



Be There For Our Veterans
Newsletter Volume 2
Fall 2023

Operation Vet NOW

Dedicated to Honoring and Supporting Our Veterans & Their Families

Meeting Veteran's Needs,
through endless Opportunities,
to fortify health & Wellness

We Believe that Suicide Can Be Prevented.

Veteran is a label not a group.

The experiences of military service differ throughout history, between branches and with each career field. Not all veterans go through the same experiences or make the transition to civilian life in the same way. For many who served, their experiences strengthened them personally, but also made the transition to civilian life difficult. Challenges may be financial, emotional, social, interpersonal and professional. But often something just feels off. Agitation, irritation, frustration and lack of purpose or focus may lead to isolation. The process of finding and accessing the right kind of help is complicated.

The Warrior Returns

Military training to be vigilant and "on point" gives the warrior a higher rate of survival, but at home the same heightened awareness is unnecessary or often unwelcome. The warrior is used to being in the constant company of others trained to work together, with a high degree of communication and teamwork, with highly specialized jobs functioning in synchronicity.



Stressors on deployment are related to carrying out orders and staying alive. Stressors at home may come in the form of a barrage of social media and electronic messages, decisions about family, budget, finances, dinner, and the kids. Operations at home have often been carried out by a single parent, who may be tired and looking for the returning warrior to take over and give needed relief.

With no instruction book, in a community that may not understand military life or the potholes of transition, it is no surprise that many veterans feel isolated, frustrated, angry, ashamed, and hopeless.

Many veterans struggle silently.

Often the veteran is haunted by the internal question "Why is this so hard for me?" The warrior struggles and the family struggles. The highly specialized training and prep to be a contributing member of a military team seems worthless at home. The pebble in your shoe become the little things that make you feel like a visitor in a foreign land.

Though struggles may be related to a diagnosis, PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury, or a physical injury, it is just as likely that the struggles are related to an abrupt change in environment, daily routine, and focus. The feeling that you are not important and no one understands.

Often the hardest thing for a veteran to do is to ask for help.

Trained to endure hardships, the veteran may shoulder the burden, finding alternatives to numb the pain and distractions to take the edge off isolation. Uncertain about where to turn or what to ask for, the warrior may choose the known path of loneliness. As a culture, we do not do well at sharing the burdens of a warrior. Our message in this Newsletter . . . You are not alone. There are resources and there are good people who will walk that path with you and have your back. You deserve that!

Continued

Be There

If you are a friend, family member or fellow veteran, you know that something is off. Kindness costs nothing. Extend a hand of friendship. We all have the ability to **Be There** for our veterans! You don't need to have a degree or an answer to send a message, make a phone call, pay a visit or have a cup of coffee. What if just being there could make a difference? IT DOES!

There is needed support for the warriors' invisible injuries and the silent struggles. Many of our warriors are one misstep from "losing it" and falling down. What if a life could be saved just by reaching out?

Awareness helps us take lifesaving steps to intrude on the silence of struggles and to make a difference. Reaching out sends the message that there is hope and there is help. Sometimes the vet is struggling with more than can be provided by a friend. Throughout this newsletter you will see other resources that may help, but lending an ear to the silent struggles addresses half of the problem . . . the silence.

Give Hope. Be There. Suicide can be prevented.



From a Place of Pain and Grief to a Community of Support

Following in his grandfather's footsteps, Karl enlisted in the Army at a young age. Married to his high-school sweetheart he was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas as an MP. He seemed to be doing well, was proud of his accomplishments, and was the pride of his family.

Military families often face unique challenges and hardships, particularly when it is your child who is serving in the military. Uncertainty, anxiety, separation, and the military lifestyle often require families to adapt to changes. Karl's parents had been out to see he and his wife over Easter break. It was a great visit and they seemed to be doing really well. Then they hit a snag. His direct commander knew that Karl was struggling. His marriage was on the rocks and he had moved back into the barracks. Several months later, September 11, 2016, the unthinkable. Karl's mom was plunged into deep despair. She lost her active-duty son to suicide.

Disconnected from the immediate stream of information and resources that were channeled through Karl's widow, Erin trudged through the days and weeks ahead, by the Grace of God and the need to take care of her younger children. Now a Gold Star mom, Erin felt the burden of that distinction. Family and friends express their sympathies, but, when you lose a loved one to suicide, a common response is to pull away. People don't know what to say, so they say nothing and suddenly you feel isolated.

Nine months out and hanging on by a thread Erin found **TAPS**. Too many families give to this nation with the lives of their loved ones and suffer with the loss. **TAPS** is a national nonprofit organization providing compassionate care and comprehensive resources for all those grieving the death of a military or veteran loved one. Through TAPS Erin could speak her story. "These people understand. They are your people." Peer connection, group support, and check-ins through The TAPS support network were a lifeline for Erin, so much so that she now works for the organization as a vital part of the survivor care team.

TAPS has programs and connections for parents, spouses, siblings, children, extended family, and friends who are grieving the loss of a military or veteran loved one. You do not need to walk alone. Compassionate care and resources are available. <https://www.taps.org/mission>



A Deeper Look at the Veterans Crisis Line

You are in crisis . . . or are you?

What does a crisis look like?

What will happen if you call?

What if it is not you, but a friend or family member you're worried about?

Earlier in this newsletter you may have seen the statement, "Veteran is a label, not a group." That's because each veteran is different.

A crisis may look very different, person to person:

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/signs-of-crisis/>

- The end of a relationship
- Loss of a job
- Housing instability
- Feeling a loss of purpose
- Appearing sad or depressed most of the time
- Hopelessness
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, mood swings
- Feeling as if there is no reason to live
- Feeling excessive guilt, shame, or a sense of failure
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug misuse
- Losing interest in hobbies, work, or school
- Neglecting personal welfare and appearance
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Showing violent behavior, like punching a hole in the wall or getting into a fight

The person on the receiving end of that crisis call is trained and experienced and most of all ready to listen to you. You call, chat, or text. The person at the end of the #988 call is there to listen.

There is a team ready to follow up . . .

Matt is a Suicide Postvention Team Lead, at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System,



An Army vet and Fire Support Specialist, with numerous deployments, Matt has walked the walk. "It was an adjustment, to say the least, and surely, I had my struggles. There is no step-by-step guide on how to readjust after military service." "Your brain beats your body out of the service. You start to compartmentalize, but it is like a leaky faucet. You can't stop it. It trickles into everything in your life."

"Pull up by the bootstraps and push through. It feels taboo to have emotions or to ask for help."



Every morning someone from Matt's team reviews the crisis line calls for their area, calling back, following up on the crisis, listening to frustrations and complaints, and giving further information where needed. Follow-up is individualized. The team member assesses the need and connects the veteran to what they need. They have walked this path and have compassion for the callers. When you are down and out, self-care is a challenge. A goal is to restore a positive sense of self and the team will help to "light the fire under the veteran", to get them to follow through with appointments and connections. The Postvention team makes sure that the caller has support. Resources exist and the Crisis team can help.

#988 . . . It takes a lot of courage to make this call. Anyone can call. The crisis line answers 365/24/7 and is there for a reason.

DISCLAIMER

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What “Jennerstown” Means to Our Veterans and Our Community

Memorial Day weekend, 2023, Operation Vet NOW partnered with Jennerstown Speedway, LLC for the second annual **Jennerstown Salutes**, to honor and support our veterans and their families. Goldstar families, the Veterans Village Project (VVP), a patriotic and sobering opening ceremony, and the presence of Ambassador Athlete, guest driver, Major [Chris Walsh](#) helped achieve this goal. Chris, an active-duty Air Force Special Tactics Officer, comes from a military family. He is the first active-duty military driver to race sports cars professionally, and does so supporting gold star families and veteran suicide awareness.

Prior to the evening events Goldstar Families were greeted and given an opportunity to connect with one another during a private dinner. Race fans were invited to visit the OVN VVP. This collaborative effort helps to create a connection with veterans and the community at large. Our friends from Ray of Hope, Westmoreland County Suicide Awareness and Prevention Task Force, WCVMC Southwestern PA, Johnstown Generals Veteran Hockey organization, Veteran Community Initiative, Inc., Vet Center, DAV, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, joined forces to connect in person with every veteran possible. These organizations work to educate veterans and their families, on how to identify signs of struggle, and how to take action when symptoms occur through the care connection of these organizations.



Prior to the first race, an opening ceremony drew the attention of the crowd. The families stood on the track with drivers who drove in honor of the military member who passed away. Following a rendition of Amazing Grace on the bagpipes, 21-gun Salute, Taps, and a POW/MIA remembrance, drivers Tom Golnick and Jarrod Barclay led, carrying the American Flag and a POW flag, 17 motorcycles ridden by warriors, Veterans, and First Responders. This symbolizes the 17 warriors who die by suicide every day. Watch the highlight video of this portion of the evening at this link [Warriors Ride to Raise Awareness](#).

It's going to take every one of us to stop this tragic situation. We can do this together by reaching out to the Veterans in our family, our Veteran neighbors, our Veterans friends, and Veterans to each other. By attending an event like Jennerstown Salutes, organized by OVN, we are reminded that a simple call, text, DM, email, or visit could be that lifesaving step. Thank you, Jennerstown Speedway for helping to spread hope with the reminder that every one of us can make a difference. Gentlemen, Start your engines! Watch a quick highlight of the entire evening's events at

[Jennerstown Salutes Highlight Reel](#).

Task Force Rock

Life-Saving Music

Task

Through a previous friendship/musical partnership and through social media, combat veterans, from four states, were united. Within 36 minutes of setting up in the practice venue, the sound exceeded the quality of seasoned collaborations. Putting something like that together does not just happen. It is a translation of a combined 50+ years of military professionalism and knowing the task at hand will take teamwork.

Force

Each musician traveled a personal and diverse musical journey leading to the intersection in August at the OVN Fallen Heroes event in Greensburg, PA. With skill, cooperation, comradeship, and a love of music, Task Force Rock created a life-giving model. Bring your passion, hone your focus, be flexible, and have fun. For three days, the band, sharing an Airbnb, lived, breathed, ate, laughed, and when there was time, slept music for a cause.

The hardest thing about military service is possibly reaching out for help and support once you have separated. The power of accepting an outstretched hand has compounding value especially when there is teamwork involved. This group of men formed a force through music that will not be easily broken or forgotten.

Rock

Like rock music itself, the quartet of guitarists Dean, Jeff, and Bob, and drummer/sound engineer extraordinaire, Rob, blended their skills and vocal strengths from different roots to form Task Force Rock. The band's set list was mostly classic rock, but the louder message was together we are stronger; the power of finding camaraderie after serving and becoming a team and we are a legit band!

Air Force Chief Master Sergeant and OVN board member, Dean brought his musical passion and vision to the table when he reached out to the OVN Director to float the idea of assembling an all-veteran rock band to play at the event in August. Tony's "Hell-yeah", started the ball rolling. With the mission to Help Stop Veteran Suicide, the members of Task Force Rock represent nearly 30 combat deployments. Dean planned, led, and executed special operations with the nation's most elite forces during 15 deployments. Getting a rock band together in less than 6 months with three days to actually play together was not going to be a challenge.

After playing several instruments it was the guitar that accompanied Active-Duty Air Force MSgt, Bob through a crushing personal loss in 2012. Bob and his wife suffered two miscarriages. In the dark crossroads of losing TWO babies, where empathy and sympathy collide, was a cavern of isolation and despair. Talking wasn't working, but sitting on the couch he could pick up his guitar and play, and play and play. Solid ground came slowly, but the connection with music through the guitar gave light to a path out of isolation. "Music pays exponential benefits." It was a guitar shop in Texas where Bob rediscovered how good it was to play with others. "Just a couple of hooligans playing around", but found the power in playing together. With Dean as the catalyst, TFR gave Bob, once again, a chance to play with others, reaping immeasurable benefits.





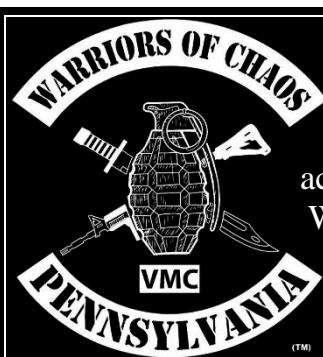
Rob's love for music started with a Muppet Animal Drum Set, probably ripped to shreds at the end of that Christmas Day. A drummer was born. Raised in a military family, Rob was always drawn to challenges. Wanting to jump out of planes, at the age of 17, Rob enlisted in the Army as an infantryman volunteering and successfully passing the 75th Ranger Regiment's Ranger Assessment and Selection Program. Continuing to seek challenges, Rob was selected for and trained for the Special Forces, Green Beret elite, mastering the physical, emotional, and psychological requirements. Laying down the beat and rhythm for several bands, Rob reaped the benefits of doing something so different from Army life. The switch to music full-time came in 2021. Rob is credited for bringing magic to TFR, leaning on his skills as a full-time musician, audio engineer, and music producer.

Providing a rhythmic pulse not only to the band but for the whole experience was Jeff, 22 years of active duty in the Air Force. A command Pilot with over 10,000 hours, Jeff brought a special love to the group. Heralding from Montana, he started with piano lessons, then added the guitar and trombone in his early years. Playing in bands throughout his life he connected with Dean through a mutual friend in 2004. On Tap played gigs wherever and whenever they could. Jeff was a natural fit when Dean was pulling together Task Force Rock.

The band carried the Fallen Heroes Run into the afternoon in August. The hardest part of the day came when it was time to leave the stage. What was forged in those four days has galvanized a friendship and an idea, or two. The band has plans to play again. Coming together for the purpose of music has laid a foundation none of them can ignore. What happened in Greensburg, can't stay in Greensburg. Stay tuned for the next verse of Task Force Rock's journey. The power of coming together for the purpose of music has ignited these four warriors to continue to use music for a purpose.

SIDENOTE worthy of a click:

Rob Dufresne (drummer) has collaborated on a song called Hold On, Reach Out, intent on raising funds and awareness for veteran-focused nonprofits that are fighting military and veteran suicide. Listen and learn more about the campaign here: <https://linktr.ee/overneverout> and here <https://www.holdonreachoutsong.com>



OVN is a small volunteer force. The Warriors of Chaos Veterans Motorcycle Club (WCVMC) is a non-profit organization made up of like-minded active-duty service members, veterans, and patriots. The Warriors of Chaos have been a powerhouse of support for Operation Vet NOW events and well as other veteran centric events and activities in the Pittsburgh Area.



The WCVMC holds the United States in the highest regard, along with the freedom and rights given to us by our founding fathers. Their pledge is to never forget we have our freedom because of the warriors that came before us and those currently serving us and to honor those who've shed blood on the battlefields: unselfishly giving of themselves, no matter the cost, to uphold our American ideals.

The WCVMC believes in, and lives... **Brotherhood, Respect, and Integrity**
OVN is indebted to you. Thank you for being there in support of the missions of OVN.

Robert Mau Honors Fallen Hero Sgt. Marcus Mathes

Driver Robert Mau drives the No. 438 STR38 Motorsports BMW M4 GT4 in the Pirelli GT4 America series. In conjunction with his race effort, he supports Operation Vet NOW Inc. (OVN) to raise support for veteran suicide awareness. Robert himself served in the United States Navy with a commission from Purdue's ROTC program.

OVN leads a program titled the OVN Fallen Heroes Tribute Project. This portion of the organization's mission is to honor those killed in combat by having their names shared and stories told to ensure they are never forgotten. Both large- and small-scale sporting events are used to reach the goal through partnering with series, teams and athletes.

To date, OVN has honored over 400 fallen heroes across the country.

One of the unique ways the heroes are honored is through the OVN Ambassador Athlete team. Robert joins 25 Ambassador Athletes from various sports categories, all veterans themselves and all involved in honoring U.S. service members. Robert was the Strike Officer on the USS Hie City (CG 66) from 1993 until 1996. He supported operations worldwide including Joint Endeavour in Bosnia Herzegovina during the joint NATO operations to limit the warfare in that region.

In early September, raised awareness for Sergeant Marcus Mathes while running three races at Sebring International Raceway. Sergeant Marcus C. Mathes served in the U.S. Army and was Killed in Action on April 28, 2008, in Bagdad, Iraq of wounds sustained when enemy forces attacked his Forward Operating Base (FOB). Sgt. Mathes grew up in Highland County and attended Sebring High School before moving to Zephyrhills, Florida, outside of Tampa.

His mother, Sue Sawyer, is a current resident of Sebring, Florida and was in attendance for the race and a time to honor her son. Sawyer described Marcus as the type to make everyone feel happy and very fun-loving. Sgt. Mathes was best known for his willingness and desire to serve others. His 2005 enlistment was inspired by his want to serve following the September 11 terrorist attacks. However, it will always be his ability to make others feel loved and laugh that those who knew him remember best.

"I'm honored to have Sgt Mathes as my copilot at his hometown track. He's a true hero that volunteered to serve his country in Afghanistan and Iraq. We should never forget!"

Sebring International Raceway had three rounds of racing for the Pirelli GT4 America series Sept. 22-24. To follow this race, join the over half a million users on the GT World YouTube page by subscribing. Find your spot in the community by following SROMotorsports on Twitch, where Ash Vandelay hosts a conversation while streaming each race. Story Credits: SRO Motorsports Press Officer

OVN Ambassador Athletes are:

- Veterans or Active-Duty Military Members
- Competing in and organized amateur series and/or at the professional level in sports
- Help carry OVN's message to reach our veterans
- Most importantly – the passion and commitment to help our veterans



Veteran Resources You Should Know About

If you need more info or an assist in navigating, give Sue a shout at susan@opvetnow.org



Connection.
Camaraderie.
Community.

White Oak Vet Center

Oak Park Mall
2001 Lincoln Way, Suite 280
White Oak, PA 15131
412-678-7704

Pittsburgh Vet Center

Noble Manor
2500 Baldwick Road, Suite 15
Pittsburgh, PA 15205
412-920-1765

Wheeling Vet Center

1058 East Bethlehem
Boulevard
Wheeling, WV 26003
304-232-058



VETERAN BUSHIDO BROTHERHOOD

223 West Pittsburgh St,
Greensburg, PA 15601



CALL 24/7
Hotline
800-959-TAPS (8277)

Readjustment Counseling - 100% Confidential help

Did you know that the Vet Center are :

- Conveniently located in the Community.
- Three locations in the Greater Pittsburgh Area
- Staffed by Military Veterans. The Counselors have walked in your boots.
- Records cannot be accessed by the VA, DOD, or Chain of Command.
- There are 300 Vet Center Locations Nationwide.

24/7 Call Center:

877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)

<https://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-vet-center/>

HELPING VETERANS FIND FITNESS AND COMMUNITY

Get back into positive communities with activities that push us to be better!

- Using fitness and community as tools to heal the mind and body.
- Once you qualify, we:
 - Connect you with a gym in a community near you!
 - Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu
 - Boxing
 - Mixed Martial Arts
 - CrossFit
 - Cover the membership fees associated with that gym for the first three (3) months.
 - If equipment is needed, we will help to provide things like a jiu-jitsu Gi, rash guard, shoes, or gloves.

<https://veteranbushidobrotherhood.com/contact-us/>

NO COST compassionate care and comprehensive resources for all those grieving the death of a military or veteran loved one..

- Connection to grief resources
 - National Military Survivor Seminar
 - Good Grief Camp has been held annually in Washington, D.C
- Counseling in your community
- help navigate benefits and resources
- retreats and expeditions around the world

If you are grieving the loss of a fallen service member, or if you know someone who can use our support, the TAPS 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline is always available toll-free with loving support and resources.



Discover the power of connection.

Someone is available right now to answer your call

1-855-838-8255

<https://vets4warriors.com/connect/>



If you know a veteran who is on the verge of homelessness or struggling with issues related to housing, health care or substance abuse,
Call our toll-free number:
1-866-406-8449 or
1-413-200-3013



Confidential peer support to any veteran, service member, family member, or caregiver whenever they have an issue, wherever they are in the world.

- We help before challenges turn into crises.
- We are a 24/7 confidential peer support network for veteran and military communities.
- We provide immediate, free, and long-term peer support through confidential phone, chat, and email conversations to help those we serve live better lives.
- We serve the entire military community, including anyone who has ever worn the uniform, as well as the family members and the caregivers who love and support them.

Soldier On - Private nonprofit organization committed to ending veteran homelessness.

- Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program
- Door-to-door outreach campaign assisting veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Aims to assist veterans and their families before they become homeless in New York State, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and western Massachusetts.
- Provides in-home case management, referral services, and temporary financial assistance
- Mission is to provide veterans with the services and support they need to carry on healthy, productive lives in homes of their own.

The mission at Military Veterans Outdoors (MVO) is to honor, empower and provide a private recreational getaway for current military and veterans.

- Outdoor adventures for Active Duty Military and Veterans
- OVER 700 ACRES
- Hunting, trapping sporting clays, and fishing land in Pennsylvania.
- To hunt on MVO property you must attend 3 meetings and work parties or events.
- Apply on-line, click <https://militaryveteransoutdoors.com/>

THIS! With a few simple clicks you access info that may help YOU save a life!



Mission: Raise public awareness, calling upon American citizens to meaningfully and routinely engage Veterans.

Outstanding resources

Please click the link to raise your own awareness. Veteran Suicide Count *

- Suicide is Preventable *
- Engagement Strategies *
- Warning Signs of Suicide *
- Risk and Protective Factors *

[Check A Vet](#) Click for outstanding resources

This is How We Do It!

Operation Vet NOW Fallen Heroes and Veteran Village Project - August 2-5, Greensburg, PA



For five years Operation Vet NOW has honored local military heroes through an event that has grown in scope and magnitude. This year the project kicked off on Wednesday with the arrival of the Dog Tag Memorial honoring the fallen Global War on Terror troops. This moving addition was shaped like an American flag when draped over a fallen troop's casket. The memorial itself is made of 7,040 dog tags. Each one represents a service member who died during the War on Terror. The memorial remained in place until dusk, August 5, guarded at night by members of the **Warriors of Chaos Veteran Motorcycle Club**.

Families who lost a family member during active military duty were invited to a private evening on Friday. A time for connection, and support for the losses they have endured, they had quiet time at the wall, catered dinner, and three passionate speakers, Jon Kolb, Dean Unger, and Mike Blahovec. These families bear the unfortunate distinction of Gold Star Families following a tradition dating back to WWII. Families hung banners in their windows with one blue star for each family member serving in the armed service. However, if a family member died while serving, that blue star was replaced with a gold star. Gold Star Families are honored and supported by the actions of OVN.

The Pittsburgh area has lost too many military heroes since 9/11. During the two-day OVN event, 44 of the fallen were honored and remembered. These young men called Pittsburgh "home". They represent Greensburg, Murrysville, Hempfield, Derry, Houston, Richeyville, Spring Church, Johnstown, Fredericktown, Apollo, Moon Township, Butler, Knox, Beaver, Greenfield Township, McKees Rocks, Bethel Park, Irwin, Oil City, Verona, Crafton, Pittsburgh, Oakmont, and McKeesport.

Early on Saturday, August 5, The Warriors of Chaos Veteran Motorcycle Club, the Gold Star Riders, and the **Patriot Guard** led a Memorial Ride, including vehicles carrying Gold Star Families, from the venue, Z & M Harley-Davidson, and arrived at the War on Terror Memorial at Twin Lakes Park in Latrobe. Each motorcycle rider carried with them the picture of one or more of these fallen heroes.

The Z&M parking lot was transformed into the OVN Veteran's Village from 10:00 AM-3:00 PM. The Veterans Village Project (VVP) brings together many agencies that provide service and support to our Veterans and their families. 32 organizations were on hand to make connection between Veterans and their families and local and national non-profit Veterans Service Organizations including the VA.



As the aroma of food trucks filled the area 9 veterans residing at the Southwestern Veteran Center arrived, including 2 WWII veterans. They joined the community in a casual atmosphere to learn about resources, share good food, and hear music including the work of the all-veteran band, Task Force Rock. Over 1,500 participated in wellness activities, shared some stories and laughs, and saw therapy horses and military vehicles up close.

After remarks from OVN's Tony Aubrey, the crowd was moved to tears as the Laurel Highlands Pipe & Drums played Amazing Grace, Rev Mike Beckley delivered the Gold Star Family prayer and buglers played Echo Taps.



This event has become a signature event in the region. This could not have happened without the support and generosity of all who were involved. Deep gratitude goes to our hosts, Z&M Harley-Davidson of Greensburg, the Warriors of Chaos Veterans Motorcycle Club, Legacies Alive, Irwin VFW, Jeannette American Legion, DJ Corey, Smokey Bones, RJC Manufacturing, Edgar Snyders Ryders, Stone Concrete, Westmorland County Young Marines, and many individuals who rolled up their sleeves and helped make the event what it is today.

Please take some time to watch the video linked below as these pictures paint thousands of words. <https://youtu.be/JA2Vm9XG7dU?si=IQWEFsF2EkMOwbo8>

"OUR FIRST DUTY IS TO ALWAYS REMEMBER AND HONOR."



A healing garden and memorial park ...

This special monument is more than just an honor roll. It is a moving place of remembrance, intent on honoring the fallen, inspiring patriotism, and educating the visitors about the sacrifices made on their behalf. Twin Lakes Park is the site of the Global War on Terror monument, the Westmoreland County Fallen Heroes Memorial, a First Responders Monument, and a Pre-9/11 Conflict Monument.

<https://wcvwwot.org/>



Fallen Heroes from this region are honored through laser-engraved portraits, chosen by their Gold Star Family members to ensure they are always remembered and honored for their ultimate sacrifices made in service of the United States Armed Services. On

August 5, The Global War on Terror monument became the setting for a moving ceremony during the Fallen Heroes Ride.

Led by the Gold Star riders, the Gold Star families were escorted to the new Westmoreland County Veterans Global War on Terror (WCVGWT) memorial followed by over 150 motorcycles who came to honor their family members.



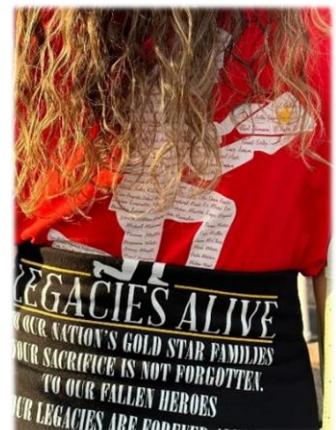
Awaiting their arrival was a full complement of the Patriot Guard flag line, VFW Post 781 Bugler, Laurel Highlands Bagpipe & Drum team, and local soldiers of the 110th Infantry.

We were honored to have LTC(R) Craig Minnick as our guest speaker. LTC Minnick spoke of our heroes' bravery and dedication to defend America, and how vital our service members are to keeping our country free. The ceremony closed with a special presentation to the President of the WCVGWT organization, Dorey Stabile, recognizing her dedication and work to create the beautiful memorial to our fallen heroes.

After remarks from OVN's Tony Aubrey, the crowd was moved to tears as the Laurel Highlands Pipe & Drums played Amazing Grace, Rev Mike Beckley delivered the Gold Star Family prayer and buglers played Echo Taps. The final piece of the day's ceremonies and tributes was roll call. We were honored to have the Executive Director of Legacies Alive, Mr. John Dudo, read the names and hometowns of our fallen heroes.

"The mission of Legacies Alive is to strengthen and support the Gold Star families of our nation's fallen heroes and to bring national awareness to the life and character of all service members who paid the ultimate sacrifice." Founded by combat veterans and deeply committed to the mission, Legacies Alive has a special connection with these families who lost a loved one while on active duty. The OVN mission and that of Legacies Alive are aligned; providing unwavering support to Gold Star families and ensuring the legacies of our fallen heroes are forever alive.

<https://legaciesalive.com/about/>



**OUR FIRST DUTY IS TO ALWAYS
REMEMBER AND HONOR**

VETERAN BUSHIDO BROTHERHOOD

PROVIDING RESOURCES TO VETERANS TO HELP IMPROVE THEIR LIVES

An infantry Marine is a part of the frontline fighting force. Equipped with rifles, machine guns, and grenades, and trained in combat skills, marksmanship, physical conditioning, tactical maneuvers, and survival techniques, reality smacks you in the face, when you get out and your skills don't translate well to a civilian job.



After four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, Marine Infantryman Jeric Fry returned home with no real friend group and no career. He felt disconnected. Somersaulting from the highest level of valor to not being able to pay bills, veteran life threw him into a dark place. Jeric turned to alcohol. He was in an all too

familiar veteran hell of feeling totally abandoned, without a sense of purpose. In the military misery loves company, but this despair felt like a solo mission.

With no viable skill set, after a stint with a plumber, Jeric turned to barbering, the one thing he did in the military that was needed in his community. He walked into the local barber shop and started cutting hair and talking to people - veterans and police - and found that his "alone feeling" was common.

The need for camaraderie found a voice the day a guy came into the barbershop and talked Jiu Jitsu. Two other guys had started Jiu Jitsu and encouraged Jeric to come. It seemed expensive but so was spending \$30-\$40 at the bar. Sauntering into the gym, Jeric found himself being manhandled by a bunch of smaller people. Check your EGO! The soft-spoken dudes seemed to have insane amounts of discipline and the tough guys were in the bars every night. After the hook of fitness, discipline, and nutrition, in the context of community and kinship, Jeric knew he had to help others find a place where they too could thrive.

After some incredible coincidences and leaps of faith, The Veteran Bushido Brotherhood was founded in 2021 to help veterans heal by using fitness and community. "I always wanted to help people. Here at The Veteran Bushido Brotherhood, we look to get you into any group fitness situation that will push you, both mentally and physically. You will either fall in love or realize that an activity is not for you. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Boxing, Mixed Martial Arts, and CrossFit are a few options that VBB will support. Positive communities with activities that push us to be better Once you qualify, (Honorable Discharge Status)

- We will get you connected with a gym.
- We then cover the membership fees for the first three (3) months.
- If equipment is needed, we will help to provide what's necessary to get you started.

It is hard for someone to see value in something that have not experienced. VBB removes that excuse.

It is good to not be drinking in the dark, looking for people who are not really friends. Micro decisions lead to your next decision and your next. Finding a home in a group fitness activity makes you better in the end. Positivity then trickles into other parts of your life. "What you put into the world; you get back ten-fold. Positivity is magnetic.



This is a man who is committed to your success as a veteran. The struggle does not need to be! Reach out.

Check out the website and mark your calendar for a great community event, the 6TH ANNUAL VETERAN BUSHIDO FESTIVAL October 7, 2023

Check the following links for more information and Festival updates ↗

WEBSITE - <http://www.veteranbushidobrotherhood.com>

FACEBOOK - <https://www.facebook.com/Veteran-Bushido-Brotherhood-107887724733137>

The Veteran Suicide Crisis - A Call Out to Americans



There is argument about the number we use to bring awareness to the veteran suicide crisis. It depends on the metrics and the reporting, but I think we can all agree that one veteran life ended by suicide is too many. So, let's support awareness that may lead to prevention of this tragedy. Not just who to call in crisis and how to recognize risk factors. Let's work to understand the veteran experience.



My dad, an Iwo Jima combat Marine, said boot camp was brutal, but it's what kept him alive. A Korean War veteran said that the "purpose of boot camp was to beat the civilian out of you so that the military could build a warrior". When asked about how he dealt with his Vietnam experience, a vet said, "I put it all in a box."

It stays there . . . until it doesn't.

What is alarming about the veteran suicide dilemma is that EACH survivor - EVERY Veteran - who took an oath to protect and defend did so as a warrior, not a civilian. EVERY veteran carries the burden of a trained warrior, ready for duty. As a country and a culture, we need to step it up, accepting some of the responsibility for the warrior mindset and experience that allows for our American freedoms. We need to share the burden they carry for the liberties we enjoy. We are responsible for welcoming back the warrior, listening to their collective story, and being aware of the bumpy, sometimes dark transition path back to civilian life. They expend great amounts of energy keeping the lid on the box. They are not monsters. They are not still warriors. They are OUR brothers and sisters, spouses, friends, aunts, uncles, neighbors and friends. It is our duty to be a light on the path; to Be There for them. [Check A Vet](#) resources.

Sue Watson - Proud daughter of Sgt. Jack Watson, USMC, WWII, Iwo Jima

Project Odyssey Trip Report



Learning how to safely use the ropes course in North Carolina

In April 2023, I attended a mental health workshop in Wilmington, North Carolina, with Wounded Warrior Project. It was very impactful for me. Over five days, I and 15 other veterans from around the country learned how to better ourselves through adventure-based learning.

"Project Odyssey® is a no-cost 12-week mental health program for veterans that uses adventure-based learning to help warriors with PTSD, anxiety, and depression manage and overcome their invisible wounds, enhance their resiliency skills, and empower them to live productive and fulfilling lives."

<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/project-odyssey>

During the in-person part of Project Odyssey, we used Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to discuss various activities we would participate in, such as a high ropes course and zip lines. ACT was and is helpful for me to deal with issues in my own life.

In the months following the trip, the group engagement continues, as we meet over Zoom to discuss our individual goals in North Carolina. Many of the guys in our WhatsApp discussions group are active daily sharing the challenges of daily life.

-Matt Edson, USAF Veteran

Save the Dates

April 6, 2024

2nd Annual Fallen Heroes Ride South to honor our heroes and help our Veterans! All Day.
Gruene Harley-Davidson, 1288 TX-337 Loop, New Braunfels, TX 78130

May 18, 2024

Jennerstown Salutes 2024, Honoring local Heroes and the Veterans Village at the beautiful Jennerstown Speedway. 5:00 PM-10:30 PM
Jennerstown Speedway Complex LLC, 206 Somerset St, Jennerstown, PA 15547, USA

August 3, 2024

6th Annual Fallen Heroes Ride & Veterans Appreciation Event
Z&M Harley-Davidson, 6130 US-30, Greensburg, PA 15601, USA

Thank You

We are only as good as the veterans, families, loved ones and veteran organizations that we connect with and serve. That means you!

Need + Opportunity = Wellness

We invite your feedback, suggestions and involvement.

We would appreciate a few minutes of your time to share your thought and comments in this survey.

Survey Link: <https://form.typeform.com/to/y3MQkq17>

Whether you help through monetary donations, volunteering your time, or spreading our mission through word-of-mouth, thank you.

We couldn't accomplish our goals without the help of supporters like you.

OVN is a 501(C)3 Organization.

<https://opvetnow.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/operationvetnow>

