

VETERANS DAY



— Honoring All Who Served —



STORIES OF HONOR

TODD MIZENER
tmizener/qconline.com

Over the last two years, the Quad-City Times and Dispatch-Argus have spearheaded the Stories of Honor project to recognize the sacrifice of area veterans during the months leading up to Veterans Day.

The veterans are nominated for Stories of Honor by friends and family looking to shine some light and express their gratitude to a veteran close to their hearts. Each one of those nominations is featured in the pages of this special Veterans Day section. In addition, we have republished the four veteran profiles to ensure that every reader has an opportunity to learn about their unique experience and sacrifice.

Each one of the four featured veterans personifies the call to action we posted back in July: “Share stories of allegiance, heroism, and determination. Some of the most powerful stories come from those who have served in the armed forces. Recognize the service, bravery, and sacrifice of the many heroes who have served or are serving our country.”

Every veteran has a unique story. Combat is not the only measure of a veteran’s sacrifice. The willingness to volunteer is a commitment very few Americans make. According to the Office of the Undersecretary

of Defense, there was about 1.4 million active-duty personnel as of July 2021. To put it in perspective, that measures out to less than one-half of 1% of the U.S. population.

It has been my honor to write the Stories of Honor profiles of Amy Johnson, Henry Setton, David Dwyer, and Monica Coussens-Danner. I am both thankful and amazed how candid they were talking about their experiences in the service of their country -- and their lives that followed.

Danner returned to her farm; Dwyer went on to found Olde Town Bakery in Moline; Setton took what the Navy taught him and parlayed it into a long career as an electrical engineer and professor; and Johnson earned her college degree and went on to a long career of helping children and senior citizens.

Returning home to civilian life is not an easy transition. The trauma of combat and being away from family for extended periods of time wear on everyone who serves and their families.

Army veteran Monica Coussens-Danner, who served three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, talked about the difficult adjustment.

Like too many veterans she has struggled with her mental health, PTSD, and the loss of comrades to suicide. But counseling has helped her stay on track. She’s tough, Iowa

tough, and despite the survivor’s guilt and the occasional angry outburst, she lives for her family. “I think for me it just comes down to my family, my husband, my daughter, and my horses,” said Danner.

Amy Johnson talked about how grateful she was for the welcome she received coming home from the Gulf War, especially in light of what happened to those returning from Vietnam.

“We flew commercial back in and at the airport, they made sure that they were giving everybody a hero’s welcome. I remember later sitting in VFW and American Legion halls talking to those who served in Vietnam. They would say to me ‘You guys are lucky that that’s how you came home. Because we came home to spit and, people saying we were the worst piece of crap on earth.’ I’m glad that the effort was made in that timeframe, not that it made up for what happened with everyone returning from Vietnam, but I think America got it right,” said Johnson.

Thank you to all the friends and family who nominated veterans this year. I would urge everyone who knows or loves a veteran to nominate them for Stories of Honor in July 2022. We are looking forward to telling their stories in the future.

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HONOR**
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STORIES OF HONOR

Stories of Honor Nominees



MONICA COUSSENS-DANNER

Monica, my daughter, joined the service in 2001. She immediately called me when 9-11 happened and said don't worry, National Guard, does not usually leave the states. So after 3 tours, Afghanistan and Iraq, she did encounter an attack on her group. She has injuries and received the Purple Heart. She continues to work for the Army and also works beside her husband and daughter on a cattle ranch. Very proud of her accomplishments and strong will.



SGT. LENA OLIVIA CLAYTON

Right after her 2017 graduation from united township high school, my daughter Lenae started her journey as a soldier in the United States Army. She has served through two deployments and was recently promoted to Sergeant. She also received the Distinguished Leader Award for her dedicated service to our country. Her family here in the Quad Cities is beyond proud of her!



HECTOR COLON

April 10, 1940 - May 13, 2018

In the fall of 1967, I was assigned to Company B, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment (Manchus), 25th Infantry Division operating in South Vietnam. There I met Lt. Hector Colon. Lt. Colon was a respected soldier, provided tremendous leadership, and served his country well. He left Bravo Company in 1968 and I returned to the states having completed my military obligation. In the mid 70's I was listening to a local radio station and heard "Hector Colon" conclude his Latin music radio show. Shortly thereafter I learned this was the same Hector Colon I served with in Vietnam, he was living in Moline and working at the Rock Island Arsenal. Subsequently, I learned Hector had not shared all of his Vietnam experiences including the fact that he had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), the nation's second-highest military award for heroism, for his heroic actions. In the late 90's Hector and I begin meeting annually with some of those we served within Vietnam. Again, he never boasted about his DSC. Agent Orange affected Hector's health and he passed in 2018. His obituary acknowledged his DSC award. This was probably the first time many of his family members, friends, and co-workers had heard of his heroic actions, for Hector was not one to brag about his accomplish-

ment. However, for those of us that served with Hector, we knew what a hero he was!

Hector's DSC citation reads as follows:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Second Lieutenant (Infantry) Hector E. Colon (ASN: O-5338231), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Company B, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division. Second Lieutenant Colon distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 5 January 1968 as a platoon leader of an infantry company during a helicopter extraction operation in War Zone C. Lieutenant Colon's platoon had just completed a reconnaissance-in-force mission and was awaiting extraction when it came under the heavy rocket, mortar, automatic weapons and small arms fire from an estimated four hundred Viet Cong. He quickly positioned his men to repel the advancing enemy. His radio operator was wounded and the radio was damaged. Lieutenant Colon secured another set and directed artillery fire and airstrikes on the insurgents, sometimes to within five meters of the friendly positions. He personally killed five enemy soldiers who tried to overrun the platoon's perimeter. As the firing subsided, he supervised the evacuation of the casualties, saw that the remainder of his men were extracted, and insured that all weapons and equipment were recovered. His exemplary leadership was directly responsible for routing the numerically superior and determined Viet Cong. Second Lieutenant Colon's extraordinary heroism and devotion to

duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

STEPHEN MORGAN

I am submitting on behalf of my husband (Steve) Steve is a Vietnam Veteran. His devoted to family and The Lord. His letters from his mother and good friend Daniel helped his days there get him through a situation that otherwise was hopeless. Several years ago we went to the traveling "Wall" in Geneseo, Ill. It was the first time anyone from the military had ever thanked him for serving our Country. Tears welled in his eyes and I believe everyone needs to know how a simple THANK YOU goes thousand of miles!!! Steve has been on The Honor Flight out of the Q-Cities. I urge anyone that loves our Veterans to participate in their homecoming. Join them on their return at the airport. Respect, loyalty, and admiration !!! These men were the past notching out our future. To all who have served...God Bless---One Nation Under God- For Liberty and Justice for All !!! This is a small part of Steve's story. He survived and is the most remarkable person I know.



JOHN KATHERMAN

John was drafted into the Army in August 1968 just 6 weeks after he was married. He was sent to Vietnam in February 1969 and was assigned to a rifle company in the First Cavalry Division. He served as an infantryman, Radio Telephone Operator,

and later, Battalion Intelligence NCO. John achieved the rank of Sergeant E-5. While in Vietnam, he was awarded the Bronze Star, Air Medal, and Combat Infantry Badge. He is a retired teacher and lives with his wife, Darlene in Rock Island, IL. He enjoys spending time with his 4 grandchildren.

DONALD L. PLACE

Donald L. Place is a decorated Vietnam Veteran who faithfully served our Country with the 101st Airborne Division in combat as part of a combat battalion. Don is an accomplished author and guest lecturer at the University of Iowa who has keenly documented his military experiences to remind those who faithfully served as well as future generations that our precious Freedom comes at an extreme price which is rarely discussed or appreciated. Since returning from combat, Don's journey is remarkably successful despite many lingering, long-term mental and physical challenges associated with his service commitment. Don is a living American Hero and an even better human being who values his Faith, Country, Family, and Community over all else. I am extremely proud to include him as one of my closest friends and clients.



ROY E. GUSTAFSON

It is an honor and a privilege to tell you about my friend and Vietnam veteran, Roy Gustafson. Roy served 10 months, 18 days, and 6 hours in that conflict in 1969. He was trained and served as an

electronic signal specialist, which means he was tasked with relaying obtained information from the northern part of South Vietnam and sending that information to Camp Eagle, to the leaders at his base camp in Phu Bai, to Da Nang and to the Pentagon. (Phu Bai was forty miles south of the DMZ. The signal site was about 20 minutes north of that. Camp Eagle was even farther north.). Roy and four to five additional soldiers would spend twelve hours every day in a small building equipped to send vital information to the different resources that needed this communication. This small building was surrounded by communication vans which helped to transmit the signals thus allowing the communications to continue to flow. From the information that was transmitted, it was then determined what action should be taken. If necessary, fire support or troop support would then be sent into the areas where they were needed. It was vital to keep this signal site up and running so that all information could flow and stay current. On one of Roy's shifts, the signal site-building was attacked with rockets and mortars. That night, Roy, the highest-ranking individual within the signal site, ordered all the other soldiers, except one, to retreat to the bunker to stay safe. The attack continued while Roy and the other operator proceeded to go on transmitting the necessary information to those in charge. Huey Cobra helicopters and DC3 airplanes (referred to as "Puff the Magic Dragons" due to their remarkable machine gun capabilities) were sent in to defend the site. After six hours, the attack finally concluded. No one was injured, but two signal vans were destroyed by rockets. For their

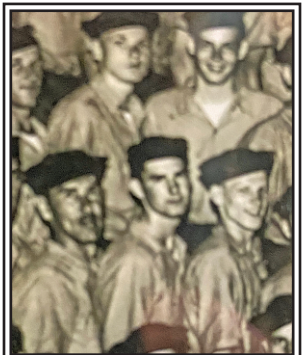
Please see **NOMINEES**, Page 3



Ivan Donner
US Army
S. P. 3



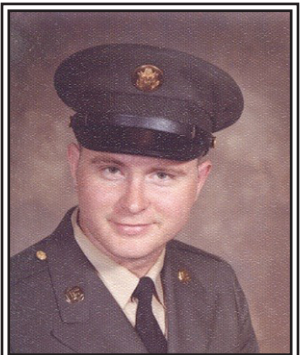
William Mess, Sr.
SP/5
Army
Germany 67-70



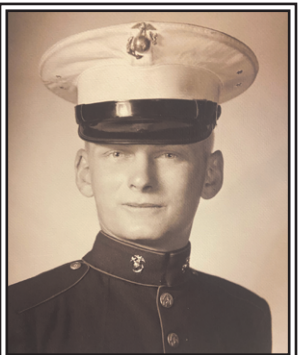
Gerry Blunt
US Marine
Messman
WW2



James Blair Ellison
US Army Air Force
Staff Sergeant
WWII



James Cary Ellison
US Army
Specialist 4
Viet Nam Era



John Adams
US Marine Corps
Staff Sergeant
Vietnam



Carl H. Schneckloth
S/M. Sgt. - 2 Bronze Stars
USAF - Korean War
Vietnam 2 Tours

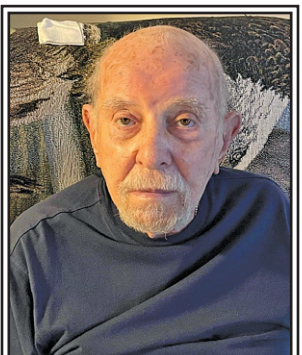
Robert. D. Morris
A2C
Air Force - Korea



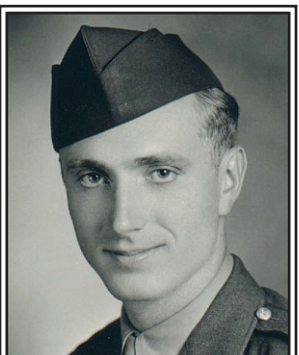
Charles A. Jackson
Private First Class, Company A,
438th Signal Battalion.
Purple Heart Recipient. Wounded
June 14, 1944 near Palo, Italy.
Dad, Grandpa, Great-Grandpa,
Your family is very proud of your
service. Thank You!



Michael Boelens
Airman 1st Class
United States Air Force



Joe Drefchinski
US Army
Corporal
Austria, WW2



Ernest Ellison
US Army
WWII

3 Locations

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Davenport, IA 52804

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STORIES OF HONOR

Nominees

From 2
bravery and willingness to stay and continue to transmit information throughout the attack, Roy and the other soldier were awarded the Bronze Star, which “a service member can receive for heroic and meritorious achievement or service.” Roy did just that, yet being ever humble, he never speaks about his act of heroism, until being encouraged to relay his story for this interview. Due to receiving the Bronze Star, Roy’s name is listed in the “Hall of Patriots” at the Rock Island Arsenal... another honor which he prefers not to mention.



ROBERT BRETl
My father enlisted in the Army when he was 17 years old and was immediately sent to Vietnam where he was a part of the Big Red One combat engineers—his group was sent in to rebuilt what was destroyed, sometimes under dangerous circumstances. He spent months in the jungle without running water or conveniences at times taking fire and not knowing if his platoon was going to make it through the night. I could not imagine existing under such circumstances at such a young age. My father is proud of his service to his country and is genuinely touched when we are out in public and someone thanks him for his service. I’m glad to see the welcome these Vietnam vets are receiving now in light of how they were treated when they originally returned from the fight.



SGT. STEVEN ADAMS
Steve Adams grew up in eastern Iowa. He founded the marines in October 2014 and has been deployed twice. Steven is back in Iowa and able to raise his 2 sons, soon to be 3, as a family back home close to his family. Thank you Steve for all you have done for our country and family.



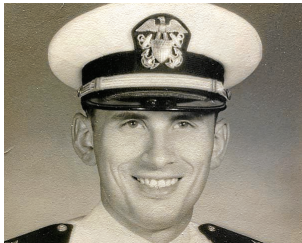
AMY LYNN JOHNSON
It is a rarity, it seems, to find a woman who would enlist in the Army, but in May of 1990, that is exactly what my friend, Amy Johnson, did on her way home from her class at Sauk Valley Community College. Few women are brave enough, strong enough, or would make the eight-year commitment, but Amy did! She stopped in at the recruiting office and committed to three years of active duty in the U.S. Army and another five years in the National Guard...all without consulting her parents! Amy has two brothers and one sister in her family. One of her brothers had served in the military and completed his education using the GI Bill. Amy felt that she also wanted to further her education in that manner, so she signed her name on the dotted line and joined the Army. She felt that “If I didn’t do something myself, I could see where I might do nothing at all.” And thus, in October of 1990, her

military experience began. Although Amy had her sights set on being in the Military Police, the recruiter offered her two options. She could be a cook or a truck driver. Amy selected “truck driver”. The recruiter stated that because she was a woman, she would probably just “drive officers around”. She entered Basic Training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in October of 1990 at the age of 20 years old. Desert Shield in Saudi Arabia was just starting to ramp up. In December, after completing her eight weeks of Basic Training, she was scheduled to have a week’s leave at home for Christmas. However, her Christmas present turned out to be that after an additional two weeks of truck driver training (instead of the typical eight weeks of training) she would then be DEPLOYED to Saudi Arabia! To top it off, instead of being granted a week spent at home for Christmas, she was given a pass to be off the post for a mere 24 hours to celebrate the holiday. Amy’s parents drove out to New Jersey to spend that day with their daughter before her deployment. The following day, she was loaded on a bus and taken to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. After three days, completing lots of tests and receiving numerous shots, she flew for over fifteen hours and landed directly at the Port of Dammam, in Saudi Arabia. Her platoon consisted of all men, and only four women, one of which was her Ranger Buddy. They were all assigned to a transportation unit that consisted of Reservists from Lisbon, Maine. Those soldiers were to teach the new arrivals about the 915 tractor-trailers. Amy and her Ranger Buddy’s responsibilities then became to haul live tank rounds through the desert to near the Kuwait border every single night. This ammunition was necessary to supply the troops as they

prepared for war. There were more than fifty trucks in her convoy and those trucks always traveled at night, every single night, when it was very dark. One truck would lead the way and the rest would carefully follow, as after the trucks would exit the highway and enter the desert, there were no roads, nor lights... just total blackness. On January 17th, 1991 Desert Storm began. Most of us were in the comfort of our cozy homes, watching the Scud missile attacks being countered by the USA Patriot missiles which were being broadcast on all the news channels. Amy and her Ranger Buddy, as well as the rest of her platoon, were in Saudi Arabia taking cover in protective barracks. Her location was less than a mile from where this was taking place. It is hard to imagine the courage that these young soldiers exhibited. It was frightening even watching it on TV. Three Marines near her location were killed that evening. Amy stated that if there was one good thing about this war, it was that “It was a fast war to be in.” The war concluded on February 28, 1991. Since there were many tasks to be completed before our soldiers could return from the Middle East, Amy spent eight additional months there. Her responsibilities now were to assist in securing all of our weaponry, equipment, tanks, Humvees, etc., and load it all onto cargo ships to be returned to the United States. Finally, it was Amy’s turn to come back. She returned to the United States and completed her final 18 months of active duty at Fort Irwin, California, at the National Training Center. There, soldiers practiced simulated tank war games in the heat of the Mojave Desert. Amy was discharged from the Army in May 1993 and immediately began her National Guard obligation by helping to contain

flooding in Quincy, IL. There was no rest for the weary! As a postlude: Amy did complete her B.S. from Western Illinois University in Macomb, IL, using her richly deserved and well-earned GI Bill to assist with her tuition. She was discharged from the Army completely in May 1998 and received her degree in January 1998. Amy exemplifies what it means to be a United States soldier. She possesses every attribute—courage, ambition, fortitude, determination, bravery, and somehow, even with all of the experiences that she has endured, including witnessing (and somehow, surviving) the Day #1 bombings of Desert Storm, as well as the rest of that altercation, continuing to do assigned duties for the remainder of her days in Saudi Arabia, and although not detailed in this report, dealing with a horrific act of brutality that was inflicted upon her Ranger Buddy—somehow through all of that, Amy demonstrates an unimaginably compassionate heart My guess is that she owned those traits before she entered into the military and thankfully, she still exhibits them!

RENE DINNEWETH
My Dad went to Vietnam in 1967 and served our country in the Army when war was not popular as it is today. As it should’ve been then. Today, we welcome our soldiers back home with open arms, as they deserve. Dad came home and worked tirelessly for his brothers and sisters in uniform, as well as his brothers and sisters in the Union. He didn’t ask for anything in return from anyone. There is not a day that goes by that I don’t miss him and wish I could have one more hour with him. Tell him how much I love him and miss him. To my mom, brother, and his family, as well as my own, Dad will always be “Our Hero”.



DAVID DWYER
This is my Dad, Commander Dave Dwyer. He was full-time in the Navy for 10 years and then reserves for 20 years. He returned to full-time duty for Desert Storm then retired. He was an Engineering Officer on the USS Warrington that was severely damaged in Vietnam. My dad received a Bronze medal for saving a lot of lives. I am embarrassed to say that I do not know all of his accomplishments. I would love to find out but I want to surprise him. My dad is a humble man. He loves to tell his story when someone asks.

LT COL AUGUSTUS WENTZ
Mr. Wentz was born in Baden, Germany around 1829. At 18, he immigrated to the United States and soon joined the army to fight in the Mexican War. After the war, he moved west and settled in Missouri where he met and married his wife Rebecca around 1852. The couple moved to Davenport two years later. Mr. Wentz seems to have been a popular citizen who was elected Constable in 1858, a position he held until he joined the war effort. When war erupted in April 1861, Mr. Wentz formed a group of volunteers that became Company G of the First Iowa Infantry. Mr. Wentz was elected Captain for this group that served a three-month term of service from May 14, 1861, through August 10, 1861. As a result of his endeavors, Governor Kirkwood gave him the commission of Lieutenant

Please see **NOMINEES**, Page 4



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develop, grow and serve the community.

Our Vets ERG partners with local organizations to provide needed services to veterans. They’ve partnered with Trinity Health Foundation to provide veterans access to VA

benefits. They’ve sponsored Irreverent Warriors events to offer connections and prevent veteran suicide. They even serve lunch to Arsenal soldiers. In the last year, they’ve donated more than \$6,000 and volunteered 60 hours to events and organizations helping Quad-Cities veterans.

We’re proud of all the veterans in the Quad-Cities, but most notably, those within our facility. So to all the veterans out there, thank you for your service.



STORIES OF HONOR

Nominees

From 3
Colonel of the 7th Iowa Infantry Company S, and Wentz left to take that position in September. By early November the 7th Iowa was camped at a place called Bird's Point, Missouri not far from Cairo, Illinois. Mrs. Wentz and several other wives were in camp at this time visiting their spouses. One can only imagine what the ladies thought as they saw their husbands board steamships in the early morning hours of November 7th for the short trip downriver to attack a Confederate camp near Belmont, Missouri. By Saturday, November 9th the local Davenport papers

had begun to receive word about the Battle of Belmont and it was soon realized that the 7th Iowa was in the worst part of the battle. Soon news arrived that Lieutenant Colonel Augustus Wentz had died. The first Scott County soldier to fall in battle.



DON LENGER
Donald Lenger served in the Navy during the Korean War on the USS Shenandoah (AD-26) in the Mediterranean Sea.

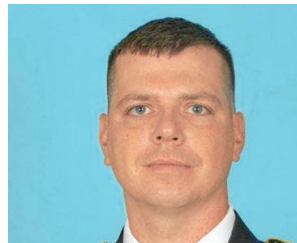
He joined after graduating from high school. The GI Bill allowed him to attend college at Western Illinois and graduated with a Bachelors's Degree in Education. He taught for 30+ years in the Moline School district.



HENRY SETTON
Henry is 97 years old, and of his adult years, the one year that stands out in his mind is 1943. In June of 1943, Henry

graduated from high school. In July he was drafted into the military service. In August, he graduated from Navy boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois. He was selected to attend the Navy's new shipboard radio, radar, and sonar school. In November of 1943, Henry married his High School sweetheart. After graduation from Navy School, he was assigned to the new USS Quincy. At the time the Quincy was the largest, fastest, and heaviest cruiser in the U.S. fleet. The Quincy became his home for the duration of the war. The Quincy was engaged in three major engagements during WWII (Europe, a Presidential Cruise, and The Pacific War Zone. Henry lived in Chicago before

moving to Overlook Village in Moline. He regularly discusses his service with other veterans and residents at Overlook during our men's group and veterans breakfast. He has recently started an educational talk about WWII and opens it up for discussion at the end.



MASTER SERGEANT NICHOLAS BARNETT
My husband Nicholas Barnett has not only served his country for 20 years but is an

amazing father to his 14-year-old daughter Meghan, he also is an amazing husband, last year his wife Stephanie was diagnosed with breast cancer and during her breast cancer journey with chemo and a double mastectomy he never left her side, he took care of his job and his family.



<p>Jim Geever US Army Corporal</p>	<p>Harley Shannon PFC- Military Police US Army- Korea had the honor to guard Marilyn Monroe</p>	<p>Dennis Searl US Army Spec 4 Korea</p>	<p>William G. Ellison US Army Tech 4 WWII</p>	<p>Dick Archibald US Army Specialist III South Korea</p>	<p>David E. Ellison US Army WWII</p>
<p>Paul E. Ellison US Navy Captain Viet Nam Era</p>	<p>Forrest Johnson US Air Force Sergeant 1950's</p>	<p>Daniel L. Wisely SSG US Army KIA 6 January 1968 Chu Lai, Vietnam</p>	<p>Floyd C. Ellison US Navy Captain Vietnam Era</p>	<p>William Mess, Jr. Corporal Marines Okinawa 89-93</p>	<p>James Bales Ellison US Army Corporal WWI</p>

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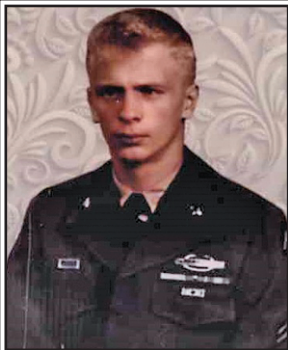
PETERSON-WALLIN-KNOX
Funeral Home

STORIES OF HONOR



Joshua Mark Ramirez
Captain USMC
Love Ya and Proud of Ya
Dad, Papo and Family

Kenneth C. Bachus
U.S. Army
Germany
1952-1954
Korean War



Jack R. Bunn
Corporal
Love you always,
Your Wife and Family



Veronica (Sierra) Houtekier
SH/SK2 • U.S. Navy
Vietnam Era



Jerome A. Houtekier
EM2/BU1
U.S. Navy Seabee
Vietnam

Joseph. Schwerdtfeger
SGT
U.S. Army
Vietnam

Donald R. Acuff

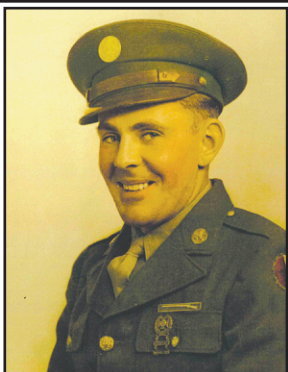
Private U.S. Army
(SP3) 1954-1957
Don served as
Russian Interpreter
in Hokkaido, Japan
during the Korean War



Socrates M. Ellison
US Army
Corporal
WWI



Ronald R. Nelson
Master Sgt.
USMC
1949-1970 Korea & Vietnam



Joseph Wm. Schurr, Sr.
PFC US Army WW II
545th Q.M. Depot Co.-PTO



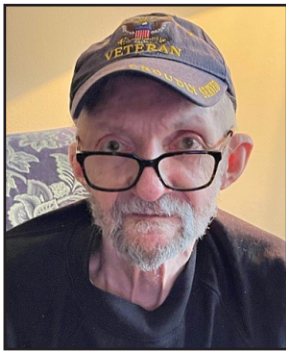
Kaitlyn N. Peterson
HN • U.S. Navy stationed in
Pensacola, FL • Working toward
Associate Degree in Dentistry



Rick Diederich
SP4
U.S. Army Combat Medic
25th INF DIV
Fire Base Keene 68-69



Calvin M. Ellison
US Army
Sergeant
Viet Nam Era



Jerry Parsons
US Navy
Fireman
Vietnam



Robert Showens
U. S. Army
Vietnam



Jorge S. Bernas
UM Corporal (E-4) USMC
Fallujah, Iraq 2004-2005
Operation, Iraqi Freedom 2-11
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Anthony Rodriguez, Sr.
Sergeant,
U.S. Air Force
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and Birthday
Brother.
Your kid brother,
Ray, USMC



J. Patrick Baldwin
Marine
Okinawa, Japan



SP4 George Weckel
U.S. Army
Served in
Vietnam
1966-1968



Louise A. Dooley
(1920-2005)
United States Marine Corps
Years of Service
1943-1945



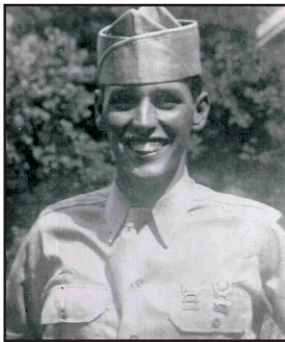
Joseph B. Dooley
(1920-2003)
United States Navy
Years of Service
1940-1961



William Theodore Wyant
Corporal, U.S. Army
World War II –
Battle of the Bulge
8/14/25 – 2/6/03
Age 20
Both Buried side by side together



William "Doc" Douglas Wyant
Spec4 (Medic)
Lost in ambush in Vietnam
Army 1968
Age 20



Lawrence G. Mais
U.S. Army Private 1st Class
Army Infantry European Theatre & Philippines
86th Division Blackhawks
Served in WWII



Joe O'Leary
U.S. Navy Seabees
1987-1992
Served in the Gulf War



Eric Stratton
U.S. Navy Seabees
NMCB-5 1987-1993
Served in the Gulf War



Jeffry Rodts
Lance Corporal
U.S. Marine Corps
Desert Storm, Somalia
1990-1994



Fred Rodts
Specialist
U.S. Army
Vietnam, 1969-1971
Purple Heart



Lynn R. Pease
Vietnam SP4
U.S. Army 1968-1969



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STORIES OF HONOR

She was born to lead

TODD MIZENER

It has taken a long time for Monica Coussens-Danner to muster the courage to tell her story of loss, triumph, sexism, hardship, and leadership while serving our country.

Her complicated journey started when she was a young girl living on a farm in New Liberty, Iowa with her family, raising hogs farrow to finish, and learning the lessons of hard work, sacrifice and commitment. She didn't know it at the time but it was a childhood that prepared her for a life in the military.

"I always say we grew up a generation behind everybody else is because we had to work. And that's how it was done. In the mornings, we got up to milk cows at 4:30 in the morning. And then we would go to school. We had chores that you had to do, that was the priority.

"I was out there doing chores with my siblings and father. Running the belt line silo feeder, milking cows, working pigs, and driving tractors all before 9 years old. You had a responsibility, but you also had that leadership that you didn't realize that you already had. So to me, farming helped me prepare for the military," said Danner.

Danner, who operates a cattle and crop farm outside of Muscatine with her husband Ben and their 9-year-old daughter Bailey, says that soldiers with a farming background are in demand in a combat zone.

"I've been deployed three times. Every single time I go over there. It is always the Iowa National Guard that is the best company to have with you. All the active-duty soldiers say, 'We want the Iowa National Guard,'" said Danner.

Monica's interest in the military sprung from her father's service in Vietnam.

"My father was drafted, (and served) in Vietnam, from '69 to '71. I kind of always dug through his medals and different things. He was an Airborne Ranger with the 173rd Airborne. But he never spoke of it. I never really understood or got to ask him a lot of questions. However, he did talk about his experience in Australia because he got malaria," Danner said.

Like so many kids from small-town America, she saw the military as a way to see the world far beyond the farm and serve a cause greater than herself.

"I just wanted to go and see the country and I wanted to go fight for my country," Danner said.

With her father's dog tags around her neck, she joined National Guard in January of 2001, after a semester at Muscatine Community College. She knew her father wouldn't be happy about her joining the Army, so she hedged her bet and joined the Guard.

"I thought I'd go National Guard, and slowly break that process in for him. So that's what I did. I signed the papers, and then I informed him, I had just turned 19," Danner said.

The Guard seemed like the 'safer choice' until 9/11 happened.

THE FIRST TOUR

The first of her three deploy-



TODD MIZENER / TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

Monica Coussens-Danner, a veteran of three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, lives with her husband and daughter on their cattle ranch outside of Muscatine, Iowa. She was awarded the Purple Heart for head injuries suffered from a road side bomb explosion. The highly decorated Sergeant First Class sports a Project Semicolon tattoo on her forearm to support suicide awareness.

ments came in 2003. Her unit bounced around without a true home for 15-months supporting the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, 101st Airborne and the 82nd Airborne," said Danner.

Danner stood out from both her fellow soldiers and the Muslim population of Iraq because she was a woman, a rarity in the ranks at the time. Additionally, she was a .50-caliber gunner, which was even rarer.

She said that a lot of people, in and out of the ranks, hated the idea of her behind that gun. It was shocking to people of the "Muslim Islamic faith to see a woman driving let alone having one up on top of the truck (with the machine gun) and they can see (my) hair," said Danner.

The M2 is a powerful heavy machine gun, which in Danner's case was mounted in an M900 series cargo truck. Her job was to protect the convoy.

When asked which was more difficult to wrestle, the .50 cal machine gun or cattle, she didn't hesitate to say "cattle for sure."

"They kick back, they drag you through the dirt. You gotta wait for their mama coming around the corner to nail you, to maul you. It's almost the same because you have to have your guard up. I like both. I think they both give me that experience of an adrenalin rush," she says with a big smile.

Her first deployment was the hardest of her three.

"We called it the wild, wild west because that's what it was. We did whatever we needed to do to survive," said Danner.

If fighting a war wasn't tough enough her life was made even worse by her command.

"They made my life miserable just because they didn't believe that I could do it. Because a lot of other females couldn't do it. And didn't do it. None of them did. I was the only (female) in my entire platoon," said Danner.

"I remember (coming back from) all-day missions, our faces boiled from the heat because it would get up past 120 degrees. You're driving down the road tucked out and just caked with dust and, you're dealing with all this other sh*t around you," said Danner.

Upon their return, the normal

protocol would be for her to dismount the heavy machine gun, hand it down to her driver and then clean it before getting food or rest.

On two occasions that she can remember someone from command arbitrarily ordering her team to step aside during the dismounting. "No, she has to do it by herself," recalled Danner.

The hardship wasn't the heavy gun, it was command interfering with the teamwork of her tight-knit unit.

"My driver is pissed off just like me because this is supposed to be a team thing and they're yelling at him to sit off to the side. Then I go in and we clean it every single time, tear the whole .50 cal apart and they'd be like, 'Alright, now tear it all apart again.' Okay, so I tear it all apart. 'Alright, put it back together.' 'Alright, now go mount it.' I'm thinking, are you serious? We just got back from a mission. We're exhausted. I'm dirty, I'm tired. I just want food because I haven't eaten all day. They made me do that, bring it out put it back up there a couple-three times. Then you have to take the barrels and bring those up, time it and lock load. And then they just be like, 'okay,' and walk off," said Danner.

Unfortunately, sexism wasn't a new experience for Danner. She's always been a trailblazer in a man's world. As a young farmer, she was in charge of a cattle operation that she owned with her brother. But still, she would run headfirst into old school farmers seemingly incapable of grasping the concept of a woman farmer.

THE COST OF WAR

All too often loss isn't segregated to the battlefield. Her first marriage only lasted two years (2004-06). She says it was a casualty of her military service, PTSD, and poor communication.

"We're too young then to go through such a traumatic event. I mean, that was crazy. That deployment, that timeframe, 9/11, it was just crazy. Nobody knew what to do. So we got divorced," said Danner.

But love would find Danner in December of 2011 when she started dating a close friend, Ben Danner. They got married five months later in May. The honeymoon didn't

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last long because she was deployed in July for her third tour, this time to Afghanistan. This deployment was different, this time her expertise and experience were a valued commodity and it didn't matter if she was a woman or not. She ended up helping to model security protocols for convoys operating in Afghanistan.

During that third deployment, the troops underneath her probably averaged 19-years-old. For the majority of the time, she commanded all men. "Some even called me their mom," she said with a wry smile. She led them in the field and was there for them when they just needed to talk to someone.

"That deployment is where I was respected for my rank, not as a female... I was on the road every day. I was security. We were getting blown up. Trucks are just getting hit and hit," said Danner.

It took her three tours of duty to earn a Purple Heart. She was the Security Section Sergeant and went on a call as the Convoy Commander for QRF, Quick Reaction Force. Their mission was to escort an EOD—Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit for a possible IED in a known dangerous area. She was in the mine roller running in the front when it was hit by a CW-IED (Command Wire Improvised Explosive Device). She and the gunner were knocked unconscious, and driver was injured. Despite the driver thinking the floor was blown apart, he hit the gas. When Danner woke up she ordered him to stop. They were now separated from the convoy and headed down one of the most dangerous stretches of road in Afghanistan.

By some miracle, the convoy made it out safe and she and the gunner were medevaced to another

base and later sent to a Traumatic Brain Injury rehabilitation center. She couldn't walk or barely talk when she arrived. After weeks of rehabilitation, she was able to go back to her unit. But then she hit her head again.

"I was getting really bad headaches. I was vomiting, nosebleeds, and I tried to hide it for a long time," said Danner.

Finally, she was convinced by a medic that her body was "a mess" and she had to go back through the TBI a second time. At this point, she could have easily punched her ticket and gone home, but her sense of duty to her troops was too strong. She convinced her command to let her stay and was ordered to take platoon leader responsibilities while he was preparing for movement back to states.

"I couldn't handle hearing it on the radio and not being there. That's not my job to be sitting back, my job is to be out there to be leading these guys. They don't have a lot of combat experience. So I went back," she said.

"I just think that anybody would do it. Those are my troops. If I can still walk and talk, I need to be with my troops."

She dealt with insomnia, headaches, vomiting, and nosebleeds because she thought that because she couldn't see the damage she was fine.

Like so many other warriors who have seen war, she brought her injuries home. She was supposed to get a series of tests when she got home, but fate intervened. Two days after getting home she got pregnant with Bailey.

"So I could no longer go in and get MRI and CAT scans. So I had to go through a very tough, tough pregnancy."

After Bailey's birth, doctors told her she had trigeminal neuralgia and had to take strong medication. The side-effect of that medication was more collateral damage from that roadside bomb.

"We wanted to have more kids, but the child would grown up with disabilities. So we had to make that hard decision. Unfortunately, I'm done having kids because of this," Danner said.

She and her husband choose not to dwell on the negative, instead, they see themselves as blessed. "She really is a miracle because if I would have had the MRIs, then I would have been on the medication and I wouldn't have had her."

Danner is a natural-born leader who says she would do it all over again. You can see it in the way she walks and talks. Just chatting across the family's heavy wooden kitchen table in their remodeled farmhouse her infectious energy is palpable.

The highly decorated Sergeant First Class sports a Project Semicolon tattoo on her forearm to support suicide awareness.

Like too many veterans she has struggled with her mental health, PTSD, and the loss of comrades to suicide. But counseling has helped her stay on track. She's tough, Iowa tough, and despite the survivor's guilt and the occasional angry outburst, she lives for her family. "I think for me it just comes down to my family, my husband, my daughter, and my horses," said Danner.

She continues to serve her country in the National Guard and her community in numerous leadership positions. It is impossible to imagine her ever slowing down or backing down from a challenge.

Despite the heavy toll of war, veteran Monica Danner has no regrets.





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STORIES OF HONOR

The genesis of Black Hawk College was to help veterans

HOLLY SMITH/BLACK HAWK COLLEGE

In the 1940s, an entire country had turned its attention to a war half a world away. Young American GIs shipped out to Europe and the Pacific. Parents, brothers, sisters, wives and girlfriends said goodbye, not knowing if this was the last time they would see their loved ones. Each tear shed carried with it fear and hope.

The war was eventually won and soon thousands of soldiers would be coming home. Quad-City community leaders realized the GIs would need training and education to move from soldier to productive citizen.

In 1946, Moline Community College was founded to provide education and training to World War II veterans. In those first classes, 73 percent of the 239 stu-

dents were World War II veterans.

The nation recovered from the war years, and the Quad-Cities enjoyed prosperity and growth during the 1940s and 1950s. As households became more prosperous, higher education and career training became possible for more people. In 1961, Moline Community College expanded to become the first county-wide junior college in Illinois and its name changed to Black Hawk College.

Seventy-five years later, serving veterans and military students remains a high priority for Black Hawk College.

Marine veteran Thomas Reagan, BHC Coordinator of Veterans Services, helps veterans and active military members transition into civilian life and learn more about their options through the GI Bill.

The college's Quad-Cities Campus is home to the Lane Evans Veterans Resource Center. It opened in 2014 and in 2015 was dedicated to Evans, a former U.S. congressman, a Marine veteran and BHC alumnus.

"This Veterans Center has actually been a godsend since I started back at school," said one BHC student veteran. "One of the main reasons is it is a separate space to relax around people that share that camaraderie."

The center includes a lounge area, a quiet room and a room with computer workstations.

"It definitely helps with stress relief, it's a good decompression zone, and a great place to meet new vets," said another BHC student veteran.

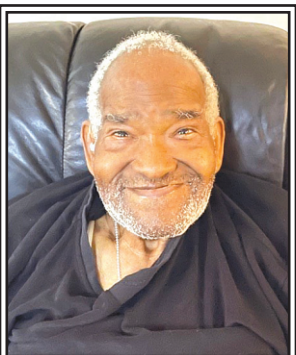
"I am happy to have this place."



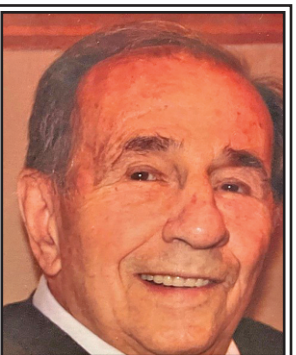
Black Hawk College was originally located in the former Moline High School building on 16th Street, in Moline.



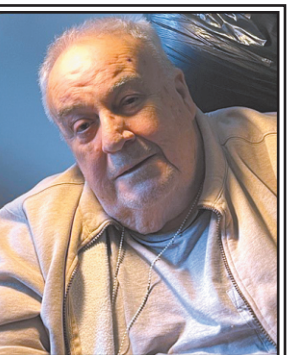
Ralph Messengarb
US Navy
Machinist Mate



Jesse Viers
US Army
First Lieutenant
18 years

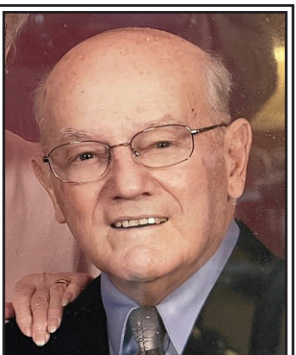


Sam Rice
US Air Force
Staff Sergeant
Korea



Tom Manion
US Army, Sergeant
US Air Force, Master Sergeant
S. Pacific and Europe

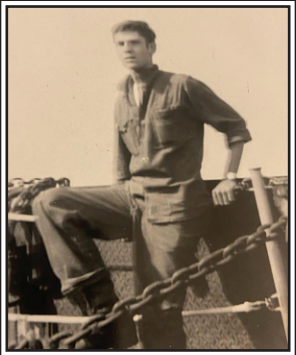
Dennis Perrin
SP4
U.S.
Army –
Vietnam



Alphonse DeBruine
US Air Force
Corporal, Flight Engineer
Peterson AFB



James Robert McAtee
CW04
Army Served 33 Years



Dave Garrett
US Navy, Seaman
US Army, P.F.C.



James Weisser
Electrician Mate 2nd Class
Navy
Shipboard 3yrs 1961-1965



Jay Landis McQuillen
Staff Sargent
U.S. Marine Corp
(1953-1956 Korean Conflict)
Passed Away 7-19-19



Jack Cobb
US Navy, Seaman 1st Class
US Marine Corps,
Military Police Sergeant



Harvey Walton Ellison
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Corporal
WWI

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STORIES OF HONOR

WWII veteran: “I had my job to do and I did it”

TODD MIZENER
tmizener/qconline.com

Henry Setton, of Moline, is shooting for 100.

The World War II Navy veteran only has three years to go until he hits the coveted century mark.

Anyone who meets the jovial Setton will quickly realize that he possesses a boatload of stories from his 97 years of life, and he is always willing to share.

Like so many men of his generation, his World War II story starts with the draft.

“Back in the old days, long before you were born, they had what is known as ‘Uncle Sam Wants You.’ And about the time you graduated high school — zip, they were right at your door to induct you into the service,” Setton recalled.

He grew up on the southwest side of Chicago, in the stockyards district where his great-grandparents had migrated to for work in the meatpacking industry.

It was in that close-knit South Side neighborhood that he met his future wife June and discovered a passion for ham radio. That hobby would end up helping guide the course of his life, both in and out of the military.

‘Radio shack’

While relaxing in his fourth-floor apartment overlooking the west end of Moline, Setton reminisced about the little “radio shack” he built in his parent’s basement.

For as long as he could remember, Setton has been interested in electronics. He obtained his radio operator’s license while in high school.

“I built my own station. I built my own receiver. It was my hobby. So I was into electronics before I got into the service,” Setton said.

“I loved it. I spent all night doing it,” he said.

“I got into the service at a time when the British had developed a vacuum tube, which would allow them to put (radar) in an airplane. Before that our first antenna aboard ship was as big as a bed spring. It was 8 feet by 4 feet (mounted atop the ship and rotated). Then it came down to a little gadget about a size of a ball,” said Setton.

After being drafted he was sent to Great Lakes Naval Base in Illinois for basic training, followed by 10 months of electronic and radar training spread between Houston, Texas, and San Francisco, California. Up till then, he’s never ventured farther from the South Side than short trips to Indiana and Michigan.

His last stop before being assigned to the USS Quincy (CA-71) was to learn how to operate the physical equipment that he would be operating and maintaining in the Navy.

“We’d work on the actual transmitters that we had aboard ship, with the actual radar that we were going to maintain and repair,” said Setton.

Defining times

His time aboard the USS Quincy involved two defining moments of



World War II veteran Henry Setton, of Moline, poses for a portrait with a photograph of the USS Quincy (CA-71), the ship he served on during the war.

history.

The first was transporting President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his entourage in January of 1945 from Newport News, Virginia, to Malta and then Yalta.

In Malta the president met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and other dignitaries while onboard the Quincy. Roosevelt then continued to the Crimea by plane to attend the Yalta Conference, where he and other world leaders discussed the postwar reorganization of Europe.

Roosevelt reboarded the Quincy in February 1945 for another series of important meetings, including one with King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia that resulted in a secret agreement that gave birth to the U.S. providing military assistance in exchange for oil.

The second defining moment of history was the days and weeks leading up to the United States dropping atomic bombs on both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. During that time the Quincy was heavily involved in the military strikes on Japan.

When asked about his most vivid memory he didn’t hesitate before answering.

“General quarters.”

“Whenever there was an emergency, or when we were about to be attacked, or attack someone, a bugler would blow into a microphone



A young Henry Setton poses for a photo in the “Radio Shack” he built in the basement of this parent’s Chicago home during the 1940’s. Setton’s love electronics carried him into the Navy and beyond.

and everybody on the ship would get the message. You’d have to run to general quarters. And my general quarters was an interesting place. I was in charge for a while of the emergency radio. And that’s where

I spent a lot of my time whenever there was an emergency.

“(The) emergency radio was located in the center of the ship toward the bottom, protected from the enemy’s shells and guns. If the

main deck of the ship was destroyed taking out our antenna, we would lose all communication with the rest of the fleet, but the emergency radio would then take over, become the communication center of the ship, because it was protected from the outside forces,” Setton explained.

While cannons were firing above and kamikaze pilots were aiming for the USS Quincy, Setton was sealed in a small square room, with the radio equipment, a few other sailors, all surrounded by steel beams and pipes. They could hear the battle but they never saw what was going on.

“We were told not to be too active. During an emergency, everything is shut down on the ship because they could be lofting gases at you. And those gases would asphyxiate everybody on the ship. So all the air ventilation was shut off. We only had the air which was in a room, and it was hot. We were instructed to just sit and not destroy what little available oxygen,” said Setton.

“I was probably 25 feet below the waterline. It was a place where a bomb on the outside couldn’t reach. It was the safest place (on the ship),” said Setton.

Thankfully for all the sailors onboard the USS Quincy, the ship never sustained enough damage to warrant the captain having to leave the bridge and take refuge in the emergency radio room.

“I was never really scared. Not that I can remember. I had my job to do and I did it. And that’s how we were trained,” he said.

In the Navy you follow orders, even when they don’t seem to make sense at the time. He remembers that they were told to cease bombardment and sail as fast as they could away from Japan.




It wasn’t until later, when they heard the Japanese propagandist Toyko Rose announce the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Then the ship’s orders transmitted from Pearl Harbor made sense.

When asked what he thought when he learned about the bombs, he repeated the mantra of so many soldiers — “We had nothing to say about it. I was interested in maintaining the equipment. I had my job to do and I did it.”

He built on that job after the war. Setton began in the little radio shack in his parent’s basement, went to the emergency radio room, and then to a radio store in Chicago that he ran with his wife.

From there he went on to study engineering at the Illinois Institute of Technology, graduating in 1950. He later worked for IBM as an electrical engineer. In 1952 he joined the faculty of DeVry Tech as an instructor, and in 1955 he became a professor of engineering at the University of Illinois Chicago. He retired in 1983 but served as an adjunct professor at Triton College, 1984-2005.

He lost his wife June four years ago. He lives at Moline’s Overlook Village and his family all reside in the Quad-Cities area, making it the perfect place for him to gently sail to the century mark.



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STORIES OF HONOR

Dwyer's bravery helped advert disaster

TODD MIZENER
tmizener/qconline.com

The Quad-Cities knows him best as the founder of Moline's Olde Towne Bakery.

David Dwyer, of Rock Island, is a 79-year-old retired baker whose sugar cookies are legendary, but he is also an extremely humble war hero whose bravery saved the lives of his shipmates on July 17, 1972, during the Vietnam War.

The father of three daughters, grandfather to eight and husband to Judy is so self-effacing that it wasn't until I asked about the ribbon taped to the back of a folded newspaper clipping on the table that he told me about his Bronze Star. We had been talking for almost an hour about his service in the Navy, and he never once elaborated on his role in what he calls "the incident."

His modest nature is what you might expect from someone who grew up in little Sandwich, Illinois. His father was a ticket salesman for the Burlington Railroad, and his mother, a first-generation American, took care of him and his brother. In 1963, after high school, he joined the Naval Reserves and was shipped off to Great Lakes Naval Base north of Chicago for basic training.

He was in the reserves during his four years of college. After graduating in 1968, he went to Officer Candidate School, served full time until 1979 and continued to serve in the reserves until 1993 when he retired.

The kid from landlocked central Illinois didn't necessarily yearn to go to sea while growing up. His reasons for choosing the Navy were first familial. His brother was a Naval officer, and a cousin was in the Navy.

Second, "I didn't want to live in a foxhole," he said with a wry smile.

After rising through the ranks of the Navy, Lt. David Dwyer was the chief engineer on the USS Warrington (DD-843), a destroyer based out of Newport, Rhode Island, when the ship was ordered to Vietnam.

Once they arrived off the coast of



TODD MIZENER

Retired U.S. Navy Cmdr. David Dwyer, poses in the foyer of his Rock Island home with his service photo. Dwyer was awarded the Bronze Star for "heroic achievement" while serving on the USS Warrington during the Vietnam War. He is also the former owner of Moline's Olde Towne Bakery.

Vietnam, their first mission was to conduct primarily gunfire support into a Quang Tr area. After a few days, they were ordered back to the Philippines to shed their helicopter and load up on ammunition.

"So we took the helicopter bay, and we filled it up with ammunition, 5-inch shells and everything because they were sending us to North Vietnam. (The Chinese) were gun-running over to North Vietnam, and we were supposed to go up there and interdict," Dwyer said.

After a brief stop in Danang for a repair, the Warrington and her crew headed up the coast of Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tonkin, northeast of the Chinese island of Hainan, when the "incident" happened.

The Warrington struck two mines rendering it practically dead in the water.

"We weren't sure if there was one or two because they were so close together. They determined that there were two because it lifted the entire rear end of the ship out of the

water," said Dwyer.

"I was sitting at my desk, and it threw me out of the desk and down onto the floor. I mean, because you weren't prepared. You weren't buckled down or anything.

"From there, I got down into the engine room to my general quarters (battle) station. From there, I directed all the activities. We discovered that we had to shut down the number one boiler because it had been so heavily damaged; in order to relight it, it might have exploded on us. So we shut that down," he said.

"We were barely turning our one screw. The one was dead, and the other one was just (barely) turning."

Sitting at his dining room table Dwyer tells the story of the "incident" without drawing any attention to his own heroism.

But a story published in the Newport Daily News on March 14, 1973, about his Bronze Star sheds more light on his actions to save the ship from sinking.

"The citation was awarded for

'heroic achievement' while serving on board the destroyer Warrington in hostile waters off Vietnam last summer.

"... Lt. Dwyer 'courageously and unhesitatingly' entered a quickly flooding Number One engine room. Despite "uncontrollable fuel oil, saltwater, and freshwater flooding in that and other spaces, heavy fuel oil fumes, sporadic electrical fires, high ambient temperatures, and live steam, Lt. Dwyer took charge of all main engineering spaces from Main Control.

"Without regard for his own safety and through a series of correct but highly critical decisions, he saved the main propulsion plant from catastrophic destruction. His prompt and courageous actions enabled the ship to escape from enemy gun range without loss of life or serious injury in any of the spaces.

"The citation lauded Lt. Dwyer for his inspirational leadership, superior professionalism, and unwavering courage."

Decades later, Dwyer paused for a moment before describing the chaotic scene when water was rushing into the ship.

"It became survival and putting out fires. We had fires down in there. It was a little hard to breathe because of the fumes. But it wasn't bad at that point, (but) getting worse. Then, when we shut everything down because of the water level that's when it stagnated, and you had to get out of there because if you stayed there, you'd probably have suffocated," he said.

Dwyer maintains he was just doing his job as chief engineer.

When asked if he sought direction to act or if he just acted quickly on his own, he hesitates to laud his decision-making during the crisis.


"I'm a little fuzzy on whether we actually communicated with a bridge. I know I talked to the captain directly at one time and told him what was going on. ... I told him that we were shutting down because of the water level. By the time the water got to the deck plates, which is what you were walking on next to the pumps, then you had to shut down because the water was steadily coming up. If the water got any deeper basically they would have exploded and that would have been a disaster because we were still down there with all the crew manning the engines and everything. The engine room was the main hub. That's where I was. And that's where the key chiefs and people were. And there's more than one power pump down there that would have exploded. It would have been a chain reaction. Because the water was coming up too fast."

"We were extremely lucky. We had so much explosives on board. We were at 110% of our capacity. Why nothing detonated from the explosions? Lord only knows. But the ship would have just gone poof if anything started blowing."




Approximately 270 crew members survived the "incident" that day off the coast of Vietnam, thanks to the quick thinking of Lt. David Dwyer.



Alvin Klouda
Staff Sergeant
United States Air Force



Stevie Willis
SPC/5
US Army
Active duty 1976-1983



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STORIES OF HONOR

TEAM LEADER

Playing days prepared Johnson to lead on ultimate team, the US Army

TODD MIZENER
tmizener/qconline.com

When Amy Johnson strides into a room her shoulders are straight, and as she shakes your hand you realize she is a natural leader.

Those leadership skills were on display as a basketball and volleyball athlete and helped her make the life-altering decision to join the U.S. Army without consulting her parents, but they served her well once she signed on the dotted line.

Being a team player made the military a natural fit for Johnson. “In the military, you can’t get anymore team than that situation. I excelled in that right away. I was a squad leader in basic training and eventually moved into a leadership position as the years went by,” Johnson said. She didn’t envision that when she enlisted.

“I think I was just trying to take control of my life. At that point, I wasn’t going to go play sports anywhere else. If that opportunity had presented itself, I probably would have gone and done that. But that just wasn’t happening for me,” Johnson said.

She was 20 years old in 1990 and attending Sauk Valley College on an athletic scholarship and pursuing a degree in criminal justice with the intent to become an Illinois State Trooper. Her two years of free education were coming to an end and her family’s pockets weren’t deep enough to send her to a four-year college.

Like her brother before her, she thought the military could be a solution. She made a decision.

“I saw recruiting office and just went in,” Johnson said.

She told the recruiter she was interested in being an MP (Military Police), but its five-year commitment was too long for her; she wanted short. Her options dropped to cook or truck driver. She picked truck driver.

Serve your country and get a college education in return. It was

a simple plan until the Gulf War broke out.

Basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, followed by two weeks of specialized training for her job as a truck driver, then it was off to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to gear up and ship out to Saudi Arabia.

The gravity of her decision to enlist hit her the minute they handed her an M-16 rifle. She realized that she might never get the opportunity to attend college, and she might have to use that rifle to shoot someone. It was at that moment her commitment stopped being about what her country could do for her and changed to what she could do for her country.

Sight, smell and sound

Johnson’s job in the lead-up to and during the month-long war was to drive a semitrailer full of supplies, such as ammo, through the desert at night to troops on the front lines.

The coalition’s victory was swift, and Johnson bore witness to the carnage left behind by the bombardments.

“We saw the Highway of Death,” she said.

It was on the six-lane highway between Kuwait and Iraq that the American-led coalition attacked retreating Iraqi military personnel. Seeing 1,400 to 2,000 vehicles destroyed or abandoned is an enduring image of her Middle East experience.

She also recalls the stench of the burning oil wells and how the thick smoke blacked out the sun. “We drove through that stuff. It was daylight but black as night.”

She remembers when a Scud missile struck a U.S. Army barracks killing 28 members of the Pennsylvania National Guard. Johnson was just one mile down the road in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

“It was like the Fourth of July right there overhead. It seemed like it was happening to us. ... We were in full



TODD MIZENER / TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

US Army veteran Amy Johnson, of Moline, served during the Gulf War. While in the Middle East, she was first assigned to the 619th Transportation Company, and later to the Stevedore unit from the 7th Transportation Battalion. Following her time overseas Johnson’s permanent duty station for two years was the National Training Center, 177th Support Battalion Company A. After active duty she joined the 1644th Transportation Company in Rock Falls, Ill. for her final five years with the Illinois National Guard.

gear, in our bunkers, and I thought ‘this is it, it’s happening.’

“That was probably the scariest time through it all.”

Nothing in her life previously could have prepared her for her time in the Middle East, both on and off the battlefield.

“I was 20 when I got there and didn’t know a lot about the world. I grew up in Tampico, Illinois. It’s a town of 800 people; pretty much everyone’s white,” said Johnson. Joining the diverse military was eye-opening.

“The first eight to 10 weeks were a learning experience with me just interacting with other races.”

She was then in a foreign country where it was hard to get clean drinking water and women wore burqas with only their eyes showing.

“It was kind of like a movie. It was unbelievable to me. I didn’t really realize that this was real and happening over there,” she said.

Having a buddy’s back

There were not a lot of women in her unit which is why she and her “ranger buddy” stuck close together. It was safer that way. The pair had been assigned to each other in basic training, but their bond was real and they always had

each other’s back.

It was rare for the two to be apart, but one night they were. and the unthinkable happened. Her partner and friend was raped by a male soldier in their unit while Johnson was only a few rooms away. Johnson learned about the attack the next morning and urged her to report the assault.

They returned stateside for the trial in Fort Story, Virginia. Other female soldiers came forward, and the man was convicted.

“She’s a teacher out in Oregon, and I’ve lost touch with her over the years. But you know, when you go through something like that, you just don’t forget that and not have that affect you. It messed me up,” Johnson said.

“I blamed myself for it because I wasn’t with her at the time that it happened, and we had gone through all that stuff. And just one night, I decided to go do something else with some other friends and soldiers, and she went her way.

“I had a lot of things going on. I was depressed. I had anxiety, probably had some PTSD. But you know, back then I don’t think we are as aware as we are now. And I’ve had to kind of go through that stuff throughout my life,” she said.

Recalling the rape and the aftermath is hard for Johnson. Her face and voice changes. She paused and drew a deep breath before saying, “You think about going through a war and making it through all of that and then someone on your own team (rapes your friend), it scarred her for life. And probably me a little bit too.”

Coming out the other side

Despite it all Johnson has no regrets.

“It made me who I am today, so I don’t know if I would be as strong if all of that wouldn’t have happened,” Johnson concluded.

Not only is Johnson strong but she is happy. She has a 17-year-old son named Luke, that she and her partner Sue have been raising together for the last 16 years.

She used the GI Bill and earned her degree from Western Illinois University in Macomb, and worked for the Two Rivers YMCA in Moline for nearly 24 years. She recently took a position as director of operations with CASI (Center for Active Seniors Inc.) in Davenport.

Johnson jokes that if her military experience taught her anything it was that she didn’t want to be an Illinois State Trooper.

Richard E. Orr S1 Navy – World War II 1944-1946	 Ed Freebern US Navy Parliament 3rd Class	 John Lester Harrington PFC 1967-1970 United States Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran/Combat Wounded	 Bill Humphrey US Navy Reserve 1950 - 1962	 Benjamin B. Houtekier US Army Sergeant Operation Iraqi Freedom	 Keith Burkholder US Army Cook
 Walter Danielson US Army Corporal Philippines	 Lucien E. Ellison Chaplain WWI	 Ted Dorough SFC 22 years Active Army from 1953-1975 Europe and Asia including tours in Korea and Vietnam Resides in the QCA	 Robert McQueen CTA1 Navy	 John F. Muhlhausen Airman First Class AIC-Korea U.S. Force	 Jerry L. Ruefer U.S. Airforce (1957-1961) Your family misses you. 3/31/39-6/15/21

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STORIES OF HONOR

Local company helps improve the lives two veterans

Just in time for Veterans' Day, a Quad-Cities home improvement company announced in mid-October the names of the two area winners in its annual Bath for the Braves program.

Veterans Dan Stegall of Coal Valley and Richard Kozeliski of Des Moines will each receive a free safety shower installation from the company.

Midwest Bath Co. in Moline is one of ten companies from across the United States partnering together to provide deserving veterans with a bath or safety shower remodel. This one-of-a-kind one-day event began in Kaukauna, Wisconsin with Tundraland Home Improvements. The remodels will occur simultaneously for the se-

lected veterans on November 11th.

According to their press release, "The goal of Baths for the Brave is to improve the lives of veterans who were left disabled from their military service or have experienced hardships in their life that prevent them from completing normal everyday tasks such as bathing."

Daniel Stegall

Dan Stegall is a US Army Veteran from Coal Valley, Ill. He was drafted and served during the 1970s. Stegall was stationed in various locations including, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Vietnam.

After his time in the military, he returned home and attended Black Hawk College. Stegall, who



Daniel Stegall

has been married for 42 years, is medically retired.

When Stegall learned that he would be receiving a new shower courtesy of the Baths for the Brave program, he said he experienced a sense of relief. The veteran suffers from 13 bone fractures that never healed properly, and the new shower will allow him to have an easier and safer bathing experience.

Stegall also expressed gratitude to his neighbor for nominating him for Baths for the Brave.

Richard "Koz" Kozeliski

Richard "Koz" Kozeliski, a US Army veteran from Des Moines, Iowa served from 1969-1971. Kozeliski was stationed at Fort Bragg,

NC, before his service in the Vietnam War.

After his time in the military, he worked as a mechanic and did contract work. He said he enjoys reflecting on the good times he had alongside his fellow soldiers. Kozeliski is married with two children and four grandchildren.

When Kozeliski found out that he would be receiving a new shower through Baths for the Brave, he was happy to know his days of being nervous about falling while stepping into the tub would soon be a thing of the past. He said he was thankful this sister nominated him for the program.

To learn more about the program, visit <https://www.midwest-bath.com/baths-for-the-brave>.



Veteran Ronald Miller walks along the more than 58,000 names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., Thursday, April 25, 2019.

FILE PHOTO

Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities resume flights

STAFF

Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities resumed its flights for veterans to Washington on Thursday, Nov. 4.

The Bob Morrison Memorial Flight, named in honor of the late founder of Honor Flight of the Quad Cities, took

off with about 100 veterans on a flight to see monuments and memorials to war veterans in Washington, D.C.

Included on the flight will be the 5,000th veteran to fly with Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities.

Two of the volunteer guardians on

the Nov. 4 flight will be Morrison's sons.

The veterans and guardians returned to the Quad-City International Airport around 10 p.m to a hero's welcome.

If you are interested in volunteering for the next Honor Flight of the Quad Cities apply at www.honorflightqc.org.

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About 13 percent of all Davenport Works employees are veterans. They have a place here. A network. Just ask members of our Veterans Employee Resource Group.

The Vets ERG is an active group where employees can find others with similar experiences. It's also an organization where veterans can continue to



develop, grow and serve the community.

Our Vets ERG partners with local organizations to provide needed services to veterans. They've partnered with Trinity Health Foundation to provide veterans access to VA

benefits. They've sponsored Irreverent Warriors events to offer connections and prevent veteran suicide. They even serve lunch to Arsenal soldiers. In the last year, they've donated more than \$6,000 and volunteered 60 hours to events and organizations helping Quad-Cities veterans.

We're proud of all the veterans in the Quad-Cities, but most notably, those within our facility. So to all the veterans out there, thank you for your service.





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