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Tazewell VA clinic offers telehealth and in-person health assessments



By Jim Talbert
The News & Press

Traveling may be the key to getting veterans health care in Southwest Virginia.

Abbi Evans, supervisor at the VA Clinic in Tazewell, said that facility and a clinic in Princeton are the only ones within a 100-mile radius. The Tazewell clinic is on the campus of Carilion Tazewell Community Hospital and has operated under a contract with Carilion since 2016.

Dr. Kevin Combs and Physician's Assistant Douglas Dalton II staff the clinic. It also offers mental health services through the telemedicine program. They also are connected to the suicide prevention hotline for veterans.

VA hospitals in Salem, Johnson City and Beckley are the other options for veterans in need of health care in this area. For in-patient treatment, the clinic relies on Salem but can use Carilion depending on bed availability.

The clinic has a contract with a local pharmacy for short-term prescriptions, and continuing medications are sent by mail from Salem. Evans said the clinic has a steady flow of patients, and they come from a broad area.

The clinic is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. It is inside Carilion Tazewell Community Hospital at 388 Ben Bolt Ave., and appointments may be made by calling 276-988-8863.

Before the clinic or any Veterans Administration facility will see a patient, they have to be certified as eligible for care from the VA. If you served in the active



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Tazewell clinic (cont'd)

military service and were separated under any condition other than dishonorable, you may qualify for VA health care benefits, according to the VA website.

The website also notes that current and former members of the Reserves or National Guard who were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty may be eligible for VA health benefits as well. Combat veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible to enroll in PG 6 within five years of the date of discharge and will receive free health care services and nursing home care for conditions possibly related to their military service.

Evans said, in addition to determining if the patient is eligible for care, the process also determines what level of care a patient is entitled to and what their out-of-pocket costs will be.

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services has offices in Abingdon, Big Stone Gap, Tazewell and Wytheville to assist veterans. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, representatives are in the offices by appointment only.

They may be contacted online at info@DVS.virginia.gov or by phone at 804-786-0286.



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Local nonprofits serve veterans and families in times of need



BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD COURIER

There are hundreds of nonprofit organizations throughout the country that have formed to give vital assistance to veterans, active service members and their families.

The mission of each of these nonprofit organizations is simple. They offer relief to those veterans who have given so much of their lives for the benefit of their country. Veterans may need help with getting a job, housing, paying a bill or dealing with emotional challenges.

There are around 19 million U.S. veterans as of this year, according to data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, representing less than 10% of the total U.S. adult population.

The following list is just a few of the places veterans can contact when assistance is needed.

Vittles for Vets

Vittles for Vets is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in December 2014 by

veterans for veterans.

Bill McCann founded Vittles for Vets in December 2014 in Rhode Island after witnessing the need and despair among many veterans.

After he moved to Radford, Virginia, in Dec. 2015, the charity had only seven veteran recipients. Now, the organization serves more than 120 veterans. The addition of family members increases that number to more than 180 people, McMann said in an email.

The primary purpose of the organization is

to distribute gift cards for nutritious food to qualifying veterans. The nonprofit also conducts special drives to meet the needs of veterans and their families who have qualified for the program through Virginia veteran services.

According to the website for Vittles for Vets, their mission is to empower those who have served our country honorably and have fallen on hard times to see a brighter future through the gift of nutritious food.

Vittles for Vets provides qualifying veterans,



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Nonprofits (cont'd)

who are living at or below poverty level (as determined by the Federal Government guidelines) food gift cards in the amount of \$50 each on a weekly basis.

To qualify, a veteran must complete a noninvasive application form, be living at or below poverty level, be drug- and alcohol-free and have received an "other than dishonorable" discharge from the military.

"As we receive no government assistance, on any level, we are totally dependent on the generosity of members of the community, organizations, groups, churches and business to fund and advance our program," McCann said.

The organization hosts many fundraising events throughout the year.

The Eastern Divide Brewing Co. will host a veterans fundraising event, donating \$1 for every pint of beer or ale sold from 3 to 9 p.m. on Nov. 11. Representatives of Vittles for Vets will be available to answer questions about services offered and to solicit donations for veterans.

The second annual Vittles Littles drive is

currently underway, raising funds for the purchase of toys, games and clothing for children, ages 18 and younger, of all veterans enrolled in the Vittles program.

"Last year, we served 39 children, several of whom had never received a Christmas present, seen Santa Claus or had a festive family dinner. We also provided an uncooked Christmas dinner for every veteran in the program," McCann said.

"This year, we have over 50 children in the program."

Vittles Littles Christmas Angel trees have been placed in businesses from Wytheville to Roanoke in an effort to raise money to accommodate an increase in the number of children needing to be served this year.

Check out "Vittles for Vets" on Facebook, or visit the webpage at www.vittlesforvetsradfordva.com. Donations are appreciated.

Send an email to vittlesforvets@gmail.com or call 401-447-5912.

Virginia Veterans Services Foundation

The Virginia Veterans Services Foundation plays a vital role in assisting veterans and their families throughout Virginia.

The Virginia Veteran Services Foundation helps to provide critical needs assistance to veterans who live in Virginia. Those services include housing assistance for veterans and their families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness; mental health services for those struggling; and employment assistance to prevent anyone from falling through the cracks.

Services offered include:

- Assistance for families as they adjust to the challenges of military service.
- Three veteran cemeteries throughout Virginia
- Care centers that provide quality short-term and long-term care for veterans in need of skilled nursing care or Alzheimer's dementia care.

Through the Virginia Values Veterans Program, Virginia became the first state to

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Non-profits (cont'd)

create an official program dedicated to improving the employment of veterans. Centers are located in Fauquier County and Virginia Beach.

The Virginia Veterans Services Foundation provides supplemental funding when state and federal funds are not available. The Foundation depends solely on donations, with 100% of all donated funds going directly to assist Virginia veterans and their families.

Additional information about all programs supported by the Virginia Veterans Services Foundation can be found on the foundation's website, www.VVSF.org or by calling the executive director, Karla Boughey at 804-225-4748 or by email karla.boughey@vsf.virginia.gov.

Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

James E. Peters, Chapter 57
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Lloyd Wilson, commander of the DAV in Abingdon, said the nonprofit organization

serves the counties of Washington, Smyth, Russell, Buchanan and Tazewell, and surrounding area.

"Our main goal is to help veterans with filing claims and answering questions," Wilson said. The organization also provides help when veterans are experiencing crisis.

"We will use every avenue available to help the veterans. We are veterans helping veterans.

American Legion Washington County Post 12

Porterfield Highway, Abingdon
Scout Building behind the Washington County Moose Family Center

The American Legion, Post 12, offers many benefits to serve veterans, including financial assistance, help with filing disability and other claims and help with obtaining headstones.

Bill Meade is the commander for the post. The organization, along with the Washington County Moose Family, is sponsoring a free dinner for all veterans and

spouses on Nov. 13 starting at 5:30 p.m.

Highlands Veterans Honor Guard

The mission of the local honor guard is to provide funeral honors for honorable discharged veterans of each branch of the service, male and female. For additional information, contact Bill Meade at bmeade12@embarqmail.com.

VFW, District 12, Department of Virginia

Elizabeth Ann Wicht, commander of District 12, which covers Southwest Virginia, said the organization is available for the services of honor guards at funerals, claims assistance, providing information on eligibilities and financial assistance.

They also have scholarship essay programs, including Patriot's Pen for middle school students and Voice for Democracy for high school students.

For additional information, contact Wicht at elizabehtannwicht@gmail.com.



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Not your granddaddy's VFW: New Bristol VFW location encourages conversation, community



BY TOM NETHERLAND
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD COURIER

Ice cubes clink in a glass of amber-colored bourbon. Dizzying lights from two rows of legal gambling machines invite you to slip in a dollar bill or more.

A sign says no smoking on the front door. And no one smokes.

Things have changed for VFW Patton-Crosswhite Post 6975. Two years since their move from its longtime — and quite smoke-filled — location on State Street in Bristol, Tennessee, the VFW's new digs at 343 Gate City Highway in Bristol, Virginia provide a much more pleasurable atmosphere.

"Everyone's welcome to come to the post," said Leon W. Brimm, post commander of VFW Patton-Crosswhite Post 6975, which earned its charter in 1946.

"It's all ages, but it's discretionary," Brimm, 46, said. "When the bar is open at night, it's ages 18 and up. We are not your granddaddy's VFW."

By that, Brimm means that this location does not allow smoking indoors. Furthermore, it's not a belly-up-to-the-bar beer and liquor joint. There's a bar. There's alcohol. But there's also soda pop and an atmosphere conducive to convivial social interaction.

There are rules for those who wish to join the VFW, an acronym for Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Established in 1899 in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War and during the Philippine Insurrection, the first post formed in Columbus, Ohio. According to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, about 1.5 million people are members of the VFW and its Auxiliary.

"The VFW is the most elite veterans' organization you can join," Brimm said. "You



Shana Parsons tends the bar and Leon W. Brimm serves as post commander at VFW Patton-Crosswhite Post 6975 on Gate City Highway in Bristol, Virginia. Photo: Tom Netherland/Special to the Herald Courier

have to go overseas, and you have to go into combat to join. I'm a vet. I've got a Purple Heart."

To join the VFW as an Auxiliary member, one must provide proof of either a parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, sibling or spouse who served in combat overseas.

Shana Parsons tends bar at and is a member of the VFW as an Auxiliary member. Her grandfather, Ray Hunigan, served during World War II and the Korean War. Like Brimm, she's an unpaid volunteer.

"This was the place (the VFW location on State Street) that my granddaddy went to when he returned from the Army in '68," said

Parsons, 45. "This was his place, where he went, had dinner. He bartended here."

Parsons added that she's developed a kinship with such veterans as Rich Davidson. On active duty from 1989 through 2014, he said he likes to drop by the VFW for a brew and to hang out with fellow veterans after work.

"To me, it's a brotherhood," said Davidson, 55, of Bristol, Virginia.

Davidson served in Somalia, Iraq and Haiti. He received a Purple Heart from a wound received in Iraq.

"I can relate with people here at the VFW,"

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VFW (cont'd)

he said. "I can talk to people, and they don't look at me like my head is on fire. They get it."

Brimm served in combat in Baghdad, Iraq.

"I was a reconnaissance scout," Brimm said. "I spent 11 months in Iraq. I was hit by an IED on Labor Day, Sept. 5, 2005. I had burns, a concussion, bruises everywhere. I was knocked out of the truck."

But all wasn't blood, guts and misery for Brimm in Iraq. Ask him. He enjoyed his time in the land of its former dictator, Saddam Hussein.

"I got to live in a palace for 11 months," he said.

Yes, literally, a palace.

"Overwhelming," Brimm said. "Damn right I enjoyed staying there. I can't lie. Iraqi people were nice people for the most part."

About the VFW, Brimm stressed that it's more than simply a place for veterans to visit and hang out with fellow veterans. As with its national counterparts, the local VFW reaches out into the community in a variety of ways.

For instance, a container of handmade red poppies rests on the bar. Alongside it sits a jar for donations. For a quarter, dollar or whatever, the poppies — tagged "BUDDY POPPY WEAR IT PROUDLY" — raise funds for the VFW's Veterans Assistance Program.

"We sell them to solicit donations," Brimm said. "We help homeless people. We help veterans when they need help. We did a food drive during COVID. We send birthday cards to veterans. That's a feel-good thing. It's so they are not forgotten."



Shana Parsons, of Bristol, Virginia, demonstrates one of the legal gambling machines — proceeds from which benefit the VFW — on-site at the Bristol, Virginia VFW location. Photo: Tom Netherland/Special to the Herald Courier



Bristol's VFW Patton-Crosswhite Post 6975 earned its charter in 1946. Photo: Tom Netherland/Special to the Herald Courier



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Now a person of age can visit the VFW, sit down at a gambling machine and win a large payout. It's legal. However, money wagered does benefit the VFW.

"All of that money goes back to charity. Our mission is to help

veterans and the community," Brimm said. "We are like a family. We look out for each other."

Again, Bristol's VFW post is open for whoever wishes to visit. Expect a clean, comfortable, inviting and affable atmosphere in the company of people who served, fought for and returned home to the country they love.

"We're in the city. We're not trying to hide," Brimm said. "Come see us."

How crosses and mementos help Marines remember fallen comrades



**By Katrina Finkelstein and
Derek H. Alderman**
University of Tennessee | The Conversation

On Veterans Day, people across America will thank veterans and active-duty military personnel for their service.

But many members of the public don't have a clear understanding of what service means to people in the military. How do they honor their own? What kind of spaces and activities help them reflect and remember — beyond one day a year?

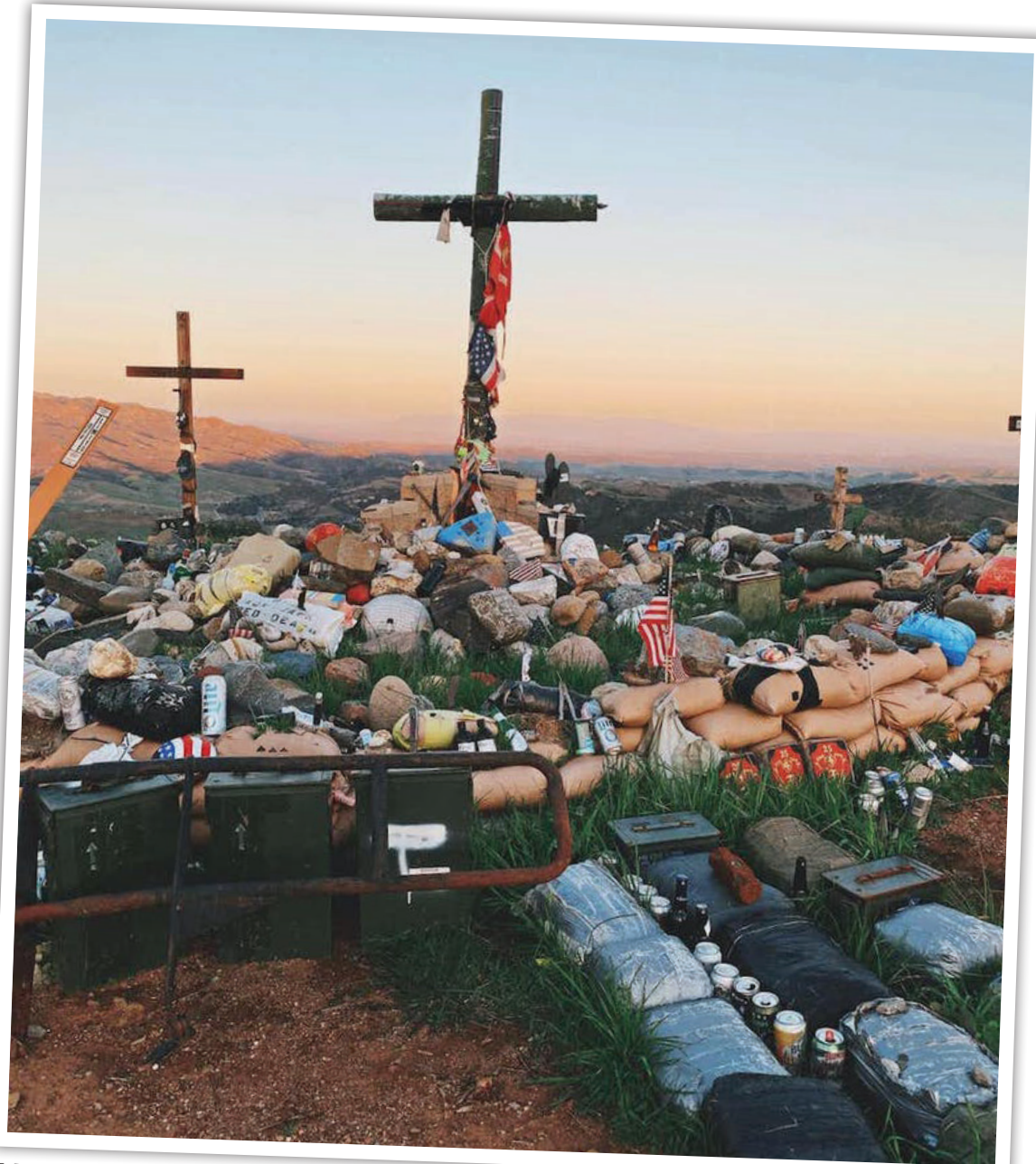
We are cultural geographers who study how people's emotions and connections with the past are represented physically in landscapes. Recently, our research has focused on commemorative place names in the military — particularly names associated with the Confederacy, which the U.S. armed forces are now reviewing and renaming.

Early this year, one of us (Katrina Finkelstein) visited Camp Pendleton in California to research commemoration on Marine Corps bases and understand how active-duty Marines and veterans interact with those spaces. In addition to official memorials and monuments sanctioned by the military, there are more informal and intimate examples of commemoration.

These ongoing, "living" memorials can be especially meaningful for service members processing their experiences and remembering those they lost, and physically represent the emotional weight they carry every day.

A living memorial

Camp Pendleton, one of the U.S. Marines' busiest bases, sits between San Diego and Los Angeles on miles of undeveloped coastline.



Marines carry personal items to the top of the hillside, contributing to the living memorial. Photo: Katrina Finkelstein/University of Tennessee

Thirteen hundred feet above the base, more than 30 crosses stand on a hillside — a memorial site established in 2003. Before deployment to Iraq, a group of seven service members — two Marine officers, two enlisted Marines, two Navy corpsmen and one Navy chaplain — carried a cross made of an old

telephone pole up to the site. It was an effort to remember a peer they lost and to prepare for the mission ahead of them. Three of the seven were later killed in action.

Today, the hilltop is still used for physical training and events before and after deployments. Meanwhile, its informal

Crosses (cont'd)

commemorations have expanded and changed, as many active-duty military and veterans develop a relationship with the space.

Destroyed in a fire in 2007, the original cross was replaced, and dozens of others added. Some are more intentionally constructed, engraved and carried up the steep hillside, while others might have been made from sticks on the way.

Contributing to the memorials has become an ongoing tradition. In August 2021, for example, after 13 service members were killed in a blast at Kabul airport — including nine Marines and one sailor based at Pendleton — new crosses appeared on the hillside. Others were erected at different Marine Corps bases, echoing the spontaneous way the first Camp Pendleton cross was installed.

This living memorial receives frequent attention, despite its isolated location and despite several official memorials throughout the base.

In an oral history interview, one of the original cross bearers from 2003, chaplain Scott Radetski, attributes the site's popularity to the "life" that exists on the hilltop. Because of its more intimate nature — secluded from the public and requiring an hourlong hike to visit — it has become especially meaningful for service members. The crosses are not a public memorial, he said, but "a warrior memorial."

More than crosses

On the journey to the Pendleton crosses, people carry mementos to leave at the top. At first, they were small rocks but have evolved to include sandbags, combat knives, insignia, unopened beer and liquor bottles and helmets, all piled at the base of the crosses.

At times, officials have moved to tidy it up, such as removing cans of alcohol. But some service members have objected, stressing that these items are deeply meaningful and carefully chosen. For them, these items they've carried to the top of the hill represent not only their comrades but the emotional weight that veterans carry each day because of their experiences.

"Those mementos represented that suffering, that pain, that loss, that anguish, that angst, whatever it was" that service members needed to leave behind, Radetski said. The site is not always clean and neat, but he suggests it reflects the messiness of war and the traumatic experiences of the veterans who visit

the site regularly.

In October 2021, before the battalion that sustained most of the losses at the Kabul airport returned to Camp Pendleton, the group Recycle for Veterans, which brings veterans together for cleanups on the West Coast, held an event to provide maintenance of the site. The group removed debris and empty bottles, but left mementos behind, leaving it ready for more commemorations in the future.

On 'common ground'

While many memorial landscapes can seem "fixed," representing a single moment or individual, the crosses at Camp Pendleton show that such spaces can actually change. The crosses reaffirm the idea that public memories are not static, and neither are spaces dedicated to them; new features are added as others are removed.

The crosses are not without controversy. A decade ago, after the Los Angeles Times ran a story about the memorial on Veterans Day, the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers filed a complaint, arguing that their presence relegated "all non-Christians who have fought and died for our country (...) to second-class citizenship." Base officials reportedly conducted a review, and the memorial still stands.

For Marines who support the memorial, however, the site can serve multiple purposes: a destination during physical training, a way to prepare for a deployment, or a journey to come to terms with their experiences upon returning home.

Often, these activities are collective. Veterans organize semiannual hikes, meaning that the site does not become obsolete or forgotten. As the site of an ever-expanding memorial, the hillside is an example of how veterans continue to return to their own community, to a place that Chaplain Radetski called a "common ground," for remembrance and healing.

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How to show your appreciation for the military in a unique time



United States military personnel serve both domestically and abroad. Active-duty personnel are following in the footsteps of retired veterans and protecting the freedoms of their fellow Americans while also playing a vital role in protecting millions of non-Americans across the globe.

United States military personnel make myriad sacrifices every day. Recognition of those sacrifices is just one of the many ways Americans can show their appreciation for the military, even during the era of social distancing.

★ Help a veteran. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2019 there were 17.4 million military veterans living in the United States. More than half of those veterans are 65 or older. As difficult as social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven for everyone, perhaps no group has sacrificed more than men and women over 65, millions of whom have been separated from their families. Aging men and women spent a year or more isolated at home to protect themselves from a virus that public health officials acknowledged was especially lethal to people over 65. Adults who want to show their appreciation for military veterans can reach out to local veterans'

organizations and offer to lend a hand. Such organizations may be delivering meals to vulnerable veterans, driving veterans to appointments to see their doctors or get vaccinated or

organizing events for veterans who have already been vaccinated. Pitching in to help with such efforts is a great way to show veterans their



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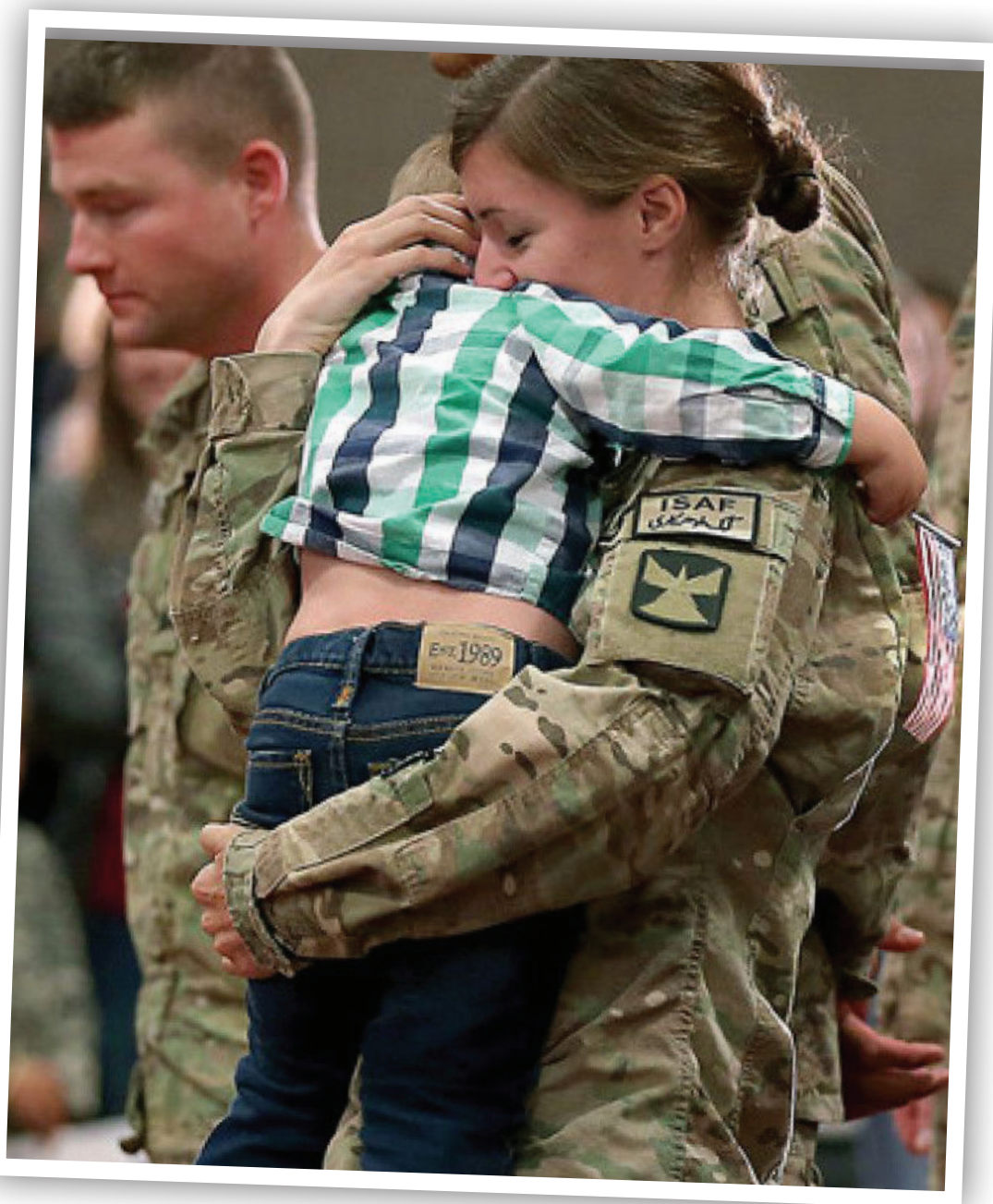
Appreciation (cont'd)

efforts are still appreciated, even if it's been decades since they last served.

★ Help a military family. Data from the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense indicates that there were roughly 1.3 million active-duty military personnel in 2018. Many of those service members serve overseas for months at a time. Their families back home can use a helping hand even in the best of times, but they might be especially needy while confronting the pandemic. Though vaccination projections suggest hundreds of millions of Americans will be fully vaccinated by mid-summer, in the meantime neighbors can help local military families handle life at home. Invite a local military family over for a weekly meal, offer to take kids to a sports practice if it's safe to do so or help out with chores like mowing the lawn or washing the car.

★ Donate to charities that serve the military. Adults who have not been vaccinated and are hesitant to be around others can still show their appreciation for military service members. Various organizations help both active-duty military and veterans, and donating to such charities can be a great way to help an excellent cause. If you're unsure about which organization to support, visit Charity Navigator at charitynavigator.org. Charity Navigator evaluates hundreds of thousands of charitable organizations and can be an invaluable resource for prospective donors.

Veterans and active military personnel deserve support. There are various ways for people to express that support, even as the world continues to confront the pandemic.



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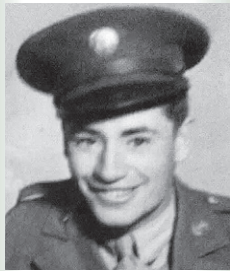
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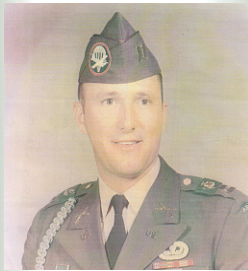
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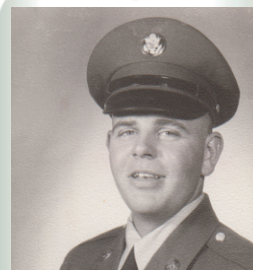
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 Vietnam
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 Special Operations
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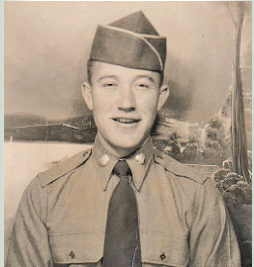
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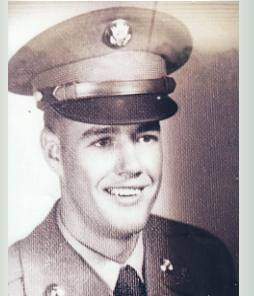
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