

The Bulletin

Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



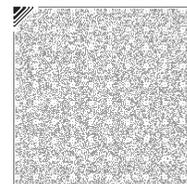
Summer 2020



TRUE FRIENDS AND ROLE MODELS



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Cover Photos:

After successfully coming to terms with their own loss of sight, blinded veterans Kennan Horn and Eric Marts have risen to the challenge of helping other veterans do the same. Their stories of selfless service, given through BVA’s Operation Peer Support initiative and in ways personal to them, are highlighted in this issue of **The Bulletin**.

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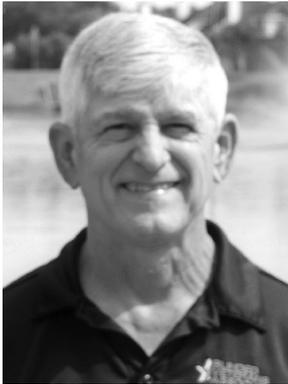
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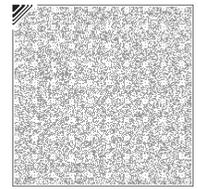
Published bi-monthly by and for blinded veterans, and sent to all blinded veterans without charge. **The Bulletin** informs BVA members about their Association and the issues that affect blinded veterans.

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



President's Page

by Dr. Thomas Zampieri



As we enter late summer and early fall, I hope that this issue of the **Bulletin** finds you and your families safe and in good health. On behalf of the entire BVA Board of Directors, I send our thoughts and prayers to those who have had COVID-19 and wish them a quick and permanent recovery.

During this time in which a vaccine is being developed, I encourage all of us, especially those who are high risk, to follow the guidelines of public health officials and our medical providers. Although knowledge of COVID-19 is still limited, we cannot go wrong in applying many of the preventative lessons we have learned from diseases such as the Spanish Flu, Typhoid, Yellow Fever, Smallpox, and Polio.

We missed seeing our fellow BVA members at the national convention this year after the difficult but necessary decision to extend the adjournment of the convention until August 2021 in St. Louis, Missouri. Meanwhile, the Board is working closely with BVA staff to make various changes in order to reduce our operating expenses and streamline our fundraising with direct mail while also working to expand grants, corporate partnerships, and the individual donor pool. We appreciate the cooperation and support we are receiving in making such changes a reality.

While our financial situation continues to improve, the major challenge confronting BVA is our decline in membership numbers.

This same trend is taking place in all other traditional Veterans Service Organizations. As we see in each issue of our **Bulletin**, both through articles as well as the **In Remembrance** section, there are significant losses in our World War II and Korean War era veterans. This affects us not only on a national level but also within our regional groups as we struggle with participation at all levels. I encourage our regional groups to communicate more with the members using whatever means is most effective for them, whether it be a simple telephone call, a text message, or a face-to-face chat using digital technology.

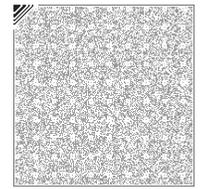
VA Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) predicts a continued decline in the number of blinded veterans and an increase of low vision veterans enrolling in care. VA is using teleconferences to engage with blinded and low vision veterans. We are working closely with BRS on how these current trends will affect our recruiting efforts at BVA. These efforts have traditionally focused on meeting new blind and low vision veterans in rehabilitation, something that has not been possible the past seven months with the pandemic.

This is indeed a time of considerable uncertainty as we wade through these unprecedented events and chart our future direction. Whatever we do, we must do it together and continue to find ways to bring about the necessary changes to the organization to meet our challenges. I sincerely extend my deep appreciation to our BVA members and thank our BVA staff for their commitment and dedication.



Legislative Update

by James R. Vale



It has been an incredible summer in the area of Government Relations at BVA with the passage of two significantly impactful bills to blinded veterans—H.R. 3504, the “Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019,” and H.R. 4920, “The VA Contracting Preference Consistency Act.”

Such a milestone would not have happened without the cumulative efforts of many advocates: former BVA Government Relations Director Melanie Brunson and present Government Relations Specialist Erin McConnell, Executive Director Donald Overton, National President Thomas Zampieri, advocacy support from other Veterans Service Organizations, and even key members of Congress. This was truly a team effort in support of blinded veterans.

The Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019 will allow eligible disabled veterans to receive housing grants for specifically tailored adaptive home equipment. The new regulations increase the maximum grant amount from \$63,780 to \$98,492 and allow recipients to utilize up to six withdrawals until the grant is fully exhausted (the prior law allowed three withdrawals). Most importantly, these new regulations allow half the grant amount to renew in ten years for eligible disabled veterans. The grant previously required the loss of a lower limb, in addition to blindness, to qualify. Now, veterans with

service-connected blindness will qualify only if their corrected visual acuity is 20/200 or worse in their better eye or if they have a field of vision that does not exceed 20 degrees in diameter in each eye. The law increases VA’s annual authorized cap of 30 grant awards per year to 120.

The VA Contracting Preference Consistency Act addresses the unemployment rate of blinded veterans by ensuring that companies and nonprofit organizations employing blinded veterans and other disabled veterans will receive contracting preferences from VA. This legislation will result in improved job security for thousands of blinded and severely disabled veterans working at these companies and greater potential profitability for organizations seeking VA contracts. At the time the bill was introduced, expiring VA contracts with AbilityOne companies threatened the jobs of approximately 2,800 individuals who are blind or severely disabled in 30 states. The legislation preserves the AbilityOne Contracting Program with respect to products and services VA was purchasing before the Veterans First Program was created in 2006. Without the passage and signing of this legislation, meaningful employment opportunities for blinded and other disabled veterans would have remained in jeopardy.

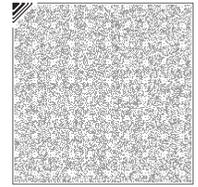
Our last legislative focus for the year is S. 3587, “Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act of 2019.” It has passed the Senate and is currently being held at the desk in the House. It may go forward by unanimous consent, or it could be attached to another bill to be passed, or, if no further

action is taken, it will then expire at the end of this legislative session. This bill directs VA to report to Congress the accessibility of VA websites (including attached files and web-based applications) to individuals with disabilities. The legislation mandates that the report identify websites, files, and applications that are not accessible to such individuals. The report should also include VA's plan to make each of them accessible.

Inaccessible websites, applications, and databases have long plagued VA, as accessibility was not built-in from the very beginning. Often, accessibility has been merely an afterthought and frequently has

lost out to other budget priorities in VA's \$4 billion annual IT budget. This has unfairly disadvantaged blinded veterans and hindered their advocates who cannot navigate VA's inaccessible websites, applications, and databases. S. 3587 will ensure that VA remain focused on the needs of all blinded and disabled veterans in accordance with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The door to get this bill passed into law is rapidly closing. We are continuing to work with our stakeholder partners on this important issue.



S. 3587

Summary: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on the accessibility of websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs to individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes. Passed in Senate on March 25, 2020 and currently up for a vote in the House of Representatives.

Section 1, Short Title: This Act may be cited as the "Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act of 2019."

Section 2, Study on the Accessibility of Websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs to Individuals with Disabilities:

(a) **Study**—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a study of all websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine whether such websites are accessible to individuals with disabilities in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

(b) **Report**—Not later than 90 days after completed the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on such study.

(c) **Elements**—The report required by subsection (b) shall include the following:

- (1) A list of each website described in subsection (a) that is not accessible to individuals with disabilities in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- (2) For each website identified in the list under Paragraph (1),
 - (A) the plan of the Secretary to bring the website into compliance with the Requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
 - (B) a description of the barriers to bringing the website into compliance with the requirements of such section, including any barriers relating to vacant positions at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

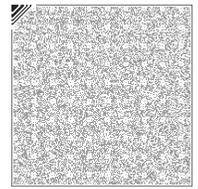
(d) **Website Defined**—In this section, the term "website" includes the following:

- (1) A file attached to a website.
- (2) A web-based application.
- (3) A kiosk at a medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the use of which is required to check in for scheduled appointments.



Executive Director's Message to Members

by Donald D. Overton, Jr.



Like many individuals, families, and organizations, BVA has faced some unprecedented challenges over the past several months. The year 2020 was to be a special one for our blinded veterans, celebrating 75 years of extraordinary history. We had a national convention planned for our Nation's Capital highlighted by unforgettable activities and opportunities with new and old friends.

The gathering, had it been held, would now be in our rearview mirror by several weeks. Other unique activities planned for 2020 are also now on hold due to the global pandemic.

Amid the turmoil encompassing the world, my thoughts have recently turned to the values upon which persons, organizations and institutions, military units, and nations base their survival and prosperity. One such person—Eric Marts of Moorhead, Minnesota—stands out in my thoughts for the way in which he has continually exemplified the values of the United States Army, regardless of adversity.

Eric and many of his fellow blinded veterans have courageously returned to the same life of service they were forced to leave after a serious injury. While the work they do now is different, the ultimate objectives are the same—helping others experience a better quality of life, guiding them to achieve their potential, and serving as their advocates and defenders.

Guided by similar values, BVA seeks organizationally to serve blinded veterans the same way Eric lives his life. While we may fall short, especially in difficult times such as these, we continue to see progress and achieve major victories in our advocacy efforts benefiting blinded veterans and their families.

On August 8, for example, we witnessed the presidential signing of Public Law 116-154. This law included two of BVA's longstanding legislative priorities, the first of which relates to housing grants that allow blinded veterans access to emerging home technologies previously unattainable for them. The second addresses the unemployment rate of blinded veterans by ensuring that companies and nonprofit organizations that employ them receive contracting preferences from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This was a monumental event during a year of unique challenges and a few setbacks for BVA and its membership. We will continue to persevere in the face of adversity, returning always to the values we learned and fought for as Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen.

We have every reason to believe that we will again emerge victorious and continue our service to blinded veterans and their families for many years to come.



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.

Horn and Marts Keep Giving

Ken Horn: Rising to the Challenge

by Stuart Nelson

When Lieutenant Colonel Kennan “Ken” Horn (Ret.) was first nominated in January 2017 to receive the most prestigious annual BVA award, he knew next to nothing about it and just slightly more about a group of veterans he would soon thereafter champion and with whom he would become a significant player.

Nor did he realize that he had come upon an organization and friends with whom he could continue living his passion—that of spending time with other veterans.

“I had not been to a single BVA meeting or convention, and had only recently joined the organization, and all of a sudden I was dumbfounded to find out that they want to give me an award for professional achievement over everyone else in an organization of thousands who could have been selected,” he said.

Walking up to receive the award from then National President Dale Stamper before a crowd of blinded veterans and their family members at the BVA 72nd National Convention Awards Banquet in Jacksonville, Florida, he still felt new to and unconnected with the organization, its history, and those

who had been recognized in the past.

“I received that recognition not really knowing what was behind it or what it meant,” he said.

What he did know was that life had thrown him a curve ball or two, especially in recent years, and that there were some mountain peaks he had found himself climbing before he could once again come down from that mountain and connect with those same curve balls as he had done so many times before.

Following the Jacksonville BVA convention, Ken learned that the Major General Melvin J. Maas Award for Professional Achievement is an honor named for a veteran of World War I, a former member of the United States Congress from Minnesota, and a Major General in the Marine Corps Reserves during World War II. Melvin J. Maas became totally blind in 1951, joined BVA shortly thereafter, and became an important contributor to its success as a National Vice President in 1953 and National President in 1960.

Retired Two-Star General Rita Aragon, Secretary of Military and Veterans Affairs for the Oklahoma Veterans Commission in 2017 and now the State of Oklahoma Secretary of Veterans Affairs, nominated Ken for that

same Maas Award. Her assessment of Ken's drive and determination as a "consummate overachiever" only begins to tell his story—a story that now benefits BVA and dozens of his blinded veteran comrades whom he likes to treat as family.

Through a BVA initiative known as Operation Peer Support, Ken is more particularly aware of and concerned about a group of veterans who have more recently experienced loss of sight. As Chair of the Operation Peer Support Committee, he oversees the participation of the members of this group in adaptive sports and recreational activities, educational opportunities, and endeavors that help them better care for their own well-being.

"Ken's initiative, consistency, managerial capabilities, and his tenacious and aggressive work ethic are astounding, and to have done this as a legally blind soldier is a testament to the capacity of the human spirit," said General Aragon. "He is an outstanding leader and developer of young talent, and he is totally devoted to making a difference in veterans' lives."

Ken Horn is a native Oklahoman, born in Bartlesville and graduated from high school in Gore, Oklahoma in 1986. Shortly thereafter he enlisted in the Army Reserves as an Infantryman. He graduated from Northeastern



While Ken's mountain in life is loss of vision, he believes everyone has their own personal mountains to climb. What matters, he says, is how one climbs that mountain.

required surgeries following his retirement, his focus was not always on his eyesight. He simply did not know what it was or the extent of his difficulty seeing. He had good central vision but sometimes did not recognize that something was located immediately next to him. One experience involved a fellow paratrooper with whom he nearly collided in mid-air during a parachute jump training exercise.

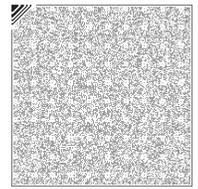
"I did go see and complain to some Army doctors along the way, but my eyes were never given a field of vision test until I took

State
University
in Tahlequah
in 1989

as a distinguished military graduate and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Air Defense Artillery.

Ken's Army assignments included service in the 101st Airborne Division, the 25th Light Infantry Division, and the 10th Mountain Division. He was a Recruiting Operations Officer for the University of Central Oklahoma Army ROTC for two years and a Professor of Military Science during his final four years.

Ken suspected that something was wrong with his vision, especially his night vision, for much of the first 16 years of his career. Because of other injuries he experienced, some of which



my son to an optometrist in Turkey, where I badly failed an eye test and then another one that eventually led to the diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa,” he said.

“Before that, I had never shied away from the most challenging assignments and I never really felt disabled. I call myself the Mr. Magoo of the Army medical system, for those who remember that cartoon, for what I was able to continue doing even with vision problems.”

Ken served four more years on active duty following the RP diagnosis, now as a successful Professor of Military Science at the University of Oklahoma in U.S. Army Cadet Command. He took a failing program and in fewer than three years saw it double in size and rank second among the 36 schools in his brigade. It ranked first among large schools. In 2007, he was the University of Oklahoma’s Student Association Outstanding Faculty Member of the Year.

Following his Army retirement in 2010, Ken served as a program manager for ALATEC, a defense contracting company at Fort Sill, and as the Executive Director for the Air Defense Artillery Association. He took ALATEC’s business line from one employee to 71 employees in 30 months and in three years won 15 government task orders worth more than \$18 million while also managing multiple projects and groups of personnel in seven different states.

Ken’s recognition as a Melvin J. Maas Award recipient resulted in large part from his work at the University of Central Oklahoma during 2014-17. Responding to a job posting for a Manager of Veteran Student Support in 2014, Ken was the first ever to hold the position. The two-person office, including a VA-certifying official that he managed, soon

grew to include a Director position, four University of Central Oklahoma employees (three of whom were veterans), and four student workers. All were veterans or dependents of veterans and all were on a VA work-study program, making the office almost entirely self-sufficient from university funding.

The university established the Veteran Higher Education Resource Office (VetHERO) in 2012 to address the academic, financial, physical, and social needs of student veterans, but the office lacked oversight of the various projects and programs.

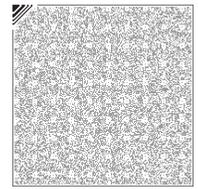
Ken said that the university had more than 700 veterans and their dependents using veterans benefits but found that 200-300 additional veterans were on campus and not using their benefits.

“We tried to take a holistic approach and made our office attractive to family members as well,” he said. “Many didn’t realize that the GI Bill wasn’t just about the GIs but for families also, and we processed the applications for them too.”

Following his Maas Award honor Ken remained at VetHERO an additional two years.

At the same time Ken chairs BVA’s Operation Peer Support Committee, he also enjoys a consulting opportunity with Yorktown Systems Group, a longstanding firm providing customized solutions and management capabilities to help federal and civil organizations achieve their goals and objectives.

As both a role model and a true friend, Ken now brings the same perseverance and drive to the Operation Peer Support initiative that he has rendered to the dozens of other pursuits



in his life. The beneficiaries are the Blinded Veterans Association and the individual veterans for whom he is trying to make life better as they adjust to the challenges of legal blindness, most of them veterans who are considerably younger than he—something he is more than accustomed to from his now dozens of years of service.

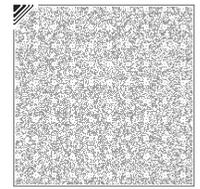
Ken's hopes for BVA's future include a wise stewarding of donation funds that can be stretched a bit further than ever before. He also hopes for continued opportunities for blinded veterans to feel the exhilaration of skiing down mountains, climbing up mountains, hiking the Appalachian Trail, kayaking, fishing, scuba diving, and much more.

"In many cases all we lack are transportation funds to make these things happen," he said. "I would hope that the cost of transportation would be considered a small price to pay for the opportunities these activities provide to our veterans to break down personal barriers and regain their confidence and sense of purpose in life, and that they can successfully do hard things."

Ken also views as absolutely crucial BVA's involvement at every VA BRC as an ambassador of what is possible through rehabilitation and membership in the organization.

"We need to be there every step of the way for our fellow blinded veterans with a sincerity to learn and know about each and every one of them," he said. "As our BVA motto simply states regarding the assistance we provide each other, we must offer that same unwavering moral support and welcoming that all of us have needed many times since losing our sight."

Values Lived in Army Firmly Rooted for Marts by Stuart Nelson



The acronym is LDRSHIP and the capital letters denote Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage. These are the values of the United States Army to which Master Sergeant Eric Marts of Moorhead, Minnesota first committed himself when he enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1985.

They are values to which he has remained devoted and true, notwithstanding the unexpected adversities placed in his path—things he never could have predicted or believed could happen.

Born and raised in the small community of Fergus Falls not far from Moorhead, Eric attended the North Dakota State School of Science following high school graduation and while serving in the National Guard. He volunteered for Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and was picked up by an Armored Brigade Combat Team that went to the Middle East for less than four months. Eric returned from his service in Desert Storm free of injury.

More than a decade later he was equally committed, making himself available for deployment with the 34th Infantry Division to Iraq when the U.S. invaded that country after 9/11.

On May 11, 2006, Eric and his unit encountered a roadside bomb while on patrol outside Fallujah. He was a considerable distance from the explosion, but the impact was enough to knock him off his feet and onto his back. He got up almost immediately because he did not appear to be hurt. He kept working.



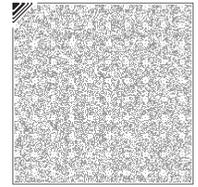
Standing third from far right, Eric enjoys a dose of the fellowship and camaraderie with fellow blinded veterans that he sorely missed when leaving the Army. As before, he seeks to be on the giving end of such relationships.

“That’s simply what you do as a trained member of the military,” Eric said of his commitment that day. “You get up and keep working without complaining when there are others around you who are losing limbs or being severely burned.”

Within a few days of the explosion Eric began having some trouble seeing clearly out of his right eye. He thought mucus had accumulated, thus causing the blurred vision, but he could not find any. Things were fuzzy. Doctors told him he could return to perfect vision as they studied test results that revealed nothing. Back then, the correlation between Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and optic nerve damage had not been established.

Fast forward just five months and now eight or nine smaller explosions later, Eric had lost most of his vision in his right eye and was now having problems with his left eye as well. He wore a patch over his right eye so that the blurred vision in the right eye would not

interfere with the still relatively decent vision in his left eye.



“There was now talk of me leaving for medical help and that I needed to do it, but in my own head I was sure that I was not going to leave my unit,” he said. “I was not going to leave my guys when they were already shorthanded—not going to happen.”

An Army regulation stating that 50 percent vision is enough to stay on active duty allowed him to convince commanding officers and medical personnel that he could stay. What no one

knew at the time was that Eric had suffered concussions that had damaged his optic nerve beyond repair, and more so after that first blast.

Only when Eric began experiencing a loss of vision in his left eye, well into 2007 and a year after the first explosion, did he come to terms with the possibility that he would have to leave to get help.

“The hardest thing through all of it was the realization that I wouldn’t be with my guys anymore and could not go back to them,” he said. “I had to fight the feeling that I had abandoned the people I had trained with, fought with, had my life threatened with, and spent all my time with.”

There were other hard times ahead, not the least of which was learning how to live without sight. There were surgeries to fix other injuries—a separated shoulder, a broken piece of his collar bone, and severe neck pain. There was significant time spent alone

at Fort Gordon's Eisenhower Medical Center. Then there was training at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center, once using ZoomText and later having to repeat some of the same training using a screen reader after losing the remaining 10 percent of his vision. There were also close friends who were happy to see him but who did not know how to emotionally handle his injuries themselves or how to maintain the friendship under the new conditions.

"Sure, there are plenty of opportunities to get discouraged, especially when there is physical pain and the prescription painkillers are there to maybe self-medicate," he said. "As my wife, Bobbie, can attest, it's just never been in my personality to be tempted by that and I utterly refused that route."

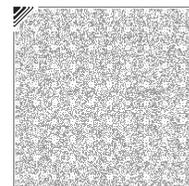
Resilience and patience paid off in the long run. Opportunities soon arose as a local radio talk show host, a spokesperson for veterans on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, a representative of veterans at the 2014 State of the Union Address, and a new home for him and his family donated by Homes For Our Troops. He again attributes his resilience and the resulting opportunities that came to him to

the experience and perspective that comes with age.

"The negatives for many are very real," he said. "Feelings of failure, depression, hopelessness, and despair are out there, especially when the maturity might not be there to put it all into a long-term perspective."

Eric's loyalty, sense of duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage as a resilient blinded veteran are now directed toward his fellow veterans. He wants them to never feel alone or abandoned, neither by their fellow veterans nor by their country. Eric has felt the ongoing support of his community and his country, and he wants his fellow veterans to always feel the same.

Eric's membership in BVA has provided him with a forum and a vehicle for inspiring his fellow veterans as he has engaged with them in adaptive sports activities, as he has represented the organization in a panel discussion that addressed TBIs at the national conference of the Association of Research in Vision and Ophthalmology, and by his commitment to bring light to their lives through times of darkness.



Did You Know?

- In the late spring of 1949, just four years after BVA's founding, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and the Bowlers Victory Legion (BVL) both made significant financial contributions to the new Association. The assistance made it possible for BVA to overcome some of its early financial struggles.
- AFB donated sufficient funds for the printing of the **BVA Bulletin**, at that time a monthly publication, for a period of six months. BVL made its second contribution of \$2,500. Blinded veterans who were still active in BVA in the early 2000s recalled that these contributions were critical to getting BVA over the financial hurdles during those challenging early years.
- The July 1949 **Bulletin** expressed gratitude for the donations and the spirit in which they were given.

A Tale of Two COVIDs

by Tracy Ferro



When a novel virus turned into a global pandemic in early 2020, the world was rocked and decisions had to be made with the very little information available about this disease now termed COVID-19. VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRCs) made the smart yet painful decision to evaluate and, if possible, discharge all inpatient veterans.

Meanwhile, staff did not forget the inpatient veterans nor the longtime outpatient veterans who became friends over the years. They took the time to complete wellness calls on all veterans, old and new. These calls were a welcome ring for both the veterans and the staff. As the pandemic continued, BRC staff and veterans began using VA Video Connect to host trainings and support groups to help us maintain a healthy balance and camaraderie.

As someone who is a regular volunteer at my local BRC, I was asked to host trainings and meetings. It was a welcome reprieve from the monotony of day-to-day social distancing.

The classes were going great!

Then, one day I sat back and just listened because I had awakened with a scratchy throat and didn't want to aggravate it by talking too much. That night I avoided kissing Kathy Good Night and let her know I was feeling a little sick. She checked my temperature and chalked it up to old age or a summer cold. We said to one another that I "should be" okay in the morning. The next day, Thursday, I still had a scratchy throat and a headache, "probably eyeball driven." I also felt a little achy with an occasional cough, which was obviously due to pollen. I took a long nap that day and my bride fed me some chicken soup.

"I'll be back in fighting trim tomorrow or

Saturday at the latest," I told myself.

Friday morning arrived and this darned "cold" had its hooks into me, so I decided I was going to make a huge pot of homemade chicken soup. I also thought back to where I had been and with whom I had been in contact over the last week. The only place I had been was the Eagles Lodge and everybody was wearing a mask and social distancing from each other. Besides, no one there was sick.

I had not gone out since Tuesday and called the only other two people with whom I had been close to physically. They were both fine. Plus, and this is the biggie, there was no fever. It was just a cold. That evening, Kathy came home and, after a few light coughs, in a scratchy voice of her own, said that she was not feeling too good. At that point I knew she was blaming me but I really did not care. I was sore all over and starting to have difficulty breathing.

That night we went to bed without the normal marital sparring about who made whom sick. Normally that's what we would have done but now we were starting to get concerned. We told each other, "we'll see how we feel in the morning and make a decision then." I, for one, was just hoping that at any point somebody would come along and move the darn Buick off my chest. Kathy just wanted to jump into a bathtub full of ice water. These were not good signs.

Saturday morning arrived and off we went to Keesler Air Force Base and its emergency room. On the way there we commiserated on how lousy we felt but at least she was not having trouble breathing like I was. This was a great relief to me as I was starting to panic.

With all that had gone on and what we had learned about this horrible virus, I knew that if I were admitted to the hospital, there would be no visitors coming to see me and, although ventilators were plentiful, I really did not want to go down that road.

After climbing what felt like 5,000 stairs, we made it to the check-in desk and the young sergeant got all of our information. We took a seat. So glad to know we would be seen soon. Yet, knowing that I was going in first because of my breathing, I was really scared that I might never see my wife and son again. Ever! An EKG, a chest X-ray and a few simple tests followed with the nasal swab. I had never had a COVID-19 test before but was told that the test goes to the top of the skull with the swab. It probably does, but I honestly did not care at that point. My blood oxygen levels were good. The X-ray was good. EKG checked out. Now, for the “Walk of Life.” I walked about 50 feet and my blood oxygen levels were checked to determine if I would need to be admitted to the hospital. Mine were still good. I was safe at that point, but I sure wished they would move that Buick.

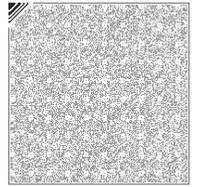
Kathy, on the other hand, was really worrying me as her temperature was high. After some blood tests for her, along with all those they gave me, the doctor came in and announced that we were both COVID-19 positive. Two of the only bright things to come of this day were these: one, we weren’t going to be admitted to the hospital, and two, we both had this together. The only thing now was to quarantine and wait it out.

The Gulf Coast BRC (GCBRC), on the other hand, was preparing for action. With COVID-19 numbers climbing in our area, the decision was made to use the GCBRC facility for hosting a different rehab program on

campus while its “home base” was converted for COVID-19 patients. The staff jumped into high gear to prepare the building for the upcoming conversion. All the specialized blind rehab equipment was removed from the patient rooms and common areas and then secured. Another wipe-down by the staff occurred and then came the VA engineering and environmental management folks to tweak a few things for the other program. Plastic shields were installed at the nurses’ station and Medical Support Assistance desks placed in the lobby for social distancing. Locks had to be changed and procedures for the new group in the building were developed. All was and still is in good hands. We are all proud of our GCBRC, as is the staff of the entire campus.

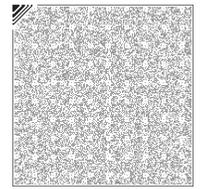
Across the board, we are all pulling for the same thing, a safe return at a yet-to-be-determined time to a normal routine. We will get there, not only here in Biloxi but worldwide. Our purpose-built GCBRC will be opened for inpatients one day and it will be as safe and secure as it ever was. Our purpose-educated staff will be there to welcome us back with open arms, bright smiles, and tears of joy at seeing us again. We veterans will probably shed more than a few tears at just being back among our dear friends and comrades. We will lay our weary heads down, after a long day of training, onto what are perhaps arguably the most uncomfortable beds on the planet. We will drift off into a good night’s sleep with a smile and knowledge that we are not only now being taken care of but that the GCBRC stepped up to the challenge and helped others in their time of need.

As for Kathy and me, we are making it. At press time of this **Bulletin**, she had just



finished her first real meal in more than a week. This brought me tons of joy. We will be here for each other so that we can, in turn, be there for you. As time marches on and 2020 becomes a fading memory, we will all know that we have gone through something we never thought we would have to face. We all pray that our children, their children, and generations to come never have to experience something like COVID-19.

Do what you can to stay safe. Join a group and get some training while you are at home. And, know that the legacy of our GCBRC and its staff will go down in the annals of history as a challenge accepted, met, and honored.



Around BVA

Virtual Meetings Earn High Marks by Kylie FitzGerald

VA's 75th National Convention became a casualty of COVID-19 when the decision to cancel the gathering was made in May. In lieu of the annual convention, BVA hosted a series of successful virtual Zoom webinars August 10, 12, and 18-20 that were also live streamed on Facebook and drew audiences in the hundreds.

BVA National Headquarters kicked off the series with an Introduction to Zoom on August 10 to help BVA members become accustomed to navigating and using Zoom with limited or no vision. Instruction was provided by Doug Jaeger and Paul Thompson of the Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center. The session included how to mute and unmute, how to raise a virtual hand to comment or ask a question, and how to utilize the Question and Answer and chat functions.

August 12 featured two speakers from the NASA Johnson Space Center—Lead

Scientist Dr. Steve Laurie and Mission Control Center Systems Operation Manager Tracy Minish. Dr. Laurie explored Spaceflight Associated Neuro-ocular Syndrome (SANS), a condition experienced by astronauts during long-duration spaceflight resulting in vision changes, folds in the retina, and swelling around the optic nerve. Tracy spoke about his experience being the Mission Control Systems Operation Manager while also being legally blind.

August 18 featured three different caregiver sessions aimed at supporting the caregivers of BVA members. Travis Wilson, Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinator at the Boise, Idaho VA Medical Center, hosted the first session, "What Happens When a Caregiver Needs a Caregiver." He highlighted the various programs and resources that caregivers can utilize to care for themselves, even during the COVID-19 crisis. Following Travis, Gary Barg of **Today's Caregiver** joined BVA for a

second year in a row to host a Caregiver Panel along with Richard Tapping, Vice President of Vispero, and Don Overton, Executive Director of BVA. Gary chaired last year's panel at the convention in Tulsa. The discussion centered on the experiences of caregivers and various solutions available to them. Finally, Kelly Golden, Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist, and Trudi Valdez, VIST Coordinator, both with the Albuquerque, New Mexico VA Medical Center, addressed the topic "Enabling vs. Empowering". Caregivers naturally tend to become enabling; however, empowering needs to be the focus so that our blinded veterans may achieve their potential for independence. All three sessions featured a Q&A session at the end.

On August 19, BVA Board and Headquarters staff hosted a virtual conference which included welcoming remarks from National President Tom Zampieri, an invocation and remembrance of the deceased from National Chaplain Dr. Ron Lester, and video remarks from the following in the order they spoke: House Committee on Veterans Affairs Ranking Member Phil Roe, M.D., House Committee Chairman Mark Takano, Senate Committee Ranking Member Jon Tester, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, updates from Tom Zampieri and BVA Auxiliary National President Sandy Krasnodemski, and, finally, the Executive Director's State of the Organization Report by Don Overton.

August 20 concluded the series of virtual webinars with three sessions highlighting VA services. Dr. Paul Lawrence, VA Under Secretary for Benefits, explored the VBA system and answered questions pertaining to veterans' benefits. Next, Tom Howard, Chief of Staff for the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), spoke about

what NCA does and the qualifications to be buried in an NCA Cemetery. Jason Latona, Chief of Specially Adapted Housing (SAH), spoke about VA loan guaranty housing grant programs available to blinded veterans as well as the new eligibility updates to the grant programs recently signed by President Trump.

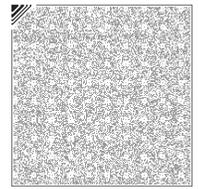
The sessions were well received by BVA members and attendees. Hopefully, BVA member Gary Schoelerman's statement that "each session was better than the one before" reflected the sentiments of many others.

National Headquarters and the Board of Directors extend a sincere thank you to everyone who was able to attend, to the willing speakers and panelists, and especially to the many who sponsored the sessions.

Minus Traditional Banquet, Awardees Still Recognized

COVID-19 may have caused cancellation of the BVA 75th National Convention and its always anticipated Awards Banquet, but it did not cancel or postpone the annual awards and Certificates of Appreciation themselves. Recipients of these awards will also be recognized at next year's gathering in St. Louis.

Tom Miller is this year's honoree for the **Melvin J. Maas Award for Professional Achievement**, BVA's highest honor. Tom has been a legendary figurehead at BVA for more than 30 years as a member of the Board of Directors, including National President, an employee in the capacity of Director of Government Relations and Executive Director, and more recently as a Committee member and a representative of BVA in collaboration with other organizations.





Longtime BVA leader Tom Miller has been present for close to 40 Melvin J. Maas Award presentations over four decades. Ironically, the banquet and convention at which he was to receive the award himself could not take place due to COVID-19.

A statement in his nomination reads:

“Tom’s accomplishments and service to both veterans and to the field of blindness have been matched by few. His achievements have never come at the expense of his integrity, class, or any attempt to demean others. His reputation has always been characterized by a positive attitude, sense of humor, and a desire to lift those around him, both blind and sighted. He is the everlasting professional who focuses on others, even after facing some of life’s most difficult challenges himself.”

Tom was wounded in December of 1967 while serving as a 1st Lieutenant with the United States Marine Corps in South Vietnam. He is service connected for bilateral total blindness and for a hearing impairment in one ear. Also noteworthy in Tom’s background prior to BVA is his six-year tenure as Chief of the Waco, Texas BRC in the early 1980s.



Tracy Ferro has been chosen as the recipient of the **Irving Diener Award for outstanding service to the Louisiana-Mississippi Regional Group**. Now president of the group, Tracy has been instrumental in increasing its membership through his frequent phone calls and emails, his more than 20 hours per week of volunteer work at the Gulf Coast BRC, and his initiative in organizing enjoyable regional group activities that attract enthusiasm and interest among potential members. He is known for his sympathetic ear to anyone who has a problem, needs help, or wants to talk.

Tracy’s long list of specific recent projects that have strengthened the regional group include finding event sites, arranging for an honor guard, locating a singer, organizing a tour at the World War II Museum in New Orleans, honoring Earl Forstal on his 100th birthday with a citation from President Trump, putting together a float of blinded veterans for the Mardi Gras Parade, spearheading the donation of a Braille flag to each VA Medical Center in the region, and contacting every county and a number of cities throughout Mississippi requesting proclamations honoring Blinded Veterans Day on March 28. Tracy has also successfully raised funds for the group.

Tracy is a veteran of the Air Force. In 2006, he was diagnosed with Stargardt Disease. Unsure of what the future held for him, he taught himself woodworking and started building custom furniture, perfected his cooking skills, and struggled with the process of losing his eyesight. Despite losing more vision, Tracy has thrived in service to BVA and his Eagles Lodge, #4535, in Diberville, Mississippi.

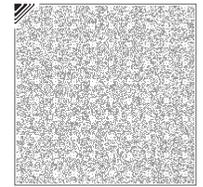
Dennis Currie, also a BVA member, is the recipient of the **David L. Schnair Award for Voluntary Service**. Dennis serves as a BVA volunteer with the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System in Tucson. In his role, he has assisted the Veterans Service Officers in processing more than 109 disability claims since November 2018. His work has had a direct and profound lasting impact on veterans' lives from not only Southern Arizona but many other parts of the country.

"Many of the veterans supported do not have access to quality veterans service for claims assistance in their home areas," the nomination reads. "Dennis does the tedious work of filling out the forms that are not as easily completed by Veterans Service Officers who must rely on JAWS software to navigate them; he serves as office manager and all veterans and staff who have ever met him are greatly impressed by his abilities, knowledge, skills, and empathy."

Dennis was born and raised in the state of Michigan. He enlisted in the Army as an aircraft mechanic in 1965. Soon after, he was assigned to the 220th Aviation Company in Vietnam as an inspector of aircraft that were used for forward air control, running artillery, Naval gunfire, and air support. He served with the 1st Platoon at Quang Ngai as an inspector, mechanic, and crew chief. In the latter capacity he flew as an observer in more than 50 combat support missions in support of ground operations in Quang Ngai Province.

Recipients of this year's **Certificates of Appreciation**, normally recognized at the convention's Father Carroll Luncheon,

are **Debra Gilley**, Chief of Blind Rehabilitation Service for the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System in Biloxi, Mississippi; **Tara Travland**, VIST Coordinator at the Doris Miller VA Medical Center in Waco, Texas; and **Marianne Ryan**, VIST Coordinator at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center.



New District Directors Assume Duties

Blinded veterans Darryl Goldsmith of Pensacola, Florida and Kevin Jackson of Austin, Texas were sworn in on July 24 as members of the Board of Directors representing Districts 5 and 6, respectively.

On August 14, Rae Hail of Deer Park, Washington, was appointed by the National Board of Directors as the Interim Director of District 4 following the resignation of Jhennicea Morrow.

Under BVA's National Bylaws, each of the newly elected District Directors will serve three-year terms. Darryl will serve in the capacity for the first time while Kevin recently served as Interim Director of District 6, having been first appointed to the position by the Board when it was vacated in 2018 and having won a special election in 2019 to finish out the term's final year.

Rae will serve in his interim capacity until July 2021, at which time a special election will be held in District 4 to select a District Director to complete the term that ends in 2022. He served previously in the same position for District 4 in 2015-16.

Ralston and Nagelberg: Two BVA Standouts

BVA lost two 101-year-old World War II members who died within ten days of one another, R. Curt Ralston of Omaha, Nebraska on July 19 and Myron “Mike” Nagelberg of Delray Beach, Florida on July 29. Mike passed away just 22 days prior to his 102nd birthday.



Curt Ralston’s membership in BVA spanned more than 70 years. He was one of the last living BVA members to receive training at Avon Old Farms Army Convalescent Hospital. Pictured here with his wife, Ruth, who passed away in 2014.

Curt Ralston participated in the 1942 Operation Torch, an allied invasion of North Africa early in the War. An ammunition dump explosion in his vicinity began his retinal deterioration, taking all the vision from his left eye and leaving only 25 percent in his right eye.

Curt was at Avon Old Farms shortly after it opened in 1944. It was there that he established a lasting friendship with Smith Shumway, who became a BVA National Secretary in 1949. He credited “Smitty” for his BVA membership and payment of annual

dues somewhat by accident (he was unaware of the life membership option) for some 70 years until he finally joined as a Life Member in 2015. Smith Shumway passed away in 2011, after which Curt maintained regular telephone contact with several National Headquarters staff members.

Curt started his own advertising business in 1949 and continued working for a few hours nearly every day until age 97.

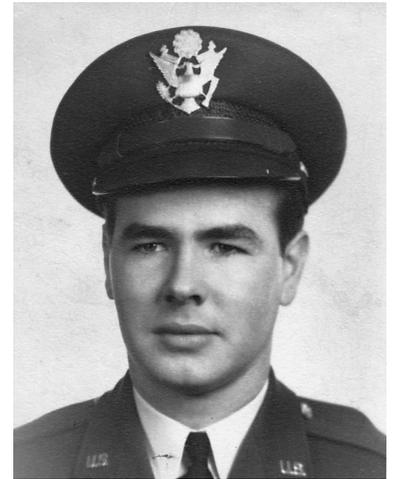
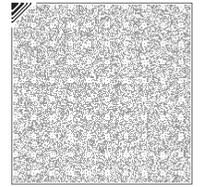
Mike Nagelberg and Kathy Berry, avid dancers even after Mike reached the century mark, were also standouts

together at nearly every national convention. Mike was known for his loyalty to the Florida Regional Group and his leadership by example.

BVA HQ Remembers Former Staff Member

Michael J. O’Rourke, a resident of Alexandria, Virginia, and former Assistant to the Director of Government Relations with Tom Zampieri, Glenn Minney, and Melanie Brunson from 2010 until 2017, passed away on July 21.

Although Mike was a part-time BVA employee throughout his tenure, his colleagues at National Headquarters were keenly aware of his thorough knowledge of and grounding in the field of Government Relations and Advocacy on behalf of veterans. Prior to working for BVA, he was on the



Curt Ralston



Mike O'Rourke, right, was a skilled legislative advocate for veterans throughout his career, including six years at BVA. He is pictured at a VSO Prosthetic Work Group meeting in 2016 with VA Director of Prosthetics and Sensory Aid Service Penny Nechanicky and Fred Downs, advocate for the advancement of prosthetic technology and longtime BVA friend.

legislative staff at the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

"Everyone in VHA and VBA knew Mike," said Tom Zampieri. "Many administrations came and went having to answer his famous 'two-point question,' which would send shivers up the spine of many VA leaders."

Mike was also known for his friendliness, sense of humor, love of country, and his passion for coin collecting. On perhaps a daily basis he did something nice for a fellow staff member or uttered a kind word of two, often with no third party there to witness it.

At age 18, Mike joined the U.S. Marine Corps and served two combat tours in Vietnam with the 3rd Marine Division and then the 1st Marine Division. He later transitioned into the U.S. Navy, serving on the USS Worden in Yokosuka, Japan,

and then attended the Naval Hospital Corps School. He was commissioned after attending and graduating from the Naval School of Health Sciences Physician Assistant Program at George Washington University.

Mike is survived by his wife, Dede, two daughters, and six grandchildren.

Szumowski Memoir Now on BARD

Reach for More: A Journey from Loss to Love and Fulfillment, the autobiography of David M. Szumowski, was added to BARD on July 8.

BARD is the National Library Service's program for Braille and Audio Reading Download Access. Blinded veterans with a username and password into the BARD system can download the audiobook for free.

Dave Szumowski, BVA's 26th National



In his autobiography **Reach for More: A Journey from Loss to Love and Fulfillment**, Davie Szumowski explains his challenges with coping, emotional distress, finding a career, accepting the hand he was dealt, finding love and a life partner, and the subsequent successes. It is the story of resilience, perseverance, faith, and courage.

President in 1987-88 and a member of the Board of Directors for four years prior to and two years following his presidency, was also a San Diego County, California Superior Court Judge for 18 years. He retired from the bench in 2016. Prior to serving as a judge, he was a prosecutor in the San Diego District Attorney's office. He was accepted and graduated from the University of Denver Law School in 1970, managing course work before the advent of today's technology by recording lectures on cassette tapes, listening to pre-recorded textbooks on reel-to-reel tapes, and hiring readers.

Dave's book recounts the sharp turn his life took after he was seriously injured when his platoon was attacked in Vietnam War combat. He discusses the difficulties he has overcome in the intervening years and the importance of faith, family, and friendships in doing so.

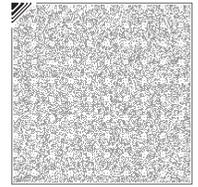
Brummell Publishes Third Book

George E. Brummell, former BVA National Field Service Director and a member of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Group, has now published his third book, the second of two children's works.

The Mole and the Violin, Part Two, A Bunny's Odyssey, is now available on Kindle, in hardcover, and in paperback. It follows **The Mole and the Violin** and George's first book, **Shades of Darkness**, a memoir of his life published in 2006. **Shades of Darkness** is available on BARD. George started writing **Shades of Darkness** in 1977 by dictating into a tape recorder in the early mornings. In the 1980s he began typing with only his left hand, which is his good hand.

Shades of Darkness is the story of growing up black in rural Maryland, his journey through Vietnam, blindness and loss of an arm

after being critically injured by a landmine, and living out a long rehabilitation and rebuilding a life as a blind man.



George and his wife, Mary, now reside in Dover, Delaware.



George Brummell, now author of two children's works and his own memoir, with Tom Miller during 54th National Convention in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Headquarters Promotes New Website Appearance

BVA members who have not recently visited the Association's website may be surprised by some of the recent updates, changes, and overall reconstruction of the site.

BVA National Headquarters and newly appointed Information Technology Specialist/Webmaster Cheryl Gajadhar have been busy rebuilding many of the pages that required significant attention and alteration, both in content as well as formatting and presentation.

As a longtime blinded veteran leader of the South Carolina Regional Group, Cheryl adds to her overall technical expertise both

knowledge and experience in the areas of website accessibility for blinded and visually impaired veterans.

Visit bva.org to note some of the recent changes.

“Santa Claus” and NJRG Provide Generous Donations

Leonard Pope, a longtime member and leader in the New Jersey Regional Group, was also known as Santa Claus for the past 52 years, beginning in Vietnam and later in New Jersey. In both capacities he coordinated several generous donations through his regional group that went to the VA BRCs, BVA National Headquarters, and the New Jersey State Library Talking Book and Braille Branch.

Leonard began a Santa Claus stint in December 1967 while assigned to Battery “C” of the 13th Field Artillery. From mid-November until the week of Christmas, his unit generously collected all leftover C-rations and put them in storage. A few days before Christmas, the unit delivered boxes of these rations to orphanages in and around Saigon.

Upon returning to the states, Leonard continued being Santa, visiting homes, schools, and other locations where there were children. After being declared legally blind in 2002 due to Type 2 diabetes that testing has concluded came from Agent Orange, his wife, Joan, generously agreed to become Mrs. Claus so that she could also provide transportation. The tradition continued until December of last year when the two announced their joint retirement.

Adding to the couple’s charitable giving has been the raising of funds for various organizations such as the Elks Lodge Veterans

Committees and Yellow Ribbon groups that send care packages overseas to help active duty personnel with writing paper, blank envelopes, pencils, toiletries, snacks, candy, letters, cards from school children, and multi-colored skull caps and gloves.



In late 2016, Leonard approached the officers and members of the New Jersey Regional Group about donating money to the group. He asked them if the money could be secured until there could be a substantial donation to each of the 13 BRCs with the stipulation that the funds had to be used for activities of blinded veterans only. Earlier this year the group donated \$478 to each BRC, \$500 to BVA for a program or initiative, and \$500 to the state talking book and braille branch.

Pandemic No Obstacle for Mid-Atlantic Volunteers

Despite the damper COVID-19 has placed on medical appointments, support group meetings, and a host of other activities throughout the VA system the past seven months, the drastic changes did not keep Stevie Bradley and Gregory Bennett of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Group from volunteering to help out at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia on August 8.

The two members of the Richmond Chapter of the regional group were among 25 volunteers willing to give of themselves for a few hours to pull weeds and perform other clean-up in the south mall patio of the medical center. They were supported by BVA chapter volunteer Linda Thomas.

Assisting were representatives of other groups, including the Disabled American



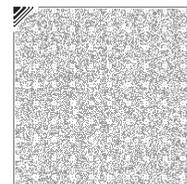
Richmond Chapter's Gregory Bennett, left, and Stevie Bradley supported Central Virginia VA Health Care System's Clean-Up Day with Veterans Service Organizations. In distant background, BVA Volunteer Linda Thomas.

Veterans Auxiliary and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

"Greg and Stevie were a huge help and we gratefully accepted their willingness to do this during a difficult time," said Voluntary Service Specialist Tomeka Graham.

On an already hot summer day in Richmond the volunteers wore masks and observed social distancing.

Lasting Camaraderie for Harrison, Horn



Nate Harrison and Ken Horn are a testament to the unexpected but often permanent friendships that BVA has helped create throughout its 75-year history.

On August 25, Nate traveled north to the area around Edmond, Oklahoma. The purpose of his trip was to get a new prosthetic leg but it had a side benefit.

"Nate called me to meet for lunch while he was here," said Ken. "We first met at the Jacksonville convention where I knew no one, stayed in touch, and did a kayak event together last year."

Nate was a Marine in Afghanistan. After he left the Corps, he became a Kansas City police officer. He was injured in an off-duty motorcycle accident where he lost his leg above the knee and his vision at the same time.

"Nate is an active Operation Peer Support participant and recently got married to his lovely wife, Samariah, at Lake Dallas on May 23," Ken revealed. "Congratulations to them!"

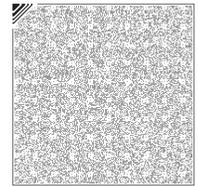


Nate Harrison, left, and Ken Horn reminisce at Oklahoma City's Toby Keith's Bar and Grill.



Auxiliary's View

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



Opinion to Education to Advocacy

In my last column I elaborated on the topic of **Opinion vs. Advocacy** as it relates to our blinded veterans, their families, and other caregivers. In this column I will share one option that exists. It is the option of education. To begin, pick up your smart phone and look up two words: **doxophobia** and **alldoxophobia**.

We live in a very social world. So how do we, as caregivers and the blind, rise above the sea of waves, currents, and life around us so that we become victims of neither of the two phobias? This question has no easy answer, given the social climate that has created these phobias.

Education. Did you ever hear the adage “learn one, do one, teach one?” Now, apply this concept to an aspect of blindness with which you are most familiar, or an aspect you would like to know more about. An example would be causes of blindness. Once you have learned more about what you have chosen, apply it to your own situation and compare it with others like yours. It is likely that you will realize at some point that blindness is as individual as DNA. Maybe you will choose to learn more about other kinds of blindness or how others deal with their blindness. Perhaps you will choose to learn how to deal with blindness in the home. Finally, you will find yourself sharing with others and teaching others what you have learned.

From **experience**, another form of education, you learn what works for you. You

find and learn “tools of accommodation” and how to use and apply them to your situation. Then you share what you have learned with others. The same applies to new technology, guide dogs, recreational activities, and so on.

In your **background** you have **skills**. Although many of these skills are difficult to transfer to your blindness, accommodations may help. In many cases, your loved ones or you will work by trial and error to transfer what you always used to do into your present situation. BRCs and BROS can help but only if they know you are interested. Then, there is the phrase heard around my house: “Honey, I need your eyes for a minute!” This usually occurs in a situation that is difficult even for a sighted person.

With education, no one can learn everything they may wish to, but everyone can learn something of interest to them or they can discover a need to know something. Positive interest and feedback frequently create a greater interest, even a passion, for what you do. Sharing what you know and especially what you are passionate about, at the appropriate time and place, helps to educate others.

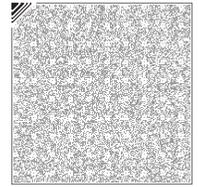
Advocacy, should you have the knowledge and desire to do so, is the next step. Advocacy is frequently used to make a strong point, to right a wrong, or to stand up for a cause – such as helping to initiate, support, even write laws; or to educate the public (sighted) about the need for particular accommodations, rights, laws, and enforcement.

My **challenge** for each of you: **Learn, Experience, and Share** – then **ADVOCATE!** You’ll be glad you did.



Veterans Service Program Update

by James R. Vale



BVA's Veterans Service Program (VSP), formerly the Field Service Program, has evolved into a new service delivery program to better serve our blinded veterans. In short, we had to break the mold and think "out of the box" to innovate and leverage technology so that we can be more productive and efficient advocates for our blinded veterans.

When it is safe to do so, we intend to introduce BVA Ambassadors at each of the 13 VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers to help get the word out about BVA and to serve as claims liaisons with our National Service Officers. With tele-video conferencing, we can expand our claim services in a cost-effective manner for claims intake at VA BRCs.

We will also build partnerships with VIST Coordinators and BROS to better serve the blind and visually impaired veterans on their case rolls. Together, we can make a significant impact with outreach, education, and advocacy.

Just as VA has had to transform from an outdated and highly inefficient paper process to an electronic claims processing system, Veterans Service Organizations have had to make changes too. Here at BVA we have recently implemented a paperless digital case management system called VetPro, which

has been a game changer for us. For the first time ever, we can start a claim while talking to a blinded veteran over the phone, obtain a digital signature during the call, submit the claim electronically to VA, and receive a digital confirmation code from VA while the blinded veteran is still on the call. Gone are the days of rushing to a VA Regional Office to obtain a date stamp. We no longer need to fax claim forms and evidence to VA. With VetPro we can submit claims and evidence electronically and we have a reliable means to track it.

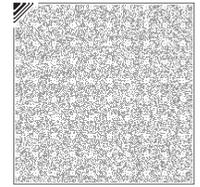
With the small number of staff at the Virginia National Headquarters, we are a very lean force. Through strategic partnerships and creating synergy with select VSOs, state agencies, county service officers, and BVA regional groups, we can expand our reach across the nation without the overhead expense associated with employing National Service Officers at every VA Regional Office. Through partnerships and technology, we can do more with less.

Our motto at BVA is "Blinded Veterans Serving Blinded Veterans." As BVA's new National Service Director, I will continue to further this important mission of serving blinded veterans. Please feel free to email me at jvale@bva.org if you have any comments, concerns, or suggestions.



Chaplain's Corner

by Dr. Ron Lester



Holding Pattern

When there is an accident on an airport runway, there is a call

for all the airplanes to go into a holding pattern, which is when the planes will fly in a circle. This could last for several minutes or several hours depending on what the problem is but, once it is over, things get back to normal.

Have you ever felt you were in a holding pattern? In March, when COVID-19 was classified as a global pandemic, I went into a holding pattern. We are concerned about going out; if you do go out, you must wear a mask, wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizer, and are not to touch your face.

Have you tried to keep from touching your face for 30 minutes? I certainly cannot.

For me, to go to church and follow the rules of social distancing is difficult. I wear hearing aids and trying to hear one person from six feet away makes it impossible to carry on a conversation, which makes me feel more shut in.

But we cannot sit around and be depressed.

Another difficult part of this holding pattern is that we cannot even see our doctors for appointments! To make things worse, VA closed the BRCs. I enjoyed getting in the van and going to the hospital here in Tucson. It is an activity that breaks up the day and is a great opportunity to meet new friends who are in the same boat as I am.

Most of the time we sit around watching TV all day and all the bad news just kills our spirits and depresses us. We must begin limiting our exposure to bad news.

So how do we break out of the feeling that we are in a holding pattern?

We need to do something that will give us the shot of energy needed to write a book or call a friend. We need to read or listen to something that will inspire us. We can rise up and do something creative. We can listen to the Bible—there are a lot of scriptures that will encourage us!

So, we wait. Hurry up and wait.

Here is the heart of it all: You are special in God's eyes! He gave us a word from the Bible in Isaiah 40:33 that says, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Teach me to wait."

A recently popularized blog known as MarkZ offered advice worthy of consideration for the times in which we find ourselves:

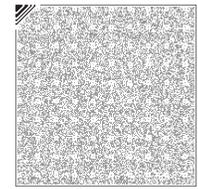
Life is about educating yourself on how to become a better person and then being who you were meant to be. Greatness would never be found in possessions, power, position, or prestige. It would be discovered in goodness, humility, service, and character. As we embark on this opportunity to do good in the world, remember that every situation in life is temporary so, when life is good, make sure you enjoy it, and when life is not so good, remember that it will not last forever and that better days are ahead!

I am ready for this holding pattern to be over. I am ready for a landing or a takeoff, one of the two! Hang in there!



BRS Offer Personal Touch During COVID-19 Challenges

by Ella Hart, National Program Consultant



Everyone in our country has been through challenging and adverse times as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact may be greater for veterans who are blind or visually impaired, especially for those with limited transportation options and/or caregiver support.

In response, VHA BRS launched a national initiative for blind rehabilitation specialists to begin contacting veterans with visual impairment. The purpose was to conduct a wellness check on veterans who have previously been served by BRS.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie once stated: “Listening to our veteran patients plays an important role in providing world class customer service.”

The purpose of the BRS Wellness Check Initiative was, and is, to ensure that veterans’ immediate safety concerns are addressed. Blind Rehabilitation Service provided a touchpoint to more than 9,100 veterans to ask about their well-being and confirm that they had access to food, medication, and self-care items.

VA’s personal touch has been greatly valued by Donald Overton.

“Serving as a veterans advocate during the COVID-19 pandemic has been both challenging and rewarding,” he said. “Challenges such as maintaining organizational operations, member services, and stakeholder engagement has required significant adaptation and effort in providing support for an ever-increasing remote work force.

“On a particularly lonely and difficult day in the office, my cell phone rang. I was pleasantly surprised to hear the voice of a member from the VA Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Service team in West Haven Connecticut on the line,” he recalled.

“She was calling to check on ‘my’ well-being and genuinely cared about ‘my’ responses,” Don continued. “The conversation was comforting and reassuring, covering everything from accessing VA care and services to sharing resources for assistance with obtaining supplies and maintaining overall health.”

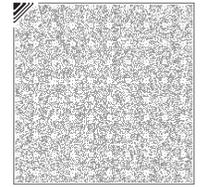
BRS Continuum of Care programs are continuing to provide access to vision rehabilitation during these challenging times in alternative formats, including VA Video Connect and third-party alternatives, such as FaceTime, Skype and Facebook Messenger video chat. BRS Continuum of Care providers have provided more than 6,200 clinical video-connect encounters this fiscal year through May.

BRS staff have implemented innovative virtual care practices that include: Healthy at Home sessions for veterans to reconnect and reinforce healthy habits, relaxation support groups, adaptive chair yoga, Traumatic Brain Injury and low vision support groups, and Living Well with Low Vision support groups focusing on wellness and adjustment to vision loss.

Our deepest appreciation to BRS staff for being dedicated, compassionate, and proactive as many of our veterans are scared and overwhelmed. A reassuring voice goes a long way to mitigate those fears.

Base Access Now Fully Operational

by Charles Reynolds



It has been nine months since the Department of Defense Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 went into effect allowing service-connected disabled veterans and some caregivers access to military bases and its facilities.

After testing the implementation of these policies at each of the bases within the Greater Washington, DC area, I found that the new policies are working well.

To recap, as of January 1, 2020, all veterans who have completed the Veteran Affairs Compensation and Pension Exam and who have received a rating by VA are given access to military bases and to Exchange, Commissary, and MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) privileges when using the new Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC). Golf courses, bowling centers, recreational lodging facilities, recreational vehicle campgrounds, and movie theaters are all included.

The following categories of veterans and caregivers are eligible for this access:

- Purple Heart recipients
- Former Prisoners of War
- All veterans with service-connected disabilities that are rated by VA at 0-90 percent.
- Family caregivers that are authorized by VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program.
- Veterans who have received a Health Eligibility Center Form H623A which states that they have been placed in VA health care priority group 8E.

VA provided DoD access to its VHIC records so that the front gate personnel can scan the VHIC as they would any active duty Common Access Card (CAC) or retiree card. Each Base Commander has the authority to make decisions on who will, or will not, be authorized base access and use the facilities. This means that some bases may still require one to register at the front gate and verify that the caregiver or family members are enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

While testing the bases, I found that each base was able to scan my VHIC and I had no difficulty gaining access to every service. While making purchases at the Exchanges and Commissaries, I learned that they had no issue with the VHIC and I made the purchases without any difficulty. The regulation does mandate that Commissaries apply a 1.9 percent debit surcharge directly to the veteran or caregiver on top of the total purchase and regular surcharge. However, using cash eliminates the extra charge. The Exchanges verify only that the customer is an authorized caregiver or veteran and should incur no extra charge.

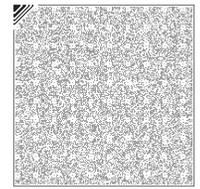
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about this policy, including additional information about eligibility, can be located at: <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Factsheets/expanding-access-fact-sheet.pdf>

To speak with a person, call Military OneSource at **1-800-342-9647**.

The next time you pass by a military base, pop out your VHIC and use the facilities! It could save up to 30 percent of what you would pay in civilian stores.

In Many Ways

by Paschal Baute



What Blinded Veterans Teach Us About Coping

Research on blinded veterans who are coping with adversity demonstrates a basic fact in social science: The way we think becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. To grasp this is a stunning realization—that we are, in reality, creating the world in which we live.

To employ this insight regularly is to become resilient, no matter what happens.

This is the truth that our blinded veterans are teaching the blind world, other veterans, and the entire system of VA caregivers.

So radical is this fact of human nature that we must find many ways to describe it. One way we describe this fact is through our tendency to focus on the negative, which is done so naturally, instinctively, universally, and inevitably.

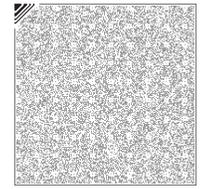
Therefore, in our book about blinded veterans, we spend five chapters on how we are hooked and blindsided by the negative, which is the dark side of reality. We then devote ten chapters to the positive and how to stay focused on the positive side of life.

Specifics about the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, which can change our perspectives:

- ✓ How we frame the situation determines the world we live in.
- ✓ Beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder but ugliness also.
- ✓ Do we play happy songs, sad songs, or no songs?
- ✓ We create the world we live in by what we focus on.

- ✓ Optimists and pessimists choose daily to remain that way.
- ✓ We create our internal world by the way we choose.
- ✓ We will find what we are looking for.
- ✓ When we are angry, we will find things to be angry about.
- ✓ When we are sad, we will choose things to be sad about.
- ✓ When we are happy, we will find things to be happy about.
- ✓ The news we choose to listen to reinforces our belief system.
- ✓ We shape our reality every moment by the way we think about everything.
- ✓ We are constantly shaping our reality by our minds.
- ✓ Can you think of other ways to express this truth?
- ✓ What words will you choose to remind yourselves of this fact?
- ✓ I create my world, my reality, my attitudes, so I live in a self-justifying reality.
- ✓ When I get up on the wrong side of the bed, my day will be unpleasant.
- ✓ Whatever is my personal story, I reinforce my belief every time I tell it or remember it.
- ✓ “Tis nothing right or wrong but thinking makes it so” –Shakespeare.

Blind Veterans Coping with Loss by Paschal Baute, published earlier this year, is available free on Kindle.



Involving Others in your Caregiving

by Ryan Mackey

Receiving some extra help or consideration from others goes a long way to helping you deal with the daily rigors of life. Given the right help and proper respite time, you will feel better about your overall role and be stronger emotionally and physically to continue your caregiving.

Because much of the burden of care falls on one person in the family, other family and friends should be considered as viable alternatives. Talking with your loved one and establishing a plan surrounding your caregiving, their finances, and the sacrifices that must be made, are essential to quality caregiving.

Consider these recommendations for involving others when providing the primary care for a loved one in need:

- Allow your spouse to share some of the responsibility by taking care of the children, giving you some free time, or maybe cooking dinner one evening.
- Seek help through community health care agencies to have someone come out to support your caregiving efforts.

- Have a friend assist you in caring for your children or in running an errand for you if you are busy.
- Keep the entire family aware of the situation and let them know if something needs to be changed or altered from the plan already established.
- If you work outside the home, see if your company or boss is willing to be flexible with your hours and see if they have any advice that may help you juggle work and caregiving.
- Incorporate the entire family in your caregiving. For instance, a long-distance relative may give you money for groceries or a friend may help you do the shopping.
- Join a support group, which may open you up to other caregivers in the area who can further assist you in learning about services available such as volunteer services and local elderly programs.

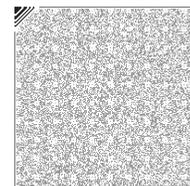
Extracted with permission from Gary Barg, founder and manager of caregiver.com, editor of Today's Caregiver, and leader of an August 18 BVA virtual panel discussion exploring caregiver experiences and solutions.

Caregiver Media Group Offers Resources

The Caregiver Media Group is a leading provider of information, support, and guidance for family and professional caregivers.

Founded in 1995 by Gary Barg, the Group produces **Today's Caregiver** magazine, the first national magazine dedicated to caregivers. Other resources include Caregiving books, Custom publications, the Fearless Caregiver Conferences, and the website, **caregiver.com**.

Today's Caregiver includes topics such as nutrition, pharmaceutical, financial, home safety, new technology options, insurance, homecare, and medication breakthroughs.



Take Precautions Against Flu Virus

As summer winds down, medical professionals are becoming increasingly concerned about the onset of the 2020-21 flu season as COVID-19 diagnoses and complications persist.

An estimated 39 to 56 million seasonal influenza illnesses occurred in the United States in 2019-20. Although the science as to how the two viruses may co-exist is still not established with any reasonable certainty, significant COVID-19 interventions such as handwashing, masks, and social distancing are believed to be just as valid for influenza as they are for COVID-19.

VA is launching an aggressive influenza vaccination campaign as an additional intervention amid the unprecedented challenges of increased virtual health care, social distancing, and supply issues of the vaccine due to possible increased demand despite last year's vaccine surplus.

BVA supports VA's efforts to protect vulnerable veterans at risk for severe illness and to reduce surges that could threaten the health care infrastructure.

The following VA links offer flu medical information and prevention tips, educational resources, flu vaccination details, and in-network vaccination locations near you, <https://www.prevention.va.gov/flu/> and www.va.gov/communitycare/flushot.asp.

Thousands of new vaccination sites are available this year. A government-issued ID is all that is necessary to receive a no-cost flu shot at one of these locations.

New VA PSA Explains Home Loan Benefits

The Veterans Benefits Administration has announced the production of a 30-second Public Service Announcement (PSA) for both television and radio that better informs veterans about their home loan benefits.

"The PSA clearly and succinctly provides the viewer with the critical information about this great benefit," said Under Secretary for Benefits Paul R. Lawrence, Ph.D. "VA does not require a down payment, has limited closing costs, and Private Mortgage Insurance is not required on VA-guaranteed loans."

He added that those three features alone can save homeowners hundreds, even thousands, of dollars. In addition to the tangible benefits, the PSA also successfully conveys the feeling and emotion veterans enjoy as they become homeowners and the ways in which VBA helps them achieve the American dream.

To view the television PSA online, visit <https://ly/3ixgn8m>.

Reach Out and Stay Connected

VA is intensifying its public awareness campaign during September's Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in an effort to help veterans and their families protect themselves from the complex and tragic health issue of suicide.

Those struggling with mental health issues are urged to call the Veterans Crisis Line at **1-800-273-8255** and press 1.

In recent years veteran suicides have reached an average of more than 20 per day.

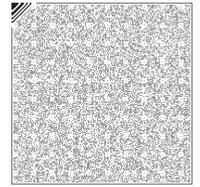
Other suggestions include reaching out and staying connected to the veteran in

one's life by simply being there. More specific advice includes learning the signs of crisis, sharing stories of recovery and the overcoming of challenges that are available at **maketheconnection.net**, and learning how to recognize and respond to worrisome social media posts.

On March 5, 2019, President Trump signed Executive Order 13861 establishing a three-year effort known as the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). Earlier this spring BVA National Headquarters completed

written questionnaires and a phone interview to provide input regarding the issue.

On June 19 of this year, President Trump released the plan to engage Americans in a nationwide effort to prevent suicide by educating the public that suicide is preventable, connecting veterans and others at risk to federal and local resources, facilitating coordinated research on suicide prevention, and building partnerships with dozens of organizations across the country.

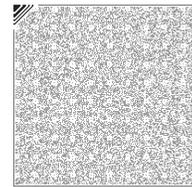


Dark Night Rises

by Warner Murray

My BVA comrades, soldiers of peace,
We march together, till this division cease.
We strengthen our minds, with no vision in eyes,
We stand together as the darkness doth rise.
This is a war our eyes cannot see,
Wearing masks, washing hands, helps you and me.
My BVA comrades, soldiers of peace,
Our prayers are many for this virus to cease.
This is a battle, an uphill fight,
With our blind eyes, we still have sight.
We, the lifetime members, brilliant thinkers of the mind,
Let's show the world great leadership from the blind.
Keep our faith and hope through COVID-19,
And pray we don't have to be quarantined.
This is a crisis unimaginable to me,
We are fighting a war our eyes cannot see.
Health care warriors on the front line,
We see your courage every minute of time.
This is a challenge for veterans not just a few,
Cherish the freedom of the red, white, and blue.

Letters to the Editor



Voiceye Codes Offer Needed Assistance

Although COVID-19 disrupted virtually all of 2020, we can still dream a little. Imagine that you are finally on the plane and ready to head out on that long-awaited vacation. You pull out your **BVA Bulletin** to read during your flight.

Darn it.

Since the Seeing AI app, the KNFB Reader, and many others require Wi-Fi to in order for us to read, you naturally assume that the same is true for the **Bulletin**. This is very unfortunate because you were so looking forward to reading the latest happenings of the Louisiana-Mississippi Regional Group!

Fret no more! Have you wondered what the QR code is on the top right corner of every **Bulletin** page? Have you noticed it on other BVA documents? If you are totally blind, you will need to trust me. That QR code, much like a bar code, is the key. That little smudge contains all the information on that page. The free mobile app is called Voiceye. The instructions for downloading the app are found in the inside front cover of every issue of the **Bulletin**.

One great thing about Voiceye is that it reads articles in their entirety rather than column by column. For example, if a page has two articles, one above the other and there are two columns, most OCR apps will read down one column and then down the next column. This scenario makes it easy to get confused since a new article will begin before the previous one has been completed. The Voiceye app reads the articles in sequence. Since all the information is contained within

that QR code, the app needs only to dissect it. Therefore, it is self-contained, does not have to reach out to the internet, and does not need Wi-Fi.

Although this app has many other capabilities, not all of them function in the United States. This is just another effective tool to keep in your toolbox to make life easier. Now sit back, listen to the **Bulletin**, and enjoy your long-awaited rest and relaxation away from home!

Tracy Ferro

Biloxi, Mississippi

Louisiana-Mississippi Regional Group

Adapt and Overcome At Gulf Coast BRC

Adapt and Overcome may not be the official motto of the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center (GCBRC) but it is most definitely part of its Standard Operating Procedure during COVID-19.

I expected to stay at the GCBRC in Biloxi for six weeks. However, after just four days there I was informed that it was closing due to the pandemic. I had to go home immediately.

Four days after arriving home, I received a wellness check phone call. During the call I discussed my disappointment at not being able to complete my Mac computer class to update my skills. The next day I received a call informing me that I would be starting my computer class the following Monday morning and that I would have Ms. Tiffany Moore as my instructor. I have been attending class every morning at 8:00 a.m. at my dining room table.

There have been times when my class has lasted three hours. Professor Tiffany has been very patient and thorough with my training.

I would like to applaud and commend GCBRC Chief Debra Gilley and her staff for their aggressive and dedicated approach to our blinded veterans and for their forward-thinking manner of adapting and overcoming during this unprecedented time.

Darryl Goldsmith
Pensacola, Florida
Emerald Coast Regional Group

New Chargers Help “Make the Connection”

During a recent gathering of blinded veterans, we were discussing books when there was mention of magnetic cable chargers. This was my introduction to a technology that helps reduce the wear and tear on Victor Readers and makes connecting many other devices much easier.

These chargers come in two pieces. A small metal adaptor fits into the charging port and remains in the device during use. Recharging the battery involves simply bringing the charging end of the cable, which is magnetized, close to the adaptor. Blinded veterans with some vision will note that a light also comes on when current flow is accomplished.

I have heavily used the Victor Reader Stream and its successors for countless purposes for nearly ten years. Consequently, the charging cables have sometimes been an issue. Four of the six Victor Readers I have owned the past ten years have had problems with the electrical connection for recharging the battery. The new magnetic chargers seem to reduce the wear on the cables and hence

minimize problems I’ve had in the past.

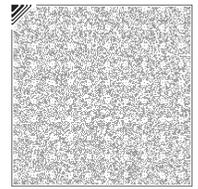
I have numerous other devices that employ rechargeable batteries. Smartphones, tablets, speakers, and other devices can use these same chargers. Further information on securing them is available through Stuart Nelson at BVA National Headquarters, snelson@bva.org or **202-371-8880, Ext. 316**.

Michael Taylor
Fleming Isle, Florida
Florida Regional Group

BVA Bulletin Audio Version

BVA has produced an audio version of the **BVA Bulletin** going back several decades to send via Free Matter for the Blind to the members. At one time, the finished product came in the form of a phonograph record. In the 1970s, and lasting at least 35 years, audiocassette tapes were produced. In 2011, the Association was still mailing more than 8,000 cassettes for each issue. All members received them unless they indicated that they were reading another version.

Although cassettes have never become extinct, the year 2012 was a major turning point. Cassettes were no longer available in large quantities at a reasonable price. Suddenly, it was the opposite of before—rather than telling National Headquarters if they didn’t want it, members now needed to request the audio version if they specifically wanted it, provided in the form of a Compact Disk. This has been announced through a variety of communications over the past 7-8 years. Unfortunately, many BVA members have never understood that a CD can be requested.



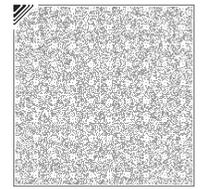
I am pleased to reaffirm that the audio version of the **Bulletin** is alive and well. Not only are CDs available, past and present issues of the professional recording can also be accessed on the BVA website. Blinded veterans and their families can listen to the 80-minute recording all at once or it can be accessed in individual sections under the various headings.

If you listened to the May-June issue of the **Bulletin**, you may have noted that the familiar voice of the past six years sounded different. At the end of April our dedicated Bruce Moyer of **AudioVideoData.com** in Bethesda, Maryland retired. Bruce recorded, edited, and duplicated the CDs for each issue for some six years. He did an excellent job and we were sad to lose him.

The good news is that Bruce pointed us to a talented friend who is also local in the

Washington, DC area. John O’Leary, who does his own audio production, engineering, and voiceover services, narrated the most recent issue. He is the voice of this issue as well. John has a smooth, clear voice and his perfectionism creates flawless recordings. Another interesting fact about John is that he is a Vietnam veteran, serving in the Air Force from August 1964 through 1968. He spent his final year at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, now Ho Chi Minh City. He was an electronics technician on ground-based aviation navigation systems, another way of saying Flight Facilities Equipment Repairman back then. Welcome, John, and thank you!

Stuart Nelson
Bulletin Editor

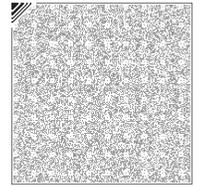


Did You Know?

- BVA’s 75th anniversary remembrances would be incomplete and remiss without mentioning one of the organization’s heralded advocates for more than 30 years and a pioneer in fighting for blinded veterans, Kathern “Kay” Frances Gruber. For her innovative teaching methods, especially in the areas of independence and self-reliance, Kay was appointed Director of War Blind Veteran Services for the American Foundation for the Blind in 1945 and in 1949 became the Assistant Director for Professional Services of AFB. Although there is no record of her being present at the March 28 meeting that established BVA, there is documentation of her presence at other meetings of blinded veterans at the campus. She was instrumental in working with Warren Bledsoe, Russ Williams, and Father Thomas Carroll in launching VA’s first ever residential blind center at Hines. Kay wrote a regular column for the **BVA Bulletin** until the 1970s and became an active member of the BVA National Advisory Board in 1963. In 1985, BVA honored her by establishing the Kathern F. Gruber Scholarship Program. According to former Field Service Program Director Bob Brown, Kay earned the nickname “Hell on Wheels” for her quick-witted, outspoken, and tenacious advocacy on behalf of blinded veterans. Among the blinded veterans themselves she was nominated and unanimously voted annually at the conventions as the “Sweetheart of the BVA.”

In Remembrance

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



Alabama R.G.

Roy Blankenship
Al Harris
Jeffrey Simmons
Kay Stamper
Billy Ray Stokes

Arizona Central-Northern R.G.

Elroy Hoverson
Charles Jessup
James Warren

Arkansas Razorback R.G.

Douglas Cornelius
Adam Hall

Cape Cod and Islands R.G.

Lawrence Gelzer

Charles Register R.G.

Charles Haynes
Rose Mann
Danilo Obal

Connecticut R.G.

Richard Harper
Edward Klimczak
Ralph Rodia

Emerald Coast R.G.

William Lucas

Florida R.G.

John Edward Beckman
Michael Boccia
Thomas Grady Cornelison
Alan Duncan
Joseph Fray
Earl Griswold
Poindexter Johnson
Robert Kirkland
Milburn Lester
Thomas Levendakes

Miguel Lugo

Fredrick Martindale
Robert Millemann
Clarence Moyle
Myron Nagelberg
William O'Toole
Don Peters
Wilbert Randolph
W. Harold Rose
Jose Santos Rolon
Normand Theriault
John Urquhart
John Wiedman

Gem State R.G.

Alphons Boxleitner
Robert Henderson

Georgia R.G.

Charles Kelly
Arthur Lawrence
Dorsey Peebles
William Rivers

Greater Houston R.G.

Ralph Arrington
Fred Barnes
Roy David Bradley
Norman Bush
William Hausinger
Floyd Johnson
Larry Rucker
Charles Sibley
Kenneth Snyder
Donald Strassner

Hawaii R.G.

Daniel Kakalia-Ogawa

Heartland R.G.

Wilbur Cherry
 Isaac Copelin
 Robert Evans
 Harold Korte
 R. Curtis Ralston
 Donald Schmit
 Marion Skinner

Illinois R.G.

Walter Beck
 Joseph Dawe
 James Garringer
 Marvin Shimp

Indiana R.G.

Paul Garrett
 David Ridenour
 George Rine

Louisiana-Mississippi R.G.

Dennis Fontenot
 Welbert Goodman
 Punzia Keys
 Michael LaGrange
 David Scott
 Chester Urbati
 Neal Paul Woods
 Finis Wright

Maine R.G.

Robert Gelinis
 Maurice Lamarre
 John Murray

Massachusetts R.G.

Anne Murphy
 Joseph Vairo

Michigan R.G.

Frank Kay
 Richard Zielski

Mid-Atlantic R.G.

Ernest Bradley
 Charles Harris
 Samuel Kramer
 Benjamin Wells

Midwest R.G.

Francis Coune
 David Johnson
 Ambrose King
 Lawrence Orr

Montana R.G.

Floyd Wiley

Mountain State R.G.

Darrell Lockard

New Jersey R.G.

Arthur Hamilton
 John Harnig
 Albert Isetts
 Theodore Johnson
 Frank Merendino
 Joseph Simon
 Willie Tatum

New Mexico R.G.

Richard Conner
 Paul Haberer
 Gilbert Lopez
 Thomas Morris
 Robert Young

New York R.G.

Robert Campanile
 Ralph Gallo
 Edward King
 Edward Leber
 Joseph Marzigliano
 Michael Protosow
 Robert Schaefer
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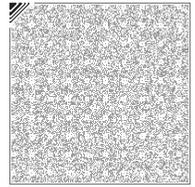
Grove Carter
 Dale Orgill

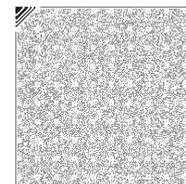
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Final Thought

The word hospital in the name Avon Army Old Farms Convalescent Hospital is a misnomer for how the facility operated to serve 800 blinded veterans from July 1944 through December 1947. Known to BVA as the organization's birthplace on March 28, 1945 and subsequently its temporary headquarters, Avon Old Farms was more of a blind rehabilitation center, converted as such from a boarding school for boys established in 1926.

School owner Mrs. Theodate Pope Riddle, close friend of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, shut the school down and provided the campus to the Army in exchange for \$1 per year.

Unidentified blinded veterans pictured here receive typing skills instruction at Avon. According to Teri Wilson, Avon Historical Society, recovering veterans were encouraged to focus on their talents and abilities rather than their sight loss.

Psychologists, teachers, engineers, businessmen, mechanics, state representatives, lawyers, and judges were some of the professions later practiced by the veterans at Avon.

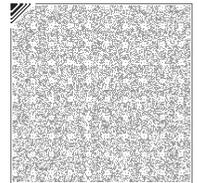


Photo courtesy of Avon Historical Society.