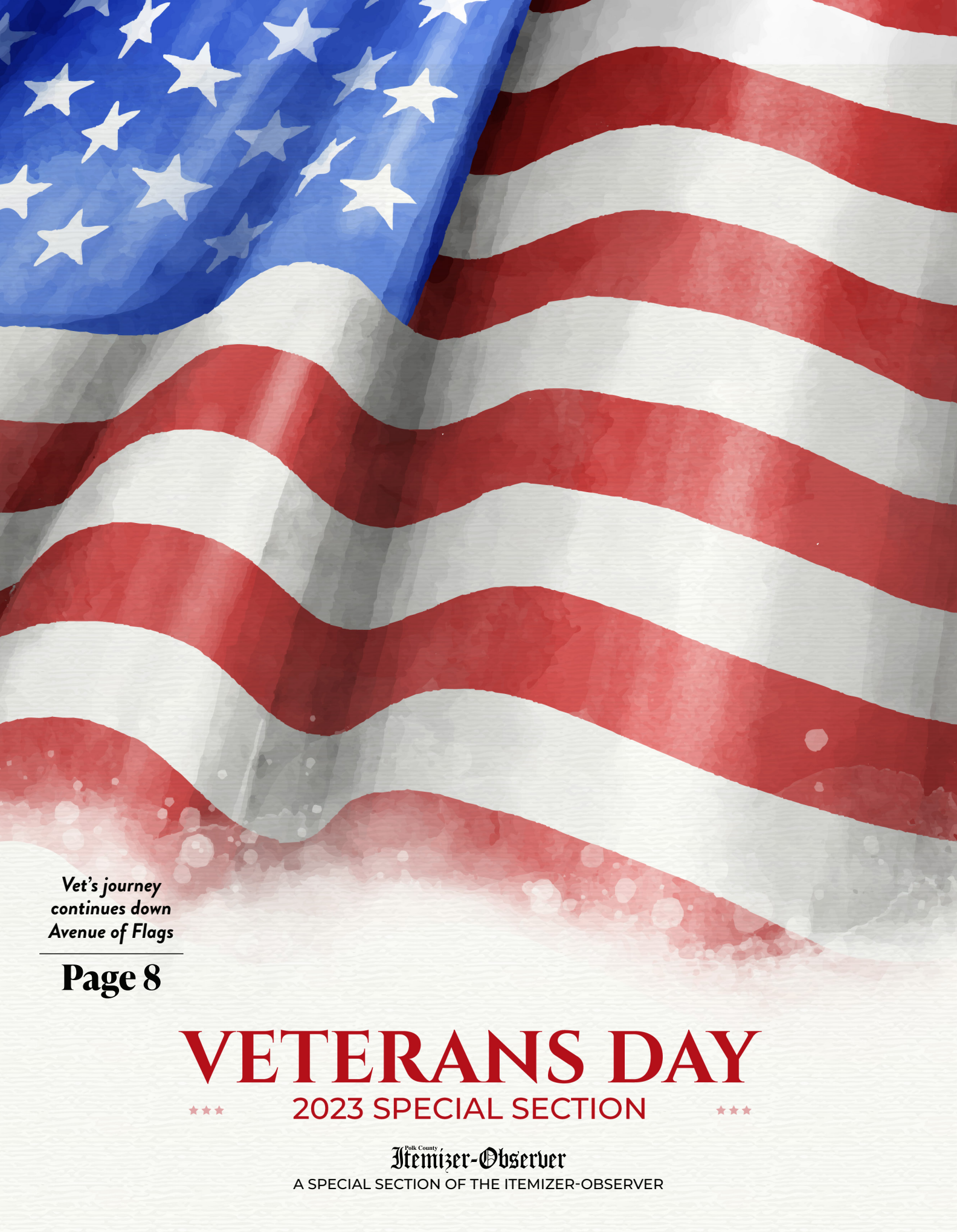




*Vet's journey
continues down
Avenue of Flags*

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VETERANS DAY

2023 SPECIAL SECTION

Polk County
Itemizer-Observer

A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE ITEMIZER-OBSERVER



AMERICAN LEGION



The Dallas American Legion Post 20 has been serving Dallas and Polk County continuously since 1919. Post 20 was founded by Dallas veterans returning from World War I and was named after Carl B. Fenton, a Dallas veteran who survived the war but died shortly after returning home.

The American Legion is chartered by Congress, which specifies membership requirements. Recent changes provide that all honorably discharged veterans who have served in World War II or at any time thereafter are now eligible to join. Family members are eligible to join the American Legion Auxiliary. Members of the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary are also eligible to join the American Legion Riders.

The Dallas American Legion family includes American Legion Post 20, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 20 and the American Legion Riders Unit 20. Everyone works together to serve and support Polk County service members, veterans and their families.

The American Legion works with the Polk County Veterans' Service Officer to support veterans and families throughout the year, such support may include; payments for rent, rental deposits, car repairs, medical assistance and other emergencies. Those needing help should start at the VSO's office.

The American Legion's biggest activity is the Avenue of Flags program at the Dallas Cemetery. For Memorial Day we place over 800 large flags at the cemetery, each with a specific veteran's name attached. We also place small flags on every veteran's grave. The program is a community effort accomplished with the support of the Oregon National Guard, Dallas Police and Fire Departments, the Old Guard Riders, Boy Scout Troop 288 and the Dallas High School choir.

The American Legion also provides other support to the community, we provide a music scholarship to a Dallas High School student and present leadership awards at six other schools throughout Polk County. The American Legion provides the color guard to lead the Krazy Dayz parade. We also present Veterans' Day programs at the Dallas Retirement Village and Lyle School.

The American Legion's monthly meeting is at 7pm on the second Wednesday at the Westside Pacific Family restaurant in Rickreall. The American Legion Auxiliary meets at the same location at 7pm on the second Tuesday of the month. The Legion family breakfast is at 9am on the first Saturday of the month.



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PHOTO BY OREGON STATE CAPITOL FOUNDATION

Oregon VA hosts ceremony at state capitol Nov. 11

The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs will honor all veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces on Veterans Day, Nov. 11 at 11 a.m. during its statewide Veterans Day ceremony this year in view of the Oregon State Capitol Building.

This event will feature remarks by dignitaries and special guests along with ceremonial elements including color guard, singing of the national anthem, laying of the wreath, and the playing of "Taps."

The celebration will honor Oregon veterans of all eras and will be hosted at the Oregon State Capitol Park located on Court Street Northeast in

downtown Salem — directly in front of the Oregon State Capitol Building.

The event is open to the public and uncovered seating will be provided for attendees. Accessible pathways and seating areas for those needing accommodations will also be provided. Attendees are reminded to plan accordingly for Oregon weather.

For those unable to attend, the event will also be livestreamed on ODVA's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/odvavet. If you have any questions about this event, please contact ODVA at (800) 692-9666 or visit www.oregon.gov/odva.



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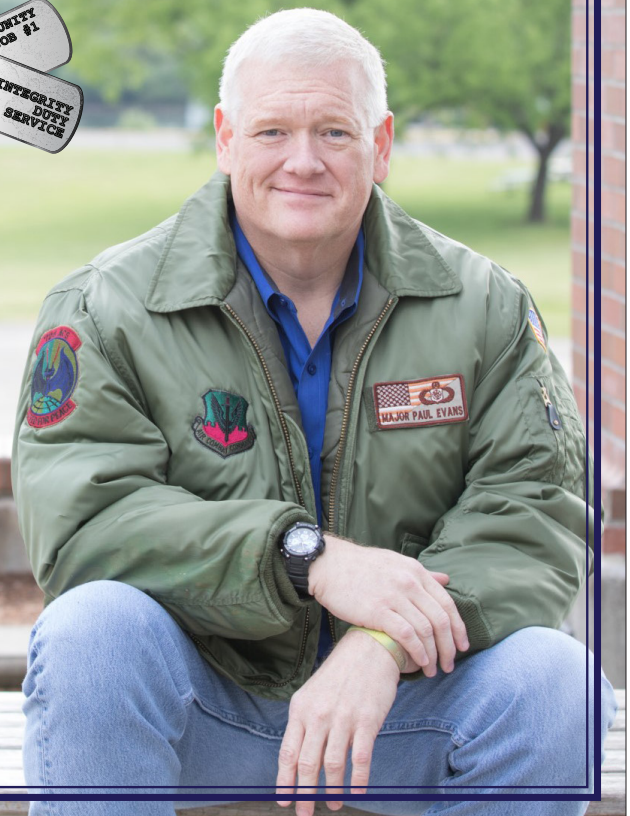
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PHOTO BY DAVID HAYES

Combat vets hope to keep VFW legacy alive

By David Hayes

Itemizer-Observer

The Polk County Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3203 may have 180 former military servicemen on its membership roll. But Post Commander Steve Storey said the list of active participants who do all the work in the name of the local VFW is down to 10.

With declining membership that was exacerbated by the covid pandemic limiting meetings during the lockdowns, Storey said the organization is trying to revitalize its public awareness within Polk County.

The first step last year was consolidating charters. The Dallas VFW post's initial charter was established in 1934. In the late 1990s, the Independence/Monmouth post turned in their charter and the Dallas post incorporated their members.

Under the former commander Dennis Miller, they voted to rename the post to reflect the wider representation around the county. With the approval of

national VFW leadership, the Dallas post redesignated Polk County Post 3203 in July of 2022.

Now, with Storey at the helm, his next goal is to keep the county post from going the way of Willamina's.

"With mostly World War 2 vets, the unit went defunct," Storey said.

A veteran of the Vietnam War, Storey, 77, said part of the problem is VFW's requirements to join the organization.

"Regulations require to join the VFW, you have to have served in combat or served on a vessel or at a facility within the combat area, such as a cook or mechanic," Storey said. "Now (our) unit is experiencing the same drag on membership. Without new wars, the old members are dying off without new war veterans to replace them."

"We have a lot of Vietnam veterans," Miller had said in the past. "But we're going after Iraqi veterans, Afghani veterans. We're going after the younger veterans. We want their families involved. We want to do stuff younger veterans are interested in."

We want to help them and be there for them, too."

One of the projects they initiated last year was an annual Community Service Day when members cleaned up the Veterans Bridge in Dallas, around and underneath it. This year, they set their sites on the Dallas Cemetery, cleaning the grounds and tidying up the headstones. In addition, the VFW teamed with the National Guard, Boy Scouts and the American Legion for projects at the cemetery, including setup of a record number of American flags to form the Avenue of Flags on Memorial Day.

Storey said they've set regular get-togethers to keep current members engaged.

"We try to get involved with other veterans with dinners and coffees, and first Saturdays of the month at the Independence Hotel restaurant, all you can eat \$10, to meet other vets, members from the VFW, the Legion and non-affiliated," Storey said. "See what's going on. Shoot the breeze. Most vets around town are a member of one of the two."

Members are also appearing at local schools to share with the youngest generation how veterans are serving the community today. They visited Perrydale students last month and are hitting up Oakdale Heights Elementary this month.

"We try to get the National Guard with us, in uniform, to show these are your options instead of going into college. We discuss benefits and how you can get stationed in other countries, travel the world on the government's dime," Storey said.

In addition, VFW members pay visits to senior citizens, such as those at Blue Heron Nursing Home this month.

"We ask older members of the community if they have any needs," Storey said, adding ex-service organizations (ESO) are also available to offer additional support such as Polk County's Veteran Support Office. The Polk County VFW Post also partners with Bi-Mart, Grocery Outlet and Tractor Supply to host a poppy sales fundraiser, a tribute to service members who fell during WWII in France and were buried in Flanders Field. Their latest achievement was acquiring a new banner identifying their post as from Polk County, now proudly displayed at meetings and other outings.

Their next goal is simple – expansion.

"We need to infuse our membership with new members. And not just new, but younger," Storey said. "We've gotta have something that keeps going instead of something that dies off."

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Vet's journey continues down Avenue of Flags

By Derek Bratton

Itemizer-Observer

As a wartime veteran, Shaun Davis's story was lived but not heard. Davis, 56, reflects on his two tours of duty in the Army.

As the Dallas resident reflects on his time in the Army, many emotions swirl behind his eyes. Some memories are humorous, while others may seem straight from a war movie, and the decision to serve his country or remain loyal to his family still haunts him today.

After being recruited out of McMinnville, Davis left for the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) where he ran into an assortment of characters. Some seemed out of central casting of an action movie while others couldn't pass the initial screening process.

"They were asking this one guy in front of me if he'd ever done any drugs, and he named off stuff I'd never heard of before. He was quickly excused and disqualified," recalled Davis.

Once Davis arrived at basic training, he witnessed his first lesson of bootcamp - get the job done in the most quick and efficient way possible, including his first "trim" at the barbershop. He remembers one recruit requesting the barber to take a little of the top.

"The barber grabbed his hair and pulled it back. In about six seconds he had him done. There were blood spots everywhere, then he yells 'next' and not a peep out of anyone else," Davis recalled with a halfcocked grin.

After his first two-year enlistment, Davis left active duty and transitioned into the Reserves from 1988 - 89, to take advantage of his G.I. Bill. While attending college full time, he was still in the Army Reserves, managed a pizza joint in Salem and ran on a track team. But he quickly felt burnt out, so he quit his job slinging pizzas and took the summer

off from school. Still, he needed something more.

He told his wife he wanted to return to the Army on active duty. They were soon relocated to Fort Lewis, Washington, when exciting news came. He would be a father. His wife was pregnant, and his life was getting back on track. Things couldn't get better now that he had a growing family.

However, his timing was less fortuitous as he was soon deployed to the Middle East for Operation Desert Storm. Although forced to separate from his burgeoning family, he was determined to serve his country.

It wasn't until he got over to the desert that he realized it was more than his family that he missed. He would miss the everyday things that most Americans take for granted, like ice.

"Ice was like gold," Davis recalled. "In the desert, we lived in tents seven out of the nine months. Being a cook, I had access to ice and things that some others didn't since I did supply runs. But it's just a little thing having a cold soda or ice, being able to go to the store when you want. I mean it's almost like we were inmates with no fence, but also no place to go."

It seems the little things like ice don't matter so much once missiles are detonating over your head. Davis would be awakened in one of the most terrifying ways possible: the sound of incoming fire.

"At about 12:15 a.m., our whole battery of Patriot missiles went off next to us. That woke us up, and people screamed, 'Get your MOPP suits on, incoming!' Davis said, referring to the chemical protection gear.

At the time, Davis was asleep with his headphones on and was shaken out of bed by the commotion. He and his buddy Paul helped others gear up and get to the foxhole bunker. One of the scuds was intercepted above their encampment, lighting the sky like a bright summer day.

"It shook the ground like an earthquake, then the

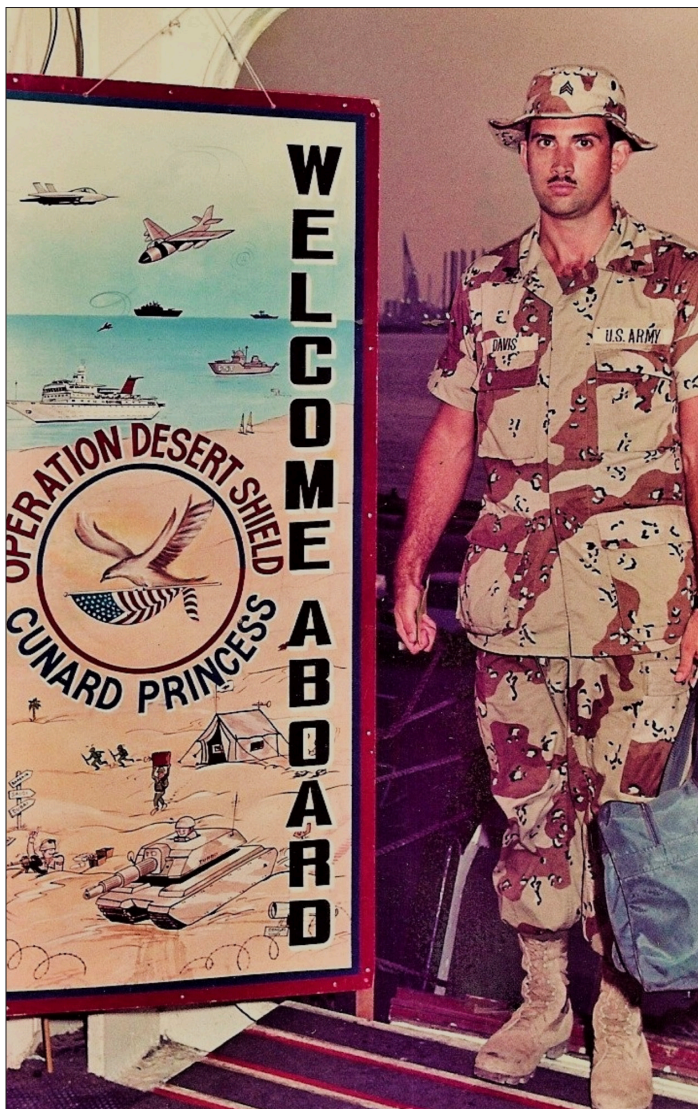


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Shawn Davis gets ready to be shipped off to Desert Storm.

concussion came. I've got hearing issues full-time to this day, but we could hardly hear for about three days. It was like the long tunnel effect, like someone speaking far, far away," recalled Davis.

After his deployment overseas ended, he looked forward to holding his three-month-old child for the first time. The leadership in his command told him that his unit would not be deployed again for at least 10 months and could have six weeks of leave.

However, while Davis was gone on leave, he was required to pick orders again. Since he was not around, they chose for him. Upon his return, Davis

CONTINUE ON, page 10

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learned he was assigned another two-year unaccompanied tour, leaving behind his wife and child, again.

Davis admits this was a sore spot; he was offered the orders and, in turn, a possible promotion. Or alternately, he could get out and terminate his enlistment early with no penalty. He chose family, and after signing the paperwork separated early from the Army, he received word that he would have been promoted to staff sergeant (E6) the following Monday had he stayed.

Undeterred, Davis chose to continue his service and commitment to his country, community, and fellow veterans as a civilian. Two years ago, he became chaplain for the Dallas American Legion, Post 20, and took over the Avenue of the Flags program. He leads a group of volunteers who set up and display full-size flags for fallen veterans and their family members on the week of Memorial Day at the Dallas Cemetery. Once the flags are taken down, he maintains them for life.

For this year's Memorial Day, they erected over 820 flags, the most ever, to line the roads within the cemetery. He said it took a lot of volunteers to pull that off. Volunteers with different backgrounds offered their help, including police, firefighters, and fellow vets. He said it takes a lot of work and a lot of planning, but he does it for the families who might have lost a loved one in combat or who have served but do not have a grave in the area.

"We will put up the flagpole and a flag for each veteran, plus we make name tags that we attach to the flags. Some people don't have a grave to go to for their family member and that's their way



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Davis and his wife Marie Johnson Davis, with three of their grandkids, Ricky, Alex and Liam.

of having a place to come honor their loved one," said Davis.

Davis wants people who are thinking about joining the military to know that there is a real possibility they may see combat.

"So, you must come in knowing that that's a possibility. If that is something that you absolutely don't or refuse to do, then don't even bother joining," said Davis.

Aside from conflict, he notes that in the military, members form unbreakable bonds that last a lifetime. Veterans learn to take pride in their work no matter how mundane the task may be.

"I wouldn't say all your day-to-day stuff in the military is not great, but it's the pride that you develop in yourself and how proficient that you become at your job," Davis said. "For me personally, I wouldn't change a thing."

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