of one's personal journey into, and out of, darkness—a sort of “bronze battle star” to be shared.



Adaptive Sports Programs Welcome Blinded Veterans

Tim Hornik, BVA Director of District 2, has compiled a list of recreational activities and organizations, both through the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as a variety of nonprofit organizations. He also secured the contact information for each organization.

According to Tim, the list is incomplete since there are so many local and national programs available that could be included on any such list.

“I can state that over the years many BVA National Board Members and some BVA staff get asked, ‘Why are Operation Peer Support events our only activities?’” said Tom Zampieri.

“In answer to that question, there are many organizations out there that can offer BVA members of all ages activities closer to their homes and can provide transportation funding for participants to attend,” said Tom.

The programs and organizations Tim compiled include Disabled Sports USA, VA Recreational Therapy, the VA National Sports Program, United States Association of Blind Athletes, Achilles International (chapter-based community sporting opportunities), the Challenged Athletes Foundation (provides grants), the Independence Fund, and Team River Runner. Team Red, White, and Blue, Project Healing Waters (chapter-based fishing), Operation Second Chance, Adaptive Adventures, and Blind Endeavors are also on the list. Organizations that are not focused on adaptive sports, but which may be able to assist, include Delta Gamma, Lions Clubs, schools for the blind, Lighthouses, Hadley, and Centers for Independent Living.

For contact information and specific URLs for each website, please contact Stuart Nelson at BVA National Headquarters, 202-371-8880, Ext. 316, or at snelson@bva.org.

PANDEMIC 2020: NURSES OF AMERICA

By Warner Murray

We value the nurses, and respect their craft,
The most important, member to the staff.
Nurses carry the torch, our bearer of light,
Giving hope in darkness, all day and night.
This is the hour, when you're in great need,
To save a life, your mantra, oath, and creed.
We cherish the nurses, each and every time,
For great compromise, put their lives on the line.
I appreciate the nurses, right from the start,
These words of inspiration, are truly from my heart.



Are you drinking enough water?

Retrieved from: <https://caregiver.com/articles/drinking-enough-water/>

Getting Enough Fluids

It's important for your body to have plenty of fluids each day. Water helps you digest your food, absorb nutrients from food, and then get rid of the unused waste. Water is found in foods—both solids and liquids, as well as in its natural state.

With age, you might lose some of your sense of thirst. To further complicate matters, some medicines might make it even more important to have plenty of fluids.

Remember, water is a good way to add fluids to your daily routine without adding calories.

Try these tips for getting enough fluids:

- Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink water or other fluids.

- Take sips of water, milk, or juice between bites during meals.
- Add liquids throughout the day.
- Have a cup of low-fat soup as an afternoon snack.
- Drink a full glass of water when you take a pill.
- Have a glass of water before you exercise.
- Drink fat-free or low-fat milk, or other drinks without added sugars.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so sensibly and in moderation. That means up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks for men.
- Don't stop drinking liquids if you have a urinary control problem. Talk with your doctor about treatment.

Red Cross Supports Military, Veteran Caregiving

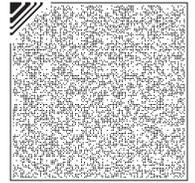
The American Red Cross has a specific caregiver program for Military and Veteran Caregivers (MVCN), offering peer-based support and services to caregivers providing care to service members and veterans. Their mission is to provide these caregivers with peer support to reduce isolation and increase connection, engagement, knowledge, skills, and hope.

MCVN achieves its mission through an online peer support community, a peer mentor program, and peer support groups both online and in-person. MCVN also has events, activities, conferences, retreats, camps, trainings, and webinars for these caregivers.

Additional information is available at <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/military-families/services-for-veterans/military-veteran-caregiver-network.html> or emailing info.mvcn@redcross.org

In Remembrance

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



Alabama RG

Jimmy Wayne Jones

Arizona-Central

Northern RG

Frank Dickinson

Cape Cod & Islands RG

Alston Chace

Gerald O'Malley

Connecticut RG

Luis Centeno

James Phalon

Emerald Coast RG

Charles Shelton

Florida RG

David Armstrong

Donald Blevons

Cecil Bradley

Clayton Craig

Elton Crandall

Donald Deptowicz

James Duda

James Gamberton

Carol Ganey

Robert Graveline

Kirk Harmon

George Hovan

Wilbur Jordan

Richard Kettering

Robert Lincoln

Earl Ray Proctor

John Rummel

Edward Sinka

Donald Vokey

Charles Waters

Lewis Wright

Gem State RG

Andres Cortez

Georgia RG

Henry Adger

Sheridan Denny

Marion Hendon

Percy Phillips

Greater Houston RG

James Barker

George Church

Richard Longbottom

Allen Duke

Henry Glenn

Robert Lee Lawson

Gene Robinson

Rix Watson

Heartland RG

Daniel Evans

Illinois RG

Zygmunt Friedel

Louisiana-Mississippi RG

Lionell Pepiton

Maine RG

Stacey Dunton

Donald Phelps

Massachusetts RG

Raymond Chevalier

Daniel Gallagher

Edward Solano

Norman Welch

Michigan RG

Nanette Dinsmoore

Donald Gelsbaugh

Mid-Atlantic RG

Samuel Kramer

Roger Lewis

Thomas Rozzell

Michael White

Midwest RG

Glenn Fishbeck

Montana RG

Gaylord Case

Clifford Schmutelar

Mountain State RG

Carl Bennett

NAT – Military Bases &

No State RG

Oliver Crawford

Danny Dunn

James Moore

Robert Sanford

New Jersey RG

George Blum

George Dickman

Louis Gambaccini

Leonard Goldstein

James Gordon Fowlie

John Harnig

New Mexico RG

Byron Braden

Bryce Pungowiyi

Lawrence Tafoya

Donald Wadleigh

New York RG

Benjamin Binyard

James Griswold

Victor Ramon Acosta

Henry Zielinski

North Carolina RG

James Collins
 Charles Gill
 G. Roger O'Shields

Northern California RG

Harry Derum
 Richard Lowder

Ohio RG

Stanley Braden
 John Dodds
 Donald Houk
 Donald Marks
 Mike Walker

Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana RG

William Mallory
 Kenneth Stump
 Charles Wilson

Oregon Columbia RG

Charles Larson
 Jerry Mallett
 Charlotte Noddin
 Derald Stange

Pennsylvania RG

Joseph Armstrong
 John Forsey
 Gene Light
 Joseph Phillips
 Norman Stetler
 Alan George Will

Puerto Rico RG

Demetrio Castro-Ayosto
 Hiplito Delgado Pagan
 Ramiro Garcia Rivera
 Eduardo Gonzalez
 Luis Gonzalez Arroyo
 Luis Angel Gonzalez Colon

Rhode Island & Southeast Mass. RG

Edmund Depin

Rio Grande RG

Dwight White

Rocky Mountain RG

Clarence Dee
 Edwin Giles

San Diego RG

William Murray

Sooner (Oklahoma) RG

Ray Gunnells
 William McPherson

Southern Arizona RG

George Gonzales

Southern California RG

Lynwood Barker

Southern Nevada/Silver State RG

James Dalton
 Dale Jensen

Spokane**Inland Empire RG**

Donald
 Geiberger
 Peter Hanrahan
 Robert Hurt

Tennessee RG

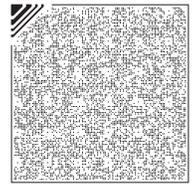
Elzo Townsend

Washington RG

Melvin Ballman
 Ray Gerring
 Charles Powers

Wisconsin RG

Neil Ford
 Bruce Keller
 Carl Mates
 Donnette Schroeder
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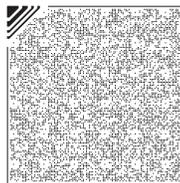
**FREE MATTER FOR
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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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

Final Thought

Just weeks prior to stay-at-home orders and international travel restrictions, representatives of BVA, BVUK, and NAEVR (National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research) met in London in a collaborative effort to garner unprecedented support for ocular trauma research internationally--with the United States and the United Kingdom leading the way.



Pictured March 2 outside Blind Veterans UK headquarters, left to right, are NAEVR's James Jorkasky, BVUK's Renata Gomes, and BVA's Tom Zampieri prior to a whirlwind week of visits with British dignitaries regarding the initiative.

The time the three spent together in the UK also led to a most improbable British Parliament motion three weeks later in which BVA was recognized for its 75th anniversary and its longstanding friendship and partnership with Blind Veterans UK, both before and since the establishment of the Project Gemini exchange initiated by the two organizations in 2011.

