



# 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 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 their own 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 1.3 million active-duty personnel as of July 2020. To put it in perspective, that measures out to less than one-half of 1 percent of the U.S. population.

It has been my honor to write the profiles of Tyler Hoogerwerf, Robert Neal Jr., Ric Knerr, and John Schmidt. I was impressed by how extremely candid and honest they were about their experiences in war and the days that followed.

The trauma of combat and being away from family for extended periods of time wears on every everyone who serves. Returning home to civilian life is not an easy transition and as I learned during my interviews, some make it home and some do not. The problem of veteran suicide was a topic that was discussed by all four veterans.

Army veteran Ric Knerr talked about his adjustment coming home:

“I never caused trouble when I was a kid. The worst thing I ever did was getting caught with firecrackers when I was 16. I wasn’t a troublemaker. I was a good kid. But within three, four years of being out of the military, I had been arrested twice and been convicted of battery. Violence quickly became the answer, you know, and I’m lucky that I didn’t end up worse than I did.”

“I’m ashamed of how I was when I first got out of the military. But I’ve been out of the military 20 years now and I’ve got a great job. I’ve

got a wonderful wife who tries her best to understand. She tries to educate herself and understand where I’m coming from. And she helps where I’m weak, she’s strong.”

“Love is a powerful thing, and if you’ve got someone that can help you through that, who can deal with the nightmares or the short temper or the borderline explosive rage over something as simple as someone pulling out in front of you. I don’t know that I would ever have the guts to tell her, but she probably saved my life.”

Marine veteran Robert Neal Jr. urged veterans to seek help if they are struggling.

“Reach out to whatever programs are available to you, talk to your buddy, talk to your best friend ... there’s a ton of programs out there if you just take the time to look for it. But unfortunately, those guys that commit that don’t see those angles, or they don’t see those opportunities. So it’s buddy checks. I mean, so every once in a while on Facebook, ‘Hey, I’m doing a buddy check what’s going on’ and then all the guys that you went into service with it, I’m here, this is good. You know, just little things like that. It’s everybody contributing to try to make things better, I think is the only way to solve that problem.”

I would urge everyone who knows or loves a veteran to nominate them for Stories of Honor in July 2021. We are looking forward to telling their stories in the future.

Illustration by Tatiana Bannikova via 123rf.com

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# STORIES OF HONOR

## NOMINEES

All of the veterans listed on this page were 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. Please take the time to read each one of the nominations.



### Henry Langrehr

Henry was one of 10 children in a poor family in Clinton, Iowa. He was born in 1924 and enlisted in 1943. He joined the 82nd Airborne and was part of the invasion of Normandy. He was the guy who landed on the roof of a greenhouse. He received 2 purple hearts, 2 Bronze Stars, and the Legion de Honor from the French. He wrote a book about his experiences called "Whatever it Took" that was published this year.

— Lana Thielen



### Louis C. Gaeta

From June of 1965-66, Louis served as Navy Corpsman @Port Smith Navy Hospital Virginia. He served in Vietnam with the 1st Marine Division F.M.F.HM2 66-67, NAF Washington D.C. 67-69. He served an extra 6 months in Vietnam with the CAC L-4 7th Marine Com. Battalion. After serving in the Navy he went to work for the National Institute of Mental Health. He retired after 37 years. He volunteers at the Vietnam Memorial. He is a lifetime member of the VFW and the American Legion. A lifetime member of the 1st Marine Association. Chaplain of the American Legion. He is a Santa helper for the American Legion. He loves the military, all veterans, and his family. He came to Iowa from Maryland to help when his elderly mother needed help. We love him and are all proud of him.

— Vince J. Gaeta



### Charles J. Gaeta

My Brother Charles went to Muscatine Community College. After serving our country he went to work for Hon. When our father had a heart attack he quit his job to help him farm. He belongs to the American Legion and VFW. He is a Knights of Columbus member. Charles donates blood and platelets. He volunteers ringing the bell and serving Thanksgiving dinner for the Salvation Army. He helped with the Tootsie Roll drive and the poppy sales. He was always there to help our parents, especially when their health was failing. He is always there to help others. We love him and are very proud of him.

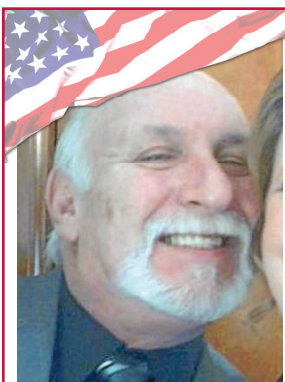
— Scott Clester



### Cpl. Ryan Clester

My son Ryan was in the Marines from 2009 to 2013. He was on 2 deployments on a Meu and deployed to Sangin Afghanistan. He graduated from Ohio State in forest Ecosystem Science and management. He went to Montana and Oregon to help with the wildfires. He is a Service Forester with the Ohio Department of Natural resources division of Forestry. He was awarded the Ohio tree farm inspector of the year. He is on the Ohio tree farm committee. Ryan is on the board for the Northeastern Ohio Forestry Association. He writes articles for the Ohio Woodland Journal. He is a hard worker, we love him and we are very proud of him.

— Philippa Clester



### John Schmidt

My stepdad John Schmidt fought in the Vietnam war. My stepdad is literally one of my heroes as he always pushes us to do our best. He has two kids and three step kids. He is retired from Davenport Purina. He is a wonderful husband to my mom and a great dad to all of us kids. We love you Dad.

—Amy White



### Joe Colmer

My grandpa, my hero, Joe Colmer. At the age of 17, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy where he served in the China fleet from 1936-1939. When war came, he again served his country, this time in the 325th glider infantry, a unit in the 82nd Airborne. As a platoon Sgt, he served from Africa in '43 to Sicily, Italy, D-Day in Normandy, Market Garden in Holland, and the battle of the Bulge. In the spring of 1945, he earned his third and final Purple Heart while leading a patrol across the Rhine in Cologne, Germany. During his service, he also received 2 bronze stars as well as numerous other citations for good conduct and service. After returning from the war, he continued to be a leader by example, working at John Deere until retirement and spending the rest of his years instilling his kindness and work ethic in his grandchildren. Joe was featured in an article about the Honor Flights by Todd Mizener. Joe is a man who gave everything he could and asked for nothing in return. It is my honor to recommend him as a deserving veteran.

— Bryce Williams



### Jimmy Edlemon

Jimmy was my husband of 50 years. We had 3 children and 6 granddaughters. A proud man that not only honored his country by serving in the Army, but always was proud of flag and country. Jim served in Vietnam in 64-66. He was a medic and medic with pride. Jim gave his all to the Army and in 2016 he lost his battle with Agent Orange Lung Cancer.

— Norma Edlemon



### Robert Neal Jr.

Robert Neal Jr., 53, graduated from United Township High School in 1985. My husband was in the Marines for 6 years. He fought in the Middle East in the late 80s early 90s. He is a Mexican American from East Moline. He has a brick in the Hero Street Memorial. He has 5 children, 3 of whom have been or are in the Armed Forces. He has been a mentor to many young people in the East Moline, Silvis, Colona, and Hampton school districts where he has been a coach for football, baseball, and softball since the late 1990s. He worked for the state of Illinois for 25 years as a correctional officer and retired 3 years ago. He now works at United Township High School as a hall monitor and enjoys working with the high school students on a daily basis. During the summer he works at Willow Springs Swim Club as a manager and referees basketball for all ages of kids. Over the years he has been a father figure to many of our children's friends who have not been lucky enough to have a strong dependable father figure in their life. He is well known and respected in our United Township community.

— Carol Neal



### Tyler Hoogerwerf

Officer Hoogerwerf is a former U.S. Army 173rd Airborne Brigade private first class who enlisted in the Army before he graduated from high school. In June 2007, while serving in Afghanistan and on patrol in the Nuristan Province, his Humvee was hit by rocket-propelled grenades. Unfortunately, much of his platoon was fatally wounded. The Al-Qaida motor fire caused Pfc. Hoogerwerf to suffer shrapnel wounds in both legs. He endured five surgeries before returning home to Geneseo on Dec. 4, 2007. He was honorably discharged and medically retired from the military on Jan. 20, 2008. He is a Purple Heart recipient. Tyler is still serving his community by serving in law enforcement. He has received several departmental recognitions, including numerous life-saving awards. His story and legacy are the definition of a veteran, who continues to risk his life for his community.

— Jeanne Anderson



### Ric Knerr

Former para-trooper and Veteran of Operation Joint Endeavor; Bosnia 1996. Served as a heavy equipment operator and combat lifesaver. As a veteran, Ric has raised almost \$60,000 for the VFW on his motorcycle, and also served as an All-State Post Commander for the VFW in Muscatine, Iowa.

— Alisha Knerr



### James Gordon

This is my baby brother. He's one of the greatest men I've ever known. He served in the Navy and fought in the Gulf War. He has two daughters that he loves and adores. James takes such good care of them financially and emotionally. He provides for them both even though neither one of them lives with him. His older daughter Nicole recently purchased a home and he drives three hours one way to help her with all kinds of home projects. His younger daughter Tessa also lives three hours away. He never misses any school functions that she has. He has taken the day off of work every day since kindergarten to be with her every year on her first day of school. He goes without just so he can give his girls everything. When our dad was sick before he passed away my brother was the one that cared for him. My dad was not an easy man to get along with but my brother didn't let that get to him. He endured and was there every time our dad needed something. He's been there for my children helping babysit and change diapers for them when they were little. He helps my husband and with any projects that we may need his help with even if it means he has to take time away from his own work. He's a dog sitter, a dad, a brother, an uncle, a nephew, and a son to our parents when they were still alive. He's my baby brother and a proud Navy vet with his Cubs flag and his Navy flag hanging right next to each other in the front of his house. For almost 50 years we've endured some crappy things together but when it's all said and done He's had my back every time and I would never want it any other way. Love him with everything in me and I'm so grateful God made us brother and sister. Couldn't imagine my life without him and neither could our older brother. Thanks, James. You're one of a kind.

— Tari Nevener

### Melvin Duwa

Melvin Duwa, of Lost Nation, Iowa enlisted into the Air Force during WWII. He landed the position of Gunner Instructor during his active war service. When training slowed down, Melvin worked at headquarters in Michigan and drove the car for the Colonel of the Field. His wife, Irene, followed him to all of his

posts. Six children are blessed to call him "Dad". He currently enjoys close to 60 members of his family, with the youngest being one month old and another great, great-grandchild due this month. He is looking forward to his 100th birthday on August 26th. He is the true meaning of a fantastic person!

— Vicki Shady

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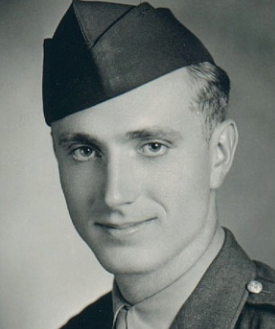
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**Erik Andon**  
U.S. Army -  
Combat Infantryman  
Iraq - CPL




**Robert Andon**  
U.S. Navy -  
F-18 TopGun Pilot  
Syria/Afghanistan - LT



**Ernest Ellison**  
US Army  
WWII




**Calvin M. Ellison**  
US Army  
Sergeant  
Viet Nam Era




**James Cary Ellison**  
US Army  
Specialist 4  
Viet Nam Era




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




**James Robert McAtee**  
CW04  
US Army-Korea  
Enlisted in 1954  
Station in Germany for 2 years  
Retired after 33 years in 1987  
(Deceased)




**Jerry Tiesman**  
SP/5  
US Army 1967-1970  
You are a hero to us,  
Love Di & Kids




**Anthony Rodriguez**  
Sergeant, U.S. Air Force  
You will always be  
a hero in my eyes  
Your Brother Ray USMC




**Stanley Andon**  
U.S. Navy  
PO3




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




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




**Jay Landis McQuillen**  
Staff Sargent  
- U.S. Marine Corp.  
(1953-1956 Korean Conflict)  
Passed Away  
July 19, 2019



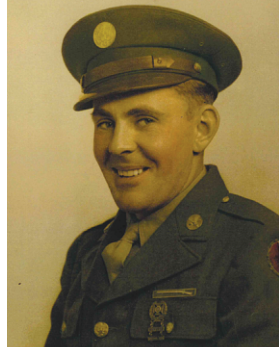
**Ivan Dean Minter**  
1st Class  
U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet 4 years & Korean War  
Thank you for your service Dad.  
Love you!



**James Bales Ellison**  
US Army  
Corporal  
WWI




**Jesse J Perez**  
Chief Petty Officer  
U S Navy




**Joseph Wm. Schurr, Sr.**  
PFC US Army WW II  
545<sup>th</sup> Q.M. Depot Co.-PTO



**Floyd C. Ellison**  
US Navy  
Captain  
Viet Nam Era



**James Blair Ellison**  
US Army Air Force  
Staff Sergeant  
WWII



**Harvey Walton Ellison**  
US Army  
Corporal  
WWI

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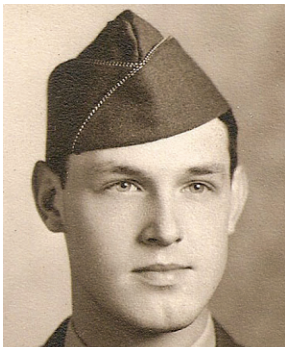


**Alan Andon**  
U.S. Army  
CPT

**E. Orville Nord**  
(1931 to 1994)  
**U S Army**  
**PFC**  
9/1952 to 7/1954



**Robert Dean Morris**  
Airman 2nd Class  
The world changes  
from year to year,  
Our lives from day to day,  
But the love and memory of  
you shall never fade away.



**William G. Ellison**  
US Army  
Tech 4  
WWII



**Arthur F. Williamson**  
Corporal, U.S. Army  
82nd Airborne Division  
Paratrooper, Korea, 1948-1952



**Lawrence Pernell Jr.**  
Master Sgt. (Retired) Army  
Annette Pernell (mother),  
Lawrence Pernell Sr., Sara Pernell,  
Sisters, Brothers, Love You

**William D Hartman**  
*Buck SGT*  
*USAF*  
*Vietnam*  
*Veteran*  
*4 Year's*



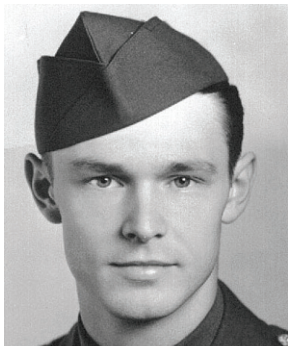
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United States Marine Corps  
Years of Service  
1943-1945



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



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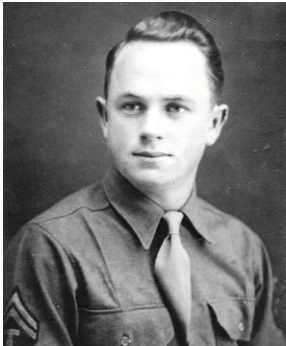
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Vietnam (SPEC 4) SP4  
1968-1969  
US Army



**Ted Dorough**  
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22 years Active Army  
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Europe and Asia  
Resides in the QCA



**Sgt. Trudle Baughn**  
Retired Army



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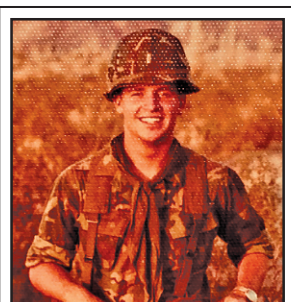


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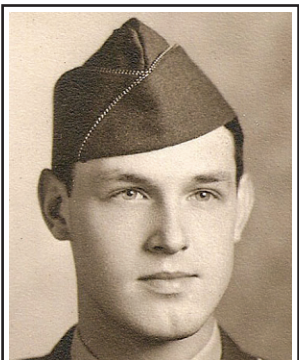


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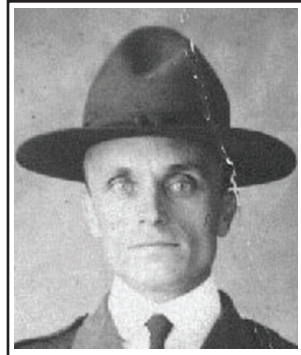
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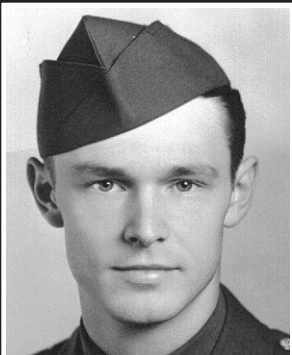
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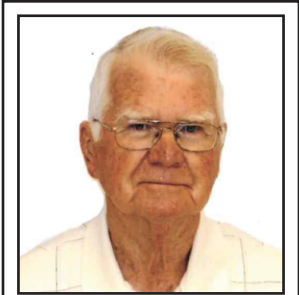
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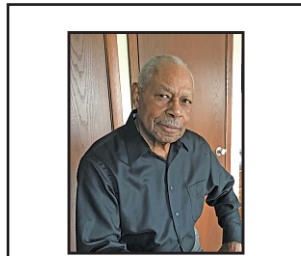
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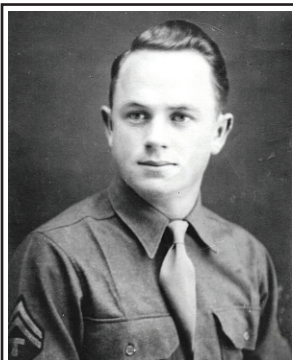
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TODD MIZENER/TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

Playing soldier as a boy in the woods around Geneseo with your friends is a long way from dodging bullets and explosions during a deadly ambush in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Tyler Hoogerwerf, now of Moline, wanted to be a soldier for as long as he could remember. So it was no surprise to his parents when in 2005 their 17-year-old son asked them to sign the consent form so he could enlist after he graduated from Geneseo High School.

Hoogerwerf's parents expressed their concerns about the active combat going on in the Middle East but they never tried to talk him out of it. Deep down they knew their son was born to serve and his mom signed the form.

A varsity soccer player in high school, Hoogerwerf says he has always been drawn to teamwork. When he is asked about what it takes to be a good soldier his answer comes without hesitation.

"Teamwork, being a team player. You can't be a Rambo," Hoogerwerf said.

He acknowledges that throughout military history there have been heroes like Congressional Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert James Miller. Miller was posthumously honored for his bravery while serving in 2008 in the Kunar Province, Afghanistan.

Staff Sgt. Miller's official Medal of Honor citation reads in part: "His extraordinary valor ultimately saved the lives of seven members of his own team and 15 Afghanistan National Army soldiers. Staff Sgt. Miller's heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty, and at the cost of his own life, are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army."

"He sacrificed himself for the team," Hoogerwerf said. "In the military services, it's a team thing you've got to be a team player. There's no 'I' because a good soldier is one that works well with others and is a team player. Everyone knows it, especially in Afghanistan where all we had were the guys to your left or right."

"There may be hundreds, maybe thousands in our platoon but there were only 38 of us on our base," he said. After completing his basic training stateside and his more specialized training in Italy and Germany, Pfc. Hoogerwerf, a member of the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade, was stationed in the mountains of northeastern Afghanistan in May 2007. Forward operating base Naray was located in the Nuristan province, near the Pakistan border.

It is a remote location with scenery not much different than Colorado, he said. "It's not much of a desert scene that you would expect in a Middle Eastern country because where our camp was there was a lot of greenery, forests, and woods."

Hoogerwerf had been there a month before his first battle with the Taliban, a firefight on the road to Gowardesh. During the battle, multiple rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) shredded the lower half of his left leg. As they tended to his torn and bloody leg, trying to keep him from going into shock, he was convinced his leg would have to be amputated.

His convoy was ambushed along a canyon road while escorting a civil affairs convoy to go pay local Afghan workers to complete a bridge project so the local population could cross a river safely. His unit was escorting a caravan of nine trucks with his

Humvee in the lead.

They knew from gathered intelligence to expect a roadside bomb at some point on their route but didn't know where, when, or if it was even true.

"There was a dogleg curve to the right and then a really quick curve to the left. And we stopped to let the other trucks close the distance on us. One of the last things I remember was Sgt. Bennett saying it's alright let's go. So once the foot hit the gas to start moving there was this loud explosion and what felt like a sledgehammer to the chest, it just rocked our truck and it took us a few seconds to realize what happened," Hoogerwerf recalled.

"We didn't know if we hit a roadside bomb ... and then all of a sudden two or three more explosives hit and they're all coming from the front end, the side and the top, the roof of the Humvee. And after the fourth one, our gunner fell in the hatch screaming that he was hit."

To make matters worse their Humvee caught fire and they had to make the life and death decision to burn to death or take their chances getting shot as bullets rang off the side of the vehicle.

"Burning alive is a guaranteed death... we took the chance of getting out. So once I opened up my door to get out an RPG hit to my right and shrapnel peppered up my entire right leg from ankle to thigh, but I didn't feel anything because my adrenaline was rushing."

The explosion threw the 19-year-old paratrooper backward and now he had to try again to push open the 300-plus pound plus door to escape the burning Humvee.

"I pushed it back open, leaned out, and another rocket hit but this one blew my entire shin off and all the muscle that is included in lifting up your foot to walk around was gone."

Severely wounded he and his team retreated to another Humvee which wasn't as badly damaged and a fellow soldier performed medical aid to his injuries.

Apache helicopters arrived to rescue Hoogerwerf and his team even as the battle continued. Finally, soldiers found daylight in the chaos to escape and he later woke up in a trauma center in Afghanistan.

"I woke up a day later."

Despite his injuries, he considers himself lucky. Their team leader, Army Spc. Jacob "Jake" M. Lowell, of New Lenox, and an Afghan interpreter were killed during the battle. The gunner who was wounded lost the lower half of his leg.

In a 2011 interview with the Dispatch-Argus he talked about Lowell's heroics. "He wouldn't stop firing his weapon," Hoogerwerf recalled. "They even hit him a couple of times, and he would not quit. He fell down. He got up. And he kept firing."

Hoogerwerf's injury forced him out of the military. The doctors saved his leg with nine surgeries and rehabilitation. But when he looks back on his service he has mixed feelings, but no regrets.

"In a way, I feel kind of upset about it simply because I feel like I was all preparing for it from childhood to adulthood and my service was cut short. Because 19 months is short, I signed up to do four years, I only did 19 months," said Hoogerwerf.

"Most of it was training. So it feels like I didn't get to go out and do what I've always wanted to do—fight terrorism and try to eliminate it. I am kind of bittersweet about it. I'm glad to be out, happy I did what I did, but on the other hand, I feel like I got cut short a little bit. You know, I would have loved to finish out the tour with the guys I trained with."

Upon his return home and recovery from his wounds, his deep sense of duty, camaraderie, and teamwork was channeled into becoming a police officer.

Hoogerwerf graduated from Western Illinois University with a degree in law enforcement in 2011. He worked for the Moline Police Department for seven and a half years before recently starting a new job with the Illinois State Police.

"I just want to do a job that allows me to help or assist people in need. But not only that, (a job where you) still have to depend on others. And they have to depend on you."

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STORIES OF HONOR



TODD MIZENER / TMZENER@QCONLINE.COM

Ric Knerr is the chapter president of the Band of Brothers, a veteran support-oriented motorcycle club. Many of the Brothers are veterans, but being a veteran is not a requirement, just a dedication to the mission and to the club. As the recently elected chapter president, he plans to continue pushing hard to make lives better for veterans and their families.

TODD MIZENER  
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He can still see it, and it haunts him—man’s inhumanity to man. U.S. Army veteran Ric Knerr, an Alleman High School graduate, joined the service after high school in 1994. He served as a heavy equipment operator and paratrooper, and in the late 1990s he found himself among the troops enforcing the peace in Bosnia and Kosovo.

“We were cleaning up a schoolyard, they had turned the playground into a junkyard, basically dumping old cars there and things like that. And while I’m in Bosnia, I’ve got a new daughter at home. I think she was maybe 3 months old at the time, my first child.

“We had to pick up these cars using cranes and hoists. We picked up this car and a back door popped open. It wasn’t unusual to occasionally find a deceased person in the back of these cars,” he said

But this time it was different. It was “a little girl still belted into the backseat of the car. (She) had obviously been there for quite a while, but you could tell it was a little girl in a sundress. That one still haunts me pretty bad to this day.

“It’s been over 20 years now, but I can still see it as vividly as the day that it happened. To have my first child be a little girl, who I had to leave when she was just 6 weeks old, and to see that. It messed me up pretty good.”

Finding the dead child wasn’t his only traumatic experience during his time in Bosnia and Kosovo, but the wound it left cuts the deepest.

“The older I get and the crazier the world gets, the less surprised I am. Maybe I’m desensitized to it. But, you know, as a younger man, it absolutely baffled me is some of the horrible atrocities that were committed to other human beings. And it really makes me sad that so much violence is going on in the world today.”

Service to one’s country comes with a price. It affects each veteran differently, and each of them has to find their own way as they adjust back to civilian life.

Before joining the military he says he was just your average Catholic high school kid.

“I never caused trouble when I was a kid. The worst thing I ever did was getting caught with firecrackers when I was 16. I wasn’t a troublemaker. I was a good kid. But within three, four years of being out of the military, I had been arrested twice and been convicted of battery. Violence quickly became the answer, you know, and I’m lucky that I didn’t end up worse than I did.”

“I’m ashamed of how I was when I first got out of the military. But I’ve been out of the military 20 years now and I’ve got a great job. I’ve got a wonderful wife who tries her best to understand. She tries to educate herself and understand where I’m coming from. And she helps where I’m weak, she’s strong.”

“Love is a powerful thing, and if you’ve got someone that can help you through that, who can deal with the nightmares or the short temper or the borderline explosive rage over something as simple as someone pulling out in front of you. I don’t know that I would ever have the guts to tell her, but

she probably saved my life.” His wife of almost 9 years, Alisha, was the one who encouraged him to seek help back in 2016. Up until then, he had never filed a claim with United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Alisha thought he might be dealing with PTSD and encouraged him to seek help from the VA. “It’s helped me tremendously. I see a psychiatrist once a month, a psychologist once a month ... And I’ve flourished. So I have her to thank for that.”

“When I was in the Army, I was young, stupid, and didn’t really have a good head on my shoulders. I probably could have been a better soldier,” Knerr lamented.

Now Knerr’s mission is to be a better veteran than he was a soldier. He wants to give back and help his fellow veterans as much as possible, especially when it comes to helping stem the tide of veteran suicide.

During his time in the Army, his unit suffered only a “couple” of combat casualties. In civilian life, suicide has been the enemy that can’t seem to be defeated.

“I have lost more friends ( to suicide) than I care to mention. Frankly, I’ve stopped counting,” Knerr said.

“It’s tough to think about because they’re gone for whatever reason, but their families still have to move forward. And their families still have to find a way to keep going. So the VFW does what we can to help with that.”

“The epidemic of veteran suicides really hit the forefront of the past couple of years. A lot of people don’t really think about who’s left behind when that soldier loses the battle within.”

Fundraising for families left behind is just one of the ways he works to help, to give back, to be a better veteran.

“It just gives me that extra drive to want to try to help them where I can. I’ve had my low points I am currently listed as 80% disabled through the VA; 50% of that’s for PTSD. Knowing to an extent, where these soldiers are, and some of them just can’t make it and they give up. It makes me try that much harder. To work that much harder to be a better veteran, and to be a better man, a better husband, a better father, a better everything, and try to do as much as I can to help.”

Knerr was nominated for Stories of Honor because of his tireless fundraising for his fellow veterans and their families.

He’s been a member of the Band of Brothers, a veteran support-oriented motorcycle club for over two years. Many of the Brothers are veterans, but being a veteran is not a requirement, just a dedication to the mission and to the club.

“We have done coat drives, turkey donations through our respective employers when possible, and are in contact with the Quad Cities Veteran Outreach Center to address the needs they have. In addition, we have committed to quarterly donations that are generated through various fundraising efforts.”

As the recently elected chapter president, he plans to continue pushing hard to make lives better for veterans and their families.

When he’s not helping veterans he is also busy with work, family and a full-time college class load. Knerr politely declines when-

ever you ask him how much money he’s helped to raise. “I won’t throw a dollar amount out there, mainly because the BBMC does not do it for recognition or praise. We do it because it is the right thing to do.”

“It’s a catharsis ... for me to help where I can because I wasn’t able to help with this or I wasn’t able to help with that person. Truth be told I carry quite a bit of guilt. For various reasons, you know, I wasn’t the best soldier. I was a dumb stupid kid.”

“And if I can do something to help somebody else get through another day or help find that light at the end of the tunnel, then it helps erase some of that red in my book, so to speak. It helps me balance my ledger, helps me sleep a little bit better. It makes it easier for me to dream about good things rather than some of the s\*\*t that still pops up, you know.”

*Editor’s Note: Some of the most powerful stories come from those who have served in the armed forces. STORIES OF HONOR recognizes the service, bravery, and sacrifice of some of the many heroes who have served or are serving our country. The series of stories is sponsored by Olde Town Roofing and Key Auto Mall.*

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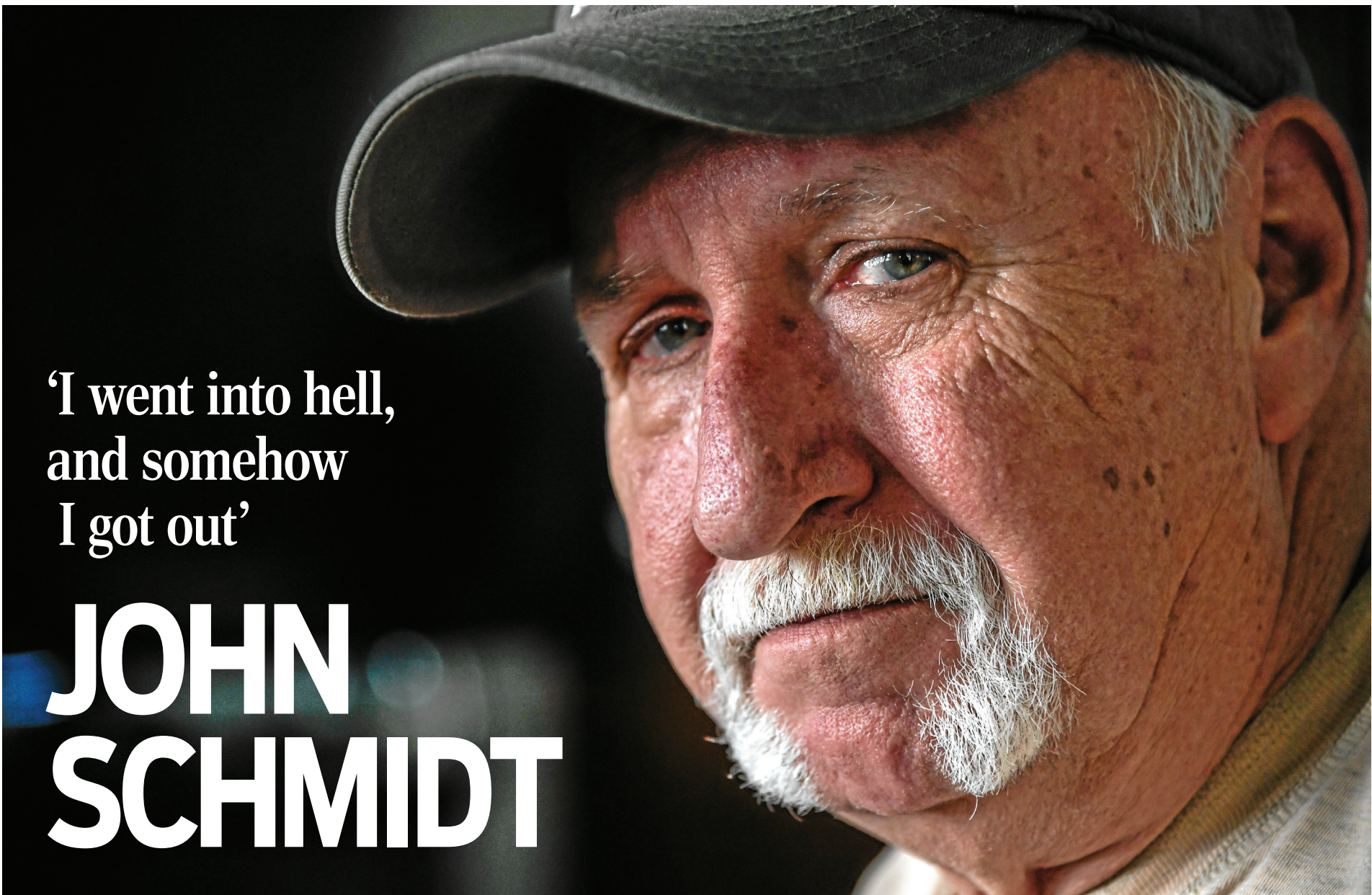
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# STORIES OF HONOR



TODD MIZENER PHOTOS/TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

Vietnam veteran John Schmidt, of Davenport, poses for a portrait in his living room Wednesday. Schmidt, who was born in Detroit but raised in and around Reynolds, Illinois, served as combat engineer from 1967 to 1971.

## Vietnam veteran describes years of fear, survival, grace

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The first thing you notice about John Schmidt is the sparkle in his eyes.

The 72-year-old Vietnam veteran stands strong and confident with a snow-white mustache and a positive attitude.

One of the sources of his positivity might be the guardian angel he says has been on his shoulder since he was a child growing up in and around Reynolds, Illinois.

“I guess I recognized it about seven, maybe 8 years old. I always felt there was somebody watching me, and I always said it was my angel. I didn’t see it. It didn’t talk to me or anything, but I always knew that I was safe,” Schmidt said.

Schmidt graduated from Rockridge High School in 1967, 12 years after the start of the Vietnam War, and nine years before it ended.

With the draft looming, he and some of his extended family members decided to join the Army before receiving their draft notices.

“We just decided one day that, you know, we weren’t doing anything of importance. I mean, we all had jobs, we were making money. And then just one day, we all got together and we said let’s join the military. And that’s what we did,” Schmidt said.

One of the reasons he and his cousins decided to enlist was because that way they were able to target a specific job (or MOS) in the military. At first, John wanted to be an MP (military police) but that required a four-year commitment. “I said I didn’t want to be away from home for four years. So I gave that up, took an aptitude test. And they said I would make a good engineer.”

So that began Schmidt’s life as a combat engineer in the jungles of Vietnam.

He describes his tour as an “adrenaline rush, 100% for 19-months,” full of snakes, rats, mosquitoes and death.

But despite it all, he says he was only scared once.

### ‘I’d made my peace’

He and a unit of 14 men were involved in a vicious firefight, which

left only Schmidt and three other soldiers alive when it was over. It’s a story he tells with trepidation in his voice and a somber tone. It’s a story he just “doesn’t tell to everybody.”

“I remember being next to Sgt. Robinson. He’d just been hit. And I was holding his hand (with one hand) and the St. Christopher medal, that I had gotten from my fiancée (with the other). And I was holding that tight. I was praying. And I was scared. I mean, the adrenaline was way over a hundred. It was way up there.

“I’m wondering, how am I surviving this? And when am I going to get hit? That’s what I was thinking: When am I going to get hit? Not, will I get hit, but when am I going to get hit. So, as I’m holding on to his hand, I’m looking down at him. ... A couple of medics are working on him. And all of a sudden, I just felt a peace. I didn’t hear the gunfire anymore. I figured the time was now, I’d made my peace. And I figured the time was now, it was gonna happen. And I put my head down.

“As I looked through my brow — I had a brow back in the day,” he says with a chuckle to break the tension of the story. “I looked through my brow, and out of no-

**“ ... Lucky is chancy and with me, all the things that have happened in my life. I always knew I was going to come out of it. Always. I didn’t know how, but I knew I was going to come out of it. I just, it’s an inner feeling. No matter what, I’m going to come out of it.”**

where — I can’t really explain it — there was a figure. And that figure, I swear, must have been 7-foot tall. And it was dressed in dark blue. They had the hood, and it was a woman, and she kept coming closer, and I thought as soon as she gets near me, “That’s it. I’m done.” And I’m holding on to Robinson’s hand and thinking time has passed, and I looked down and she was gone, and so was Robinson. Robinson died. She came for him, not for me,” said Schmidt

with a sense of relief in his voice.

When asked if he feels lucky, he says with conviction, “No, I feel blessed.”

“It’s different. Lucky is chancy and with me, all the things that have happened in my life. I always knew I was going to come out of it. Always. I didn’t know how, but I knew I was going to come out of it. I just, it’s an inner feeling. No matter what, I’m going to come out of it,” said Schmidt.

Schmidt admits that sometimes when things go bump in the night he’ll get a little scared, but that kind of scared is different. His fearlessness goes back to his childhood. He used to drive his mother crazy by traipsing off, following a stream for 50 miles, or swimming in a swimming hole somewhere.

“She always knew I’d come back. She just knew it.”

He says he inherited survival skills from his mother who raised him alone following his parent’s divorce when he was about 5 years old. They served him well in Vietnam.

### Living jungle

He describes the physical environment of being in Vietnam as very dangerous.

“Not just that they’re just trying to kill you or maim you or get you out of there. You also had the elements.

He talks about the mosquitoes with a great disdain in his voice. He and the men in his unit had a mosquito contest when they were on guard duty to see who could get the most during their four-hour stint.

Just smoking a cigarette to relax could be deadly if you didn’t do it the right way and hid the red, glowing tip of the cigarette from the view of the enemy.

Then there were the venomous bamboo vipers that would fall from the trees as they worked their way through the jungle. Oh and don’t forget the rats, which seemed to toy with the soldiers.

“I got used to spiders. I got used to rats. When you’d doze off a rat would run across you, and they were playing. Rats are weird; they’re not there just to bite you and eat you. They’re playing.”

### ‘You were just tired’

When it was over he was glad to get out of there, especially since his tour was supposed to end after 12 months, but he was deemed too important and had to stay “in-country” an extra seven months.



John Schmidt presses his fingers against one another while being interviewed about his service in Vietnam.

“Every month was like a year. And that’s how it aged you. I mean, you went from an 18-year-old to about a 35 year-old-way in your thinking and doing things,”

“I was tired. I was physically and mentally tired. I mean, there were times when we would go into a firefight or something. And you wouldn’t necessarily jump to the ground like we did when we first got there. We were brazen. More like, shoot me if you can. That was the kind of attitude. And a lot of soldiers thought that way. They were like, today’s a good day, if you’re going to do it, do it. You know, you were just tired. You know you had everything against you.”

He then described coming back from a firefight after not having any water for three days. He was so thirsty that he jumped at the first sight of water.

“When we finally got back, the first thing I saw was a tire track of a 5-ton dump truck full that went through, and it was full of water. I just buried my face and drank. I mean, that was the first water I’d seen, and that’s what gave me malaria.”

### Aftermath

He says he recovered reasonably quickly from his experience in Vietnam, estimating that he probably suffered from PTSD for the first four months after returning home.

“But the reason I don’t have it (PTSD),” he says, “is that I put it away in a room in my brain, I guess. And when I do think about it, I think it’s someone else. It was someone else. It wasn’t me. I didn’t do that.”

Sometimes a TV show or movie like “Hamburger Hill” or “Platoon” will trigger memories that startle him.

“‘Platoon’ was real close. But, you know, I got a good handle on it. I don’t wake up in cold sweats. I don’t hold any resentment.”

Like so many Vietnam veterans his return was met by protesters. His plane, full of returning vets landed on a dark runway and the men were ushered into a hanger for a steak and a beer, or a bus ride out of town. He passed on the steak and a beer and hopped on the Trailways bus and started to make his way home.

When his plane landed in Moline there were no protesters, just his fiancée. He wanted to keep it simple. He was tired and just wanted to go home.

But even he was four days and thousands of miles removed from the jungle his instincts were still firing on all cylinders.

When he arrived home to his mother’s home in Reynolds she wasn’t home, she was at work. She had no idea her son was safe at home in his bed.

He came into the house, set his duffels down, and went straight to bed without taking his clothes off.

“I think it must have been about five o’clock. And all of a sudden I heard a scream and somebody was on top of me.

“Well, that was a mistake, because I had her up against the wall before she could even say hello. I mean my reactions were really fast, and once I realized I was home everything was OK.”

“Then after that, we had dinner, called some people, drank some beers and slept for three days.”

“I went into hell, and somehow I got out.”

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ROBERT NEAL JR.

TODD MIZENER / TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

U.S. Marine veteran Robert Neal Jr. of East Moline poses for a portrait next to the Hero Street Memorial in Silvis. As a kid, Hero Street was a great place for him and his friends to play. After his six years in the military, he appreciates the significance of the historic street even more. "I have spread the word of Hero Street quite a bit to other people who don't know about the sacrifice of the Mexican-Americans from this community who died in combat," said Neal.

TODD MIZENER  
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The U.S. Marines, his grandmother, and the streets of East Moline's Watertown neighborhood have all shaped Robert Neal Jr. into the man he is today.

The loving husband and father of five (three of which also served in the military) was nominated for "Stories of Honor" by his wife, Carol. Her nomination praised Neal as a Marine, a father, and a dedicated community volunteer.

Neal's childhood got off to a rocky start but everything changed during the summer before starting the 5th grade at McKinley Elementary School, in East Moline. He was taken in by his maternal grandmother because his home life had become unstable. He joined his three uncles, the last of his grandmother's 11 kids still at home, in their two-bedroom house.

"She took me in and raised me and did the best she could by herself. My grandfather passed away when I was younger. And she worked for the Illinois Department of Public Aid in Rock Island," said Neal.

Helen Cervantes only stood 5 feet 5 inches tall but the level of positive influence she had on Neal's life is only rivaled by his experience in the U.S. Marines.

Looking at Robert Neal Jr. it's no surprise that he's a Marine. His short auburn hair, freckles, and muscular build defy his age. The lines around his eyes offer the only clue that he is 53 years old. The retired corrections officer always carries himself with the confidence and discipline first in-

stilled in him by his grandmother and then amplified by the Marines. That calm confidence comes in handy as a student supervisor at United Township High School, a job he's been doing for the last two-plus years.

He joined the Marines after graduating from United Township High School in 1985.

"I wasn't really ready for college and I liked the discipline of the military. I played sports in high school. And I thought, if I'm going to try this I want to do the hardest thing. So I was in the Marine Corps infantry for six years," said Neal. He also served with a special ops unit and "jumped out of planes."

Neal speaks fondly of his days on 17th Street but it openly admits it was a tough neighborhood with its share of violence.

"17th Street in East Moline, where I'm from, a lot of those guys have gotten in trouble and done some time in prison. But, there are also a lot of guys who went on to work at John Deere, start businesses, or go into the trades."

"But I didn't see myself as a factory worker. I didn't want to punch a clock. I hadn't really traveled much as a kid. I wanted to see the world. So having not traveled or been to a lot of places I thought the military was an opportunity for me to do this."

Joining the Marines opened up the world to Neal. Before enlisting the furthest he had ever traveled from home was to an amusement park in Cincinnati, Ohio. But, while standing at the World's Fair in Brisbane, Australia, in 1988 the young Marine was fully conscious of how far the kid from Watertown had come.

"I thought wow, I've come a really long way. Or when I was at the Olympics in Korea 1988, I thought wow, this is awesome. Or, when I was in Sydney for their Bicentennial that year, you know all those things. And then you see the USS Arizona down in Hawaii. These are things that you'd read about and maybe I thought I'd never see because of my circumstances. The military provided me an opportunity to experience all those places."

Neal says, "the mental stress of serving during a time of war" was the worst thing he experienced in the military. The best thing about his service is the lifelong bond he has with the people in his unit.

It's that unbreakable bond that has driven him to raise money and awareness of the epidemic of suicide among his fellow veterans.

The day before sitting down to be interviewed for "Stories of Honor" Neal was in Texas to honor a member of his squad who had recently committed suicide.

For the 21 days before his trip, Neal had been participating in the Active Heroes' 22 Push-up Challenge to help raise awareness and donations to help prevent veteran suicide. He completed his last set of 22 push-ups next to the grave of his squad-mate Michael Benavides.

Veteran support groups like Active Heroes are trying to stem the tide of suicide among veterans.

According to a 2019 article published in the Military Times, "In the last four years, the official government estimate on the number of veterans who die by suicide has gone from 22 a day to 17 a day in the latest Veterans Affairs report. But the rate of suicides among

Preventing veteran suicide

- Twenty Two Until None: [www.22untilnone.org](http://www.22untilnone.org)
- Active Heroes: [www.activeheroes.org](http://www.activeheroes.org)

veterans didn't decrease over that span. Instead, the way the figures are sorted and presented did.

Instead, outside experts note that by many markers the problem has grown even worse. The total number of suicides among veterans has increased four of the last five years on record. From 2007 to 2017, the rate of suicide among veterans jumped almost 50 percent.

Veterans are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than Americans who never served in the military. For female veterans, the risk factor is 2.2 times more likely."

Neal doesn't know for sure how he has avoided some of the mental health struggles that so many of his fellow veterans endure, but he thinks it might have something to do with his growing up in Watertown.

"I think I've seen some things growing up that were not normal. You know what I mean? So having a background of some kind of violence in your life kind of shelters you from that, or you learn coping skills, I would say. But, I don't know, everyone takes it differently. I really couldn't explain how I came through it. But you know, I manage to just be there for my buddies and make sure that I'm ready anytime one of them needs me," said Neal.

His friend's suicide caught him by surprise, he never saw it coming.

"It was a total shock. I mean, I talked to the man two days prior to

that, and we had a great conversation. I know another Marine... that took his life in the same manner. And not to be too graphic, but they got into bed and knew exactly what they were doing. They took their own life with a gun," said Neal.

Neal urges veterans to seek help if they are struggling.

"Reach out to whatever programs are available to you, talk to your buddy, talk to your best friend... there's a ton of programs out there if you just take the time to look for it. But unfortunately, those guys that commit (suicide) don't see those angles, or they don't see those opportunities."

So every once in a while veterans use social media to do 'Buddy Checks' on the men and women they served with, looking for a response back and also letting them know that they are there for them. You know it's just little things like that. It's everybody contributing to try to make things better, I think is the only way to solve that problem."

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STORIES OF HONOR

BOB DEBOEVER

Veteran makes sure the flags keep flying in Geneseo

CLAUDIA LOUCKS/CORRESPONDENT

GENESEO—It was his tour of duty in Vietnam that makes Bob DeBoever appreciate the American flag and the freedom it represents. It is that pride in his homeland that makes him known as one of the most patriotic men in Henry County.

When DeBoever was drafted into the military in January of 1966, he didn't know he was going to be a U.S. Marine.

The Vietnam veteran said when he received his draft notice, his orders were to report to Chicago. "It was an open draft," he said. They lined everybody up, and every other one of us went to the Marine Corps. It wasn't what I expected."

The 1963 graduate of Geneseo High School was farming on the family farm in Osco when he received the draft notice.

He and his high school sweetheart, the late Judy (Olson) DeBoever, had planned to be married in January of 1966, and DeBoever said, "The lady at the Henry County Courthouse said to me, 'you won't be here in January,' so Judy and I were married in December of 1965."

After completing basic training with the Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton near Oceanside, Calif., DeBoever left for Vietnam in July of 1966.

He said, "We were all told from the beginning that we would be going to Vietnam. The drill instructors were tough on us because the whole idea was to train us to be 'good Marines.'"

His first assignment was as a truck driver, but he ended up doing very little of that, he said, and explained, "We were based out of Danang, to begin with, and then our unit moved to Hoi An. That's where the Marines were based and there was fighting all over the country of Vietnam at that time."

DeBoever said the troops were "in constant danger, and I, like everyone else who was there serving their country, was in constant danger. I went on frequent patrols and was shot at. I lived in fear for the 13 months I was there."

Those experiences made him appreciate home.



CLAUDIA LOUCKS /CORRESPONDENT

Vietnam veteran Bob DeBoeve, of Geneseo, was drafted in 1966 and became a U.S. Marine. DeBoeve currently serves as the president of the Aisle of Flags in Geneseo.

"After you see how the people live over there and you don't know who can trust because the enemy and good Vietnamese all look alike."

"I got a letter from another member of the Marine Corps who was stationed elsewhere in Vietnam, and someone I met in basic training and he wrote, 'how does it feel to know that you can die any minute over here? That pretty much sums it up and after seeing how people in that country lived and survived, it made me realize how fortunate we are to live in the United States of America.'"

"To me, the flag means freedom, national pride and it reminds me to respect our country, our individual rights and our independence," he said.

When he and his wife moved to his present home just west of Geneseo 53 years ago, DeBoever said the couple put up a flag pole and added, "the American flag has flown on that pole ever since."

"I fought for our freedom and when you see how other people live in other countries, some under Communist rule, and who don't have the freedom we do, it makes me realize just how lucky we are to

have the freedom we have and we need to appreciate that."

In regard to the current protests, DeBoever said, "People have the right to protest as long as it is peaceful, not rioting and looting."

He continues to be involved in all aspects of honoring the United States and the American Flag including his devotion to Geneseo's Aisle of Flags when American Flags in memory and in honor of local veterans are placed in Geneseo City Park and North Park. DeBoever is president of the Aisle of Flags, a position he assumed when his wife died in 2018, as she had been president from 2011 until her death.

He recalled the project was started in 1981 by three ladies from the Geneseo VFW Auxiliary who had lost their husbands.

"Their husbands' memorial flags that had been on their caskets were put away on shelves in their homes and they wanted to get a program going to show the flags and fly them on Memorial Day, July Fourth and Veterans Day, weather permitting."

The Aisle of Flags has grown to include 819 flags and represents 835 veterans be-

cause some of the individual flags represent more than one person's name, DeBoever said.

The flags in the Aisle of Flags represent veterans who have some connection to the Geneseo area and for more information, contact DeBoever at 309-944-6343.

In addition to his dedication to the Aisle of Flags, DeBoever has been a life member of the Geneseo VFW Post since 1982 and served as commander four times and each of those times he was named All-State Commander. He also is in charge of the Memorial Day program held in Geneseo City Park, is in charge of the registry of all deceased veterans, and where they are buried. He also is the person who orders the small cemetery flags for grave markers that are put in place on each veteran's grave on Memorial Day and left there until after Veterans Day.

"I also am in charge of the honor guard for military funerals and I do the flag folding at the funeral and present the flag to the veteran's family," he said.

"I am proud of the American Flag and the freedom it represents, and I am proud to be a Marine," DeBoever said.

Geneseo's Aisle of Flags represents 835 veterans with ties to the community

CLAUDIA LOUCKS/CORRESPONDENT

GENESEO—Setting up Geneseo's Aisle of Flags is a process...a process that takes many hands and feet.

Men, women and children arrive at Geneseo City Park by 7 a.m. on July 4, with willing hearts and hands to do their part in putting in place the 819 American flags included in the patriotic display.

Bob DeBoever is president of the Aisle of Flags, which is when American Flags in memory and in honor of local veterans are placed in Geneseo City Park and North Park. DeBoever assumed the president's position when his wife died in 2018, as she had been president from 2011 until her death.

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CLAUDIA LOUCKS PHOTOS/CORRESPONDENT  
A passerby stops to look at the American Flags which are part of the Aisle of Flags along one of the sidewalks at Geneseo City Park.



Mary Beth Farber was among the volunteers who helped install the Aisle of Flags in Geneseo City Park on the morning of Saturday, July 4. The display of over 800 American flags is scheduled to be installed again in honor of Veteran's Day.

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STORIES OF HONOR



Enthusiasm for Honor Flight is still strong despite pandemic

TODD MIZENER PHOTOS/TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

FILE: World War II veteran, the late John Danay of Rock Island, consoles his son Steve Danay as they visit the Vietnam Memorial November 1, 2008 to pay tribute to Jerry Lee Danay. The son and brother were among those who participated in the inaugural Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities.



FILE: Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities Hub Director Steve Garrington talks during a 2019 press conference to announce that local Hy-Vee stores were sponsoring an upcoming flight with a donation of \$50,000.

Earliest date for resumption of local flights is April 2021

TODD MIZENER  
TMIZENER@QCONLINE.COM

November 1, 2020, marked the 12th anniversary of the inaugural Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities. The purpose of HFQC is to fly America's veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorials honoring their sacrifices. A total of 50 flights have been made, each one a life-changing experience for both the veterans and the accompanying volunteers. The next trip will push the total number of veterans making the trip to over 5,000. Since April COVID-19 has forced the cancellation of four scheduled flights and the earliest flights could resume is April 2021 according to Steve Garrington, director of Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities. If it were up to most of the 800 veterans waiting to make the trip they would charge up that hill de-

spite the hazards of COVID-19. "Their kids are saying they can't go, but the veterans are saying 'Hey, I dodged bullets in Vietnam, I don't really care about a germ,'" said Garrington. Despite the veterans chomping at the bit to make the trip the decision as to when to go doesn't fall to them. "It's not the veterans that make the decision. It's (up to) the families, the people that we work with, like Arlington National Cemetery, and the museums. They are the ones that make the decisions. So we will abide by them, and we will do whatever it takes to get them there," said Garrington. Once they finally get the green light for the 51st flight, Garrington says they are ready to go because they stay in constant contact with everyone involved but they will do whatever it takes to do it safely. "We will have masks, and do whatever it takes to get the guys there. Their safety is of overriding importance to us, so we want to put those two things together.



FILE: World War II veteran, the late Joe Colmer, is greeted at Dulles Airport in Washington, D.C., November 1, 2008 after he and 93 other Quad-Cities veterans arrived in nation's capital as part of the inaugural Honor Flight of the Quad-Cities. 50 flights have been made over the last 12 years.

Their safety and having a wonderful experience are both important," said Garrington. Of the 800 veterans waiting to make the trip only a "handful" of them are World War II and Korean War veterans. According to Garrington 99-percent of the veterans on the waiting list are Vietnam veterans. The older veterans and anyone who has under six months to live will be given priority to make the trip once they resume. Garrington estimates that 2,500 to 3,000 individual volunteers have made the trip, some making the trip more than once. A volunteer pays \$400 to make the trip and help a veteran navigate the day in Washington D.C. There is one thing that bonds all the volunteers together, "all of them have a love and desire to

give back to the guys who protected their freedom." Garrington says he would love to expand the pool of available volunteers. "When it comes time for a flight, we call the volunteers and some have to say they can't go because of work or a prior commitment, so it's nice to have a big pool of volunteers. We would be happy to have another hundred people say that they would like to go," said Garrington. If you are interested in volunteering you can sign-up at [honorflightqc.org](http://honorflightqc.org). According to Garrington the main qualifications to be a volunteer are pretty simple. They have to be able to push a veteran in a wheelchair all day, and "if they have it in their heart to help a veteran have a wonderful

day, then they're who we want." The lasting legacy of Honor Flight's huge impact on veterans and their families can be found in an unlikely place — the obituary pages of this newspaper. "When a veteran says in their obituary that (Honor Flight) was 'a highlight of my life' we've done our job," said Garrington.

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STORIES OF HONOR



GARY L. KRAMBECK

Wade Argo, Coal Valley businessman, has plans to put in a Veterans Memorial Park on this lot, one block from his office, to honor Coal Valley veterans.

Coal Valley man sees memorial as great symbol

JIM MEENAN  
jmeenan@qconline.com

COAL VALLEY — Right now, it's just an empty lot of green grass next to a parking lot. But Wade Argo sees it as so much more. Argo was given the go-ahead from the Village Board to build Veterans Memorial Park on the property at 2203 1st St., on the corner of 1st Street and 22nd Avenue. The lot sits adjacent to Bourbons Bar & Grill parking lot and is easily visible from U.S. Route 150. "The reason I am doing it is because I have lived in this village for 37 years and

I've met a lot of (good) people out here," Argo said. "I just think that this memorial is going to symbolize what this village is about — dedication to country. "We have a lot of veterans in this village. We have a lot of families that have had family members killed in all the wars. I think we need to honor these people. "I think we need to show everybody what Coal Valley is all about." Argo believes it will cost between \$40,000 and \$45,000 to build, and he plans to do it all with donations. To donate, people can write checks to: Veterans Memorial c/o Blackhawk Bank & Trust, 200 1st St. Coal Valley, IL. 61240. Renderings will soon be displayed there and at the village hall. He is working with a company called P & G Memorials from Canada and expects to have the renderings soon.

Argo is the owner of Argo Management Group, which has been in operation since 1984. He has been in the village for 37 years but because of a health issue was never in the service. His father had the same health issue, but Wade's grandfather was a major general and Wade's son was in the Air Force. "I am just proud to do this for our military," he said. He plans to reach out to veteran service organizations and various companies. He envisions people and companies donating things such as marble benches and having the company's name or whatever they want engraved on it. He also hopes to get concrete, electrical supplies and even labor donated. Argo plans to build the park this spring and possibly have it ready to be dedicated by Memorial Day, or, if it takes longer, an-

**"I just think that this memorial is going to symbolize what this village is about — dedication to country."**  
Wade Argo

other date or by Veterans Day 13 months from now. The village had acquired a house on the property and had it demolished in 2018. "We are excited that he is doing this," Annette Ernst, village administrator, said. "And we are excited that it's a good use of the land. It will be very visible for people coming in off Route 150."

City cemetery to honor veterans

Davenport City Cemetery, 1625 Rockingham Road, will honor all military veterans with a "drive through" of flag-lined lanes from 2 to 4 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11. A free hand-held U.S. flag will be given to all who drive through or attend. Cemetery volunteers are also giving special acknowledgement to three previously unrecognized U.S. Civil War veterans whose graves have lain unmarked for decades. These three U.S. service-men are: William H. Cook, Co. D 20th IA Infantry Frederick Kolk, Co. C 14th IA Infantry Johann Henry Popp, Co. G 1st IA Infantry All three of these veterans have recently obtained their long overdue headstones as furnished by the U.S. Veterans Administration and installed by Volunteers of the Davenport City Cemetery Partnership. City Cemetery is Scott County's oldest, having been established in 1843. For more information, contact DavenportCityCemetery@yahoo.com.



GARY L. KRAMBECK, QUAD-CITY TIMES

Davenport City Cemetery, 1625 Rockingham Road, will honor all military veterans with a "drive through" of flag-lined lanes from 2-4 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11. The cemetery is maintained through a partnership of the city and dedicated volunteers. In July, numerous volunteers descended on the cemetery to clean headstones.




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