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First Responder award

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Honored for Helping Vets

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Auxiliary art contest

Illinois Guardsman, VFW Member Helps Fellow Veterans “Bury These Burdens” Through Music

David Allen Stone of Robinson brings attention to Mental Health

By Mike Chrisman
Illinois National Guard
Public Affairs Office

As a kid, David Allen Stone of Robinson, Illinois, a member of Crawford County VFW Post 4549 in Robinson, always wanted to be in the military and serve his country. Enlisting in a post-9/11 era, Stone knew he would be deployed overseas. However, he never envisioned the internal struggles he would endure during his military service.

For many, depression and suicide are taboo topics no one wants to talk about. However, Stone has turned his pain into music, with hopes of helping others struggling with mental illness.

Stone, an Illinois Army National Guard sergeant first class, is part of the 123rd Engineer Battalion in Murphysboro, Illinois. He has served in the Illinois Army National Guard since 2004, when he enlisted

at the age of 18. Deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq gave him a unique perspective on the ‘personal demons’ many Veterans face. Like many Veterans, Stone turned to alcohol to cope with his depression. It was those personal struggles that enabled the 35-year-old Veteran to hone in on his passion, finding an outlet that helped him cope. Now he’s helping others struggling with depression and suicidal ideations.

“I wrote the song ‘Bury These Burdens’ when I was in a pretty dark spot in my life and thought I could fix my problems at the bottom of the bottle,” Stone recalls. “I thought ending my life would be best for everyone, until a conversation with my aunt, Angie Watson, helped me use my passion for music to focus on my pain.”

See BURDENS
Continued on Page 12



David Allen Stone, a member of the Illinois Army National Guard, and Crawford County VFW Post 4549 in Robinson, Illinois, wrote the song ‘Bury These Burdens,’ to help those coping with mental illness and thoughts of suicide.

Roesch, Kriebel to represent national organization during VFW, Auxiliary annual state conventions

Past Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch and Past National Auxiliary President Sandi Kriebel will represent the national organizations during the Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary state conventions June 9-12 in Springfield.

Roesch, from Hampton, Virginia, was installed as the 112th Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on July 24, 2020, in Kansas City, Missouri.

Kriebel, from Ellicott City, Maryland, continues to serve the VFW Auxiliary as the VAVS

National Representative.

Hal is a 20-year U.S. Air Force retiree serving from 1982 to 2002. He earned his VFW eligibility during his combat service in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and overseas service as part of Southern Watch.

Roesch is a recipient of three Meritorious Service Medals, two Air Force Commendation Medals, two Air Force Achievement Medals, the Air Force

See CONVENTION
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Hal Roesch, Past VFW Commander-in-Chief



Sandi Kriebel, Past National Auxiliary President

Postmaster: Send address changes to
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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

2022-2023 Illinois New Century Drawing

52 Weekly Drawings - July through June
\$100 Prize Each Week - Profits to Charity

DRAWING AT VFW DEPT. OF ILLINOIS
3300 CONSTITUTION DR., SPRINGFIELD, IL 62711

State Commander



Bobby Welch

Comrades,
In the past year, we have made memories, matured as a department, and learned from one another. The leadership team that you elected, has continually worked to improve the processes and programs that you use to administer the operations of your posts and districts.
We are still working on some and they should be coming on-line soon. I have no doubts that the department will continue to move forward and be a leader among the 51 other departments in the Veterans of Foreign Wars!
To those that will shortly be awarded the title of All State, congratulations and thank you for your superior performance this year. To those that are close to reaching All American, The Time is Now... do not stop because the State convention is around the corner, continue the push up until the last day... Veterans don't quit!
I want to thank everyone who supported me this year. To my "landlord" and part time chauffeur, Cathy, thank you for being understanding about the long nights I was buried in the computer pouring over numbers and spreadsheets and the weekends away from home.
To the "thinktank" (you know who you are) thank you for aggravating me to no end, making me laugh until my sides hurt, but mostly for keeping my feet planted firmly on the ground. Finally, to the members of the Department of Illinois, thank

you for putting your faith in me and allowing me the opportunity to lead this great state. I will forever be in your debt and in your service.
I want to leave you with this poem by Will Allen Dromgoole, this poem has helped guide my actions since it was first introduced to me some 20 years ago. I hope it will touch you like it has me, I think it is a fitting analogy of who we are as the premiere Veterans Service Organization and how we should take care of those that come after us.
The Bridge Builder
An old man going a lone highway
Came at the evening, cold and grey,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned, when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.
"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim, near,
"You are wasting strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again will pass this way;
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide-
Why build you this bridge at the evening tide?"
The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today,
A youth, whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm, that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him."

State Sr. Vice Commander



Bobby Edwards

2021-2022 Mission Almost Completed!
As we bring Commander Welch's Year to a close "Mission First-Veterans Always." I would like to congratulate "ALL" Post and Districts for their commitment in keeping our Vision and Mission to our Great Fraternal Organization "The Veterans of Foreign Wars."
Comrades it seems to me that just last month, the year began, but as you are aware its not true.
This 2021-2022 year has been productive and educational to all. Our efforts of being relevant within our communities by participating in countless fund raisers and veteran ceremonies has enabled us to once again show fellow Illinoisan's who we are.
Let us continue to reach out to our members to keep them

involved in the operations of our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly events. Challenge them to take charge of a committee to utilize their talents and expertise.
Ask them to become a part of the Post, District Leadership Teams. The future of our Post, District and Department depends on "ALL."
I would like to take this opportunity to say congratulations to all the Post and Districts that worked so diligently to accomplish and achieve "All American and ALL State" status.
The criteria standards were not easy, but your commitment to Excellence is an achievement recognized by all.
I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who recruited new members and or reinstated members in our quest to achieve 100 percent membership.
Membership Chairman Higginbotham has done an excellent job getting information on Post and District as well as Department standings. He has provided us with the tools necessary to achieve our goals.
Let us utilize the remainder of the year, June 30, to reach out to our unpaid membership. Our members are the lifeblood of this organization and always need to be a priority. I can tell you first-

hand that when our leadership made calls to our members, they were grateful for the call and to hear from their fellow veterans.
As we traveled the state to review where we are at the Department Level. We have witnessed great accomplishments. The members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars from our Post and Districts are helping their communities in ways that outline why we exists. Please continue to report your charitable activities and community activities through your local post, district newsletters and local and social media. Do not' forget to report it on your X-sheets.
We have 38,000 plus members represented in the 17 Districts and 260 plus Posts in the Department of Illinois. We need to strive to increase our membership back to 50,000 plus so we have the power and leverage to provide even greater support to the veterans.
Know our members, posts, and districts are out there on the front lines every day serving our veterans, their families, and our communities. We as VFW members care passionately about serving their fellow citizens.
Just as we pledged serving out time in uniform, we again vow to sustain a lifelong commitment to the Nation and our Communities.

National VFW honors Voice of Democracy, Patriots Pen students

During the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) virtual Parade of Winners April 7, the organization proudly presented more than \$211,000 in scholarships and awards as it named the national winners of its 2022 Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen youth scholarship competitions in a Facebook live event sponsored by Twisted X.
The event featured the 53 national VFW Department (state) winners.
Natalie Sissac, from Bata-

via, IL, represented the VFW Department of Illinois, and was awarded the \$3,000 Joseph and Irene Hansen Memorial Scholarship (Maryland).
Parker Tade, from Oak Forest, IL, represented the VFW Department of Illinois, and was awarded the \$750 VFW Department of Washington and Auxiliary Eric G. Sandstrom Memorial Award.
"While we weren't able to meet in person again this year, we didn't let that stop us from

ensuring we celebrated everything this year's winners have accomplished," said VFW National Commander Fritz Michelcic. "This evening's event successfully shined the spotlight on both (national VOD winner) Daniela and all of our VFW Department (state) winners across the nation. The VFW was honored to present America's top high school students with more than \$211,000 in scholarships and awards.

State Jr. Vice Commander



Brett Nila

In my travels over the past 10 months, I've had the chance to observe a number of District Meetings. The value of a District Meeting is in the information that it provides, which is why the By-Laws require each Post to send a representative. The best meetings pack a great deal of information into the time spent. Based upon my observations, I've developed a list of

"best practices" for conducting informative meetings that move at a good pace.
1) The District Commander uses a full script. While the Manual of Ritual provides scripts for various sections of a meeting, that can involve a lot of page-flipping time. For most, it's best to draft a single (combined) script for the entire meeting on full-size sheets of paper.
2) The Adjutant has a roll-call list of the Posts and the District Staff. Some also maintain a list of Past Commanders; others find it more efficient to ask all Past Commanders who are present to stand and be recognized at once.
3) Rely on an agenda. Some Commanders draft a note for themselves listing the topics they wish to cover, to ensure the meeting stays on-track. Others print an agenda for distribution at the meeting so that attendees can also follow the "track." This

can also aid Post representatives in completing their task of taking the information back to their Posts.
4) Program and Committee Chairpersons make reports. These reports are usually updates resulting from activity since the last District meeting. Many also draw from the reports issued by Department Program Chairpersons at the last Council of Administration meeting, or periodic updates that are posted in the monthly General Orders. (Those reporting should provide a copy of their reports to the Adjutant; ideally that's done before the start of the meeting.)
5) Announcements are made. Often the District Commander identifies some in advance, which are usually covered during the "Good of the Order." Some may come "from the floor;" it's a helpful courtesy to make the Commander aware of these before the meeting, but it's

not required.
6) Handouts are available. In this digital age, we no longer need to maintain stacks of flyers, brochures, and hand-outs at meetings. Still, it can be helpful to have a few on display; as the materials run out, attendees can ask about obtaining the digital copies.
Many people belong to organizations—especially those who become active volunteers—be-

cause they want knowledge and information. They want to know what's going on; they want to be "in the know." A well-planned meeting can meet that need. Posts that leave with good information—and pass it on at their next Post meeting—keep their members informed...and may even find someone new who'd be interested in attending the next District meeting.

REUNIONS

USS ABNAKI ATF96

Sept. 19-22, 2022

Holiday Inn, Urbandale, Iowa

Reunion POC: Nancy Ferber

Email: masonsawyergma@yahoo.com

Phone: (641) 745-7077

Post 1337 presents First Responder award to Gurnee Police Officer

At the March 21, 2022 Gurnee Village Board Meeting Commander Les Durov of the Mount Prospect Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1337, presented a First Responder Americanism Certificate of Appreciation to Gurnee Police Sgt. Jason Kalinowski.

The award was presented to Sgt. Kalinowski by Post 1337 as part of a program developed and sponsored by the national organization of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to honor and recognize first responders.

Attending the presentation from the Village were Mayor Tom Hood, the Village Trustees, Police Chief Brian Smith, Police Commander Jon Ward and many officers of the Gurnee Police Department. Also in attendance

was Sgt. Kalinowski's wife, Danielle.

Joining Commander Durov were several officers of Post 1337 and American Legion Post 525.

Sgt. Kalinowski began his career as policeman in 2006 when he joined the Kenilworth Police Department after graduating from the Police Training Institute in Champaign.

In 2008 he moved to the Village of Gurnee where he has served for almost 14 years. During his tenure Sgt Kalinowski has served the Village in many police positions including as the New Hire Liaison, the Field Training Officer Coordinator, and the Field Sobriety Test Trainer. He is also the current

President of the Fraternal Order of Police Social Lodge.

Sgt Kalinowski and Danielle reside in Antioch with their 10 year-old son and 8 year-old daughter.

In accepting the award Sgt. Kalinowski expressed his thanks and appreciation to Post 1337 for honoring him with the certificate. He told the audience that he was extremely proud to serve the citizens of Gurnee and to wear the badge and uniform of the Gurnee Police Department.

VFW Post 1337 is honored to salute this talented, dedicated and brave police officer who helps make the Village of Gurnee be a better place to work and live by keeping its residents and employees safe.



Mt. Prospect Post 1337 Commander Les Durov, left, presents a First Responder award to Gurnee Police Sgt. Jason Kalinowski.



Mt. Prospect Post 1337 members, as well as community leaders, congratulate Gurnee Police Sgt. Jason Kalinowski on his receipt of the First Responder award. Kalinowski began his law enforcement career in 2006 with the Kenilworth Police Department and has been with the Village of Gurnee since 2008.

Legislative session spells success for Illinois veterans

It went to early Saturday morning, April 9 but the Illinois General Assembly passed SB 1975 which included an amendment to the disabled veterans Homestead exemption. For taxable year 2023 and thereafter, it expands the exemption to include if the taxpayer is the surviving spouse of a veteran whose death was determined to be service-connected and who is certified by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as a recipient of dependency and indemnity compensation under federal law.

It no longer requires specified disabled veterans that qualify and have obtained this exemption to reapply for the exemption annually. This requirements only applies if a veteran has a combined service connected disability rating of 100% and is deemed to be permanently and totally disabled, as certified by the VA.

On April 6, house bill 4682 the Veteran scratch off lottery act was passed.

The VFW can take great pride in this bill as over 200 members submitted witness slips as proponents to support the bill . The

amendment allows not-for-profits who provide Mental health services to apply for Illinois veterans lottery grant. This bill will improve the lives of our veterans and their families as they seek mental health services.

On April 7, HB 5184 which clarified the funding for the County veterans assistance commission was passed. this bill will insure that the counties are able to provide additional emergency assistance to veterans in need.

Your VFW Legislative team- has taken the stand that Veterans at the local level know best what assistance to provide to veterans and we recognize the work done by the county veterans assistance commission. However, veterans must be diligent in there participation in the county veterans assistance commission to insure the needs of the veterans community are met.

Legislation was passed to create the office of inspector general for the Illinois department of Veterans Affairs, a free certification program for military dependents, elimination of the requirement for annual verification for dis-

abled veterans for the homestead exemption , the amendment to the disabled veterans homestead exemption to include surviving spouses receiving DIC, State veterans benefits for those with a less than honorable discharge due to sexual or gender orientation, and strengthened the ability of the VACs to provide assistance for homeless veterans.

The passage of Senate joint resolution 28, naming US Highway 20 from Oregon to Massachusetts as Medal of Honor Highway will be a constant reminder to all citizens that freedom isn't free.

At right, is a sample witness slip. We urge all members to support our legislation by submitting a witness slip on ilga.gov. The witness slips can only be submitted at the time that a hearing has been scheduled. Your legislative team will do its best to announce when hearings are scheduled on veterans legislative items. On July 1, the annual report from the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council will be issued to the General Assembly listing our priority legislation for the next session of the General Assembly.

RECORD OF COMMITTEE WITNESS - ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HB 5184 Bill #

Veterans' Affairs Committee Committee

DATE time of hearing

Wednesday, April 6, 2022 11:00 AM

Other (Subject Matter):

Unavailable

I. IDENTIFICATION

All fields are required unless noted as optional.

Name

Your Name

Address

Your Address

City

Your Town

State

IL

Zip

Your Zip Code

Firm/Business Or Agency Title

Self or Organization & TOWN Example "VFW Mount Prospect"

Email

Miss Mr Ms Mrs

Phone

Your Email

(A confirmation email will be sent if email address is provided.)

Fax (Optional)

- ### -

II. REPRESENTATION

This section is to be filled if the witness is appearing on behalf of a group, organization or other entity.

Persons, groups firms represented in this appearance:

SELF this is preferred

III. POSITION

Select your position(s) on the legislative items.

Description

SCA 1

Click

Proponent

Opponent

No Position On Merits

Proponent unless we ask you to Oppose a bill

IV. TESTIMONY

Select the testimony types that you will supply for the hearing. (Check all that apply)

Oral

Written Statement Filed

Click

Record Of Appearance Only

Please Agree to the Terms Of Agreement

Click

I Agree to the ILGA Terms of Agreement.

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Click

Create(Slip)



St. Juvin Post recognizes Floridian Club Property Manager and Army vet Kim Bockover with a certificate of appreciation for sponsoring the luncheon and the monthly coffee and doughnut event for vets.

St. Juvin Post Celebrates Veterans Day

St. Juvin partnered with the Coal City Public Library District and Coal City Unit District #1 for the library’s 13th Veterans Day observance.

Due to state restrictions on the use of schools no observance was held in 2020

The event was held in the high school’s Center for the Performance Arts venue on Nov. 11.

St Juvin presented the U.S. and Post flags accompanied by Pete Bianchetta playing “To the Colors” on the trumpet.

Rita Wise played the introductory music, Shaela O’Keefe Girl Scout Gold Award Recipient lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Coal City high school Footnotes, directed by Bonnie McDowell, sang God Bless America and My America.

Guest speakers were State Senator Sue Rezin, State Representative Jackie Haas, Diamond Mayor Teresa Kernc., St, Juvin

Commander James “Hoppy” Phillips and Coal City Public Library District Trustee Dean Vigna.

The Sulfur Springs Arbor of the Gleaners provided U.S. flags to the over 200 attendees.

The event closed with guest soloist Sophia Johnson singing The Star Spangled Banner.

The Library served cookies and lemonade in the cafeteria.

St. Juvin’s “Venice Detachment” also observed Veterans Day at the Floridian Club of Sarasota.

The Floridian Club furnished a luncheon and Post members assisted with serving. The luncheon was attended by 33 resident veterans and guests.

Featured speaker was Florida’s 17th District Congressman Greg Steube who discussed a bi-partisan group in the House of Representatives who meet to serve the needs of vets regardless of party.

Congressman Steube was presented with a POW/MIA flag for his office. The “Venice Detachment” of St. Juvin Post consists of 5 veterans who reside at the Floridian Club and are Post 1336 members.

The Post recognized Floridian Club Property Manager and Army vet Kim Bockover with a certificate of appreciation for sponsoring the luncheon and the monthly coffee and doughnut event for vets.

Also recognized with the 50th Commemoration of the Vietnam War’s Surviving Spouse certificate and pin was Jean Kratz. Jean’s husband Keith recently passed; he was an Air Force vet who served In Vietnam.



State Commander Bobby Welch presents Donald Yarbrough, service officer, Lawrence J. Cross Post 2602, Peoria Heights, with the VFW Meritorious Service award for his continuing work helping veterans in need.

Yarbrough honored for work helping vets

Peoria Heights’ Lawrence J. Cross Post 2602 Service Officer Donald Yarbrough was awarded the VFW Meritorious Service award for his continuing work helping veterans in need.

Yarbrough and his wife Tanya offer help to veterans through his own organization “Veterans Helping Veterans, Helping Community.”

Recently, Post 2602 awarded Yarbrough a \$10,000 grant to aid him in his work of collecting unusable power scooters, rebuilding them and installing new batteries. To date his efforts have provided scooters and mobility to over 500 veterans.

Donald, a disabled Special Forces veteran of Vietnam, knows the needs of veterans and offers a helping hand in any way he can.

His organization has helped vets with home repairs, shingling a roof, a tank of gas, car repairs, ramp access, and even a small loan.

Yarbrough has received help himself and understand the need to “pay it forward” and help others.



Donald Yarbrough rebuilds an unusable power scooter.

VFW State Commander Robert J. Welch recently visited Post 2602 to pin the Meritorious Service award medal on Donald

Yarbrough’s bib-overalls for service as a member of Post 2602 and his unselfish and dedicated service helping those in need.

Highway 20 designated as Medal of Honor Highway

Illinois passes SJR 28 to honor Illinois’ Medal of Honor recipients

Senate Joint Resolution 28 designating U.S. Highway 20 as Medal of Honor Highway unanimously passed as Illinois joins the effort to rename the 3,365 miles of Highway 20 spanning the nation from the Pacific to Atlantic Oceans.

“This partnership of states honoring their Medal of Honor recipients amplifies our deep appreciation and recognition of their heroism,” said IDVA Director Terry Prince. “Highway 20 intersects Illinois and connects us to Indiana and Iowa. It is well-traveled by many who

will be reminded of those within our state who have fought courageously and selflessly.”

Since the Civil War, 3,511 service men and one woman have received the honor, and 66 are still living today.

Illinois has been home to 199 Medal of Honor recipients including U.S. Army Sergeant Allen James Lynch (then SP4) of Gurnee, and U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Harold A. Fritz (then First Lieutenant) of Peoria, both cited for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and

beyond the call of duty” during the Vietnam War. Passing of the Resolution coincides with Vietnam Veterans Day, held each year on March 29th.

About 2,360 recipients or two-thirds of all 3,508 Medal of Honor awards presented since 1863 are connected with the 12 states connecting Highway 20: Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts.

**See HIGHWAY
Continued on Page 10**

ILLINOIS VFW NEWS

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NEWSPAPER COMMITTEE:

Laurie Emmer, Chairman;
Bobby Welch; Joe Bartley;
Ray Rigsby
Editor: Barbara Wilson
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**Illinois VFW News
Deadlines**

**The deadline for the
upcoming issues
of the Illinois VFW News**

Sept. 2022 - Aug. 1, 2022

Dec. 2022 - Nov. 1, 2022

March 2023 - Feb. 1, 2023

**Email items to:
Barb Wilson, Editor at
bwilson@vfwil.org**

**Items not received by the
deadline may be held for
the next issue.**

Oswego Soldier Retires After Nearly 36 Years of Military Service

Maj. Ivan Ortiz of Oswego, Illinois, a member of Montgomery Memorial Post 7452, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after nearly 36 years of military service during a ceremony held Saturday, March 5, at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Ortiz, who grew up in Chicago, is employed fulltime as an engineer with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). He has been employed by IDOT for more than 20 years. He retired from the Illinois Army National Guard as the



Maj. Ivan Ortiz of Oswego, Illinois, is awarded the Meritorious Service Medal his retirement ceremony March 5 at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Spreitzer, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

Head of the Class

Materials Management Branch Chief in the U.S. Property and Fiscal Office.

He served as both a Soldier and a Sailor graduating basic training twice – once for each service. He served in the Army Reserves from 1986 to 1987, then as an active-duty Navy Sailor from 1988-1991, and then in the Navy Reserves from 1992 to 2005. In March 2005 he transferred from the Navy into the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School. After graduating from the school and earning his commission, he has

spent the last 17 years as an Ordnance Officer in the Illinois Army National Guard.

"Take advantage of all the education benefits that the military and the Illinois National Guard offer," Ortiz advised those starting their military careers. He used the Illinois National Guard Grant as an example, which waives tuition at all state colleges and universities for Illinois National Guard members. He also advised those in the audience to start each day by identifying realistic, achievable goals.

Ortiz holds a bachelor's degree in construction management/engineering from Purdue University and a master's degree in project management from DeVry University. He is also a licensed journeyman carpenter.

Throughout his career, Ortiz has supported military operations in Africa, South Korea, and Kuwait. He deployed twice to the Middle East in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, from January 2014 to November 2014 and from October 2018 to May 2019.

Ortiz commanded Co. B of the 405th Brigade Support Battalion after serving as the company's executive officer. He



Maj. Ivan Ortiz of Oswego, Illinois, speaks to those in attendance during his retirement ceremony March 5 at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois. Ortiz retires after more than 30 years of service spanning the Army Reserves, the Navy and Navy Reserves and the Illinois National Guard. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Spreitzer, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

served as a platoon leader with the 3625th Maintenance Co.

After company command, he served as an executive officer within the 108th Sustainment Brigade. He served on two active-duty tours, as a manpower studies analyst with National Guard Bureau's G-1 (personnel office) and as a logistics officer with 1st Army on Rock Island Arsenal.

Prior to serving as Materials

Management Branch Chief, he served as a logistics officer with the 244th Digital Liaison Detachment based in Chicago.

Ortiz was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal upon his retirement as well as an Army Achievement Medal for his work during the Bright Star multinational exercise hosted by Egypt in 2021. He has multiple other awards and decorations from throughout his career.

High School Teacher Selected to be Illinois Guard's Chief of Joint Staff

A high school teacher at Lake Park High School in Roselle, and member of Carol Stream Post 10396, has been selected as the Illinois National Guard's next Chief of the Joint Staff.

Col. Seth Hible of Winfield serves as a traditional National Guard Soldier and will continue teaching full-time.

In his military duties, he now plays a key leadership role planning and coordinating Illinois National Guard support for domestic operations, international cooperation, and interagency and intergovernmental coordination. Hible began his duties as Illinois National Guard Chief of the Joint Staff in January.

Hible, who enlisted in 1985, previously served as the Director of Domestic Operations for the ILNG Joint Staff. He spent the first 12 years of his career as an enlisted infantry Soldier before enrolling in the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School in 1995, graduating in 1996 as an honor graduate. As the Director of Domestic Operations for the ILNG for the past two years, Hible planned and supervised the ILNG's COVID-19 response and six civil disturbance operations.

"Colonel Hible is the quintessential Citizen-Soldier. He's an English and art teacher as a civilian and a professional planner and leader as a military officer," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General and commander of the Illinois National Guard. "He played a key role in the Illinois National Guard's

domestic operations response these last two years and his calm demeanor will serve him well as the Joint Chief."

As Chief of the Joint Staff, Hible will supervise the Joint Staff as well as develop and coordinate partnering activities with other military services and other countries and their militaries.

Domestically, he will also work with intergovernmental agencies to provide support to civil authorities and augment domestic operations.

"Colonel Hible was selected for his experience as a leader and as a planner," said Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, of Sherman, Director of the ILNG Joint Staff. "He will use this experience to work closely with our state partners during emergency operations."

Hible said he is honored to be selected to serve as the Chief of the Joint Staff.

"I'm honored to be selected for this position," Hible said. "Transitioning from the Director of Domestic Operations for the Joint Staff to the Chief of the Joint Staff allows for consistency in the Joint Staff. I look forward to developing the Joint Staff."

He replaces Alessia, who was selected to serve as the Director of the Joint Staff in October.

Hible has deployed three times, including Task Force Santa Fe to Kaiserslautern, Germany in 2002 in support of U.S. Army Europe as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in response to the terrorist attacks on Sept.



Col. Seth Hible, of Winfield, Illinois, has been selected as the Illinois National Guard's Chief of the Joint Staff. He assumed his duties in January.

11, Operation Cajun Fury to Fort Polk, Louisiana in 2004-2005 when the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion was mobilized and sent to Iraq and Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 131st Infantry Regiment were sent to Louisiana to take over the duties of the 509th as Opposing Forces Soldiers under the Joint Readiness Training Center, and to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2008-2009.

In addition to the federal activations, he served on state active duty for flood response operations in 1993.

Hible said his last duty positions have prepared him for the job.

"The past two years with the Joint Staff and experience as an operations officer with the 404th Maneuver Enhancement

Brigade has helped me to define and refine the planning process," he said. "This experience has really prepared me to better work with our state and federal emergency partners and other state agencies."

Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Gorup, of Raymond, noncommissioned officer in charge of the Illinois National Guard's Joint Operations Center, has served with Hible on numerous assignments throughout his own nearly 26-year career and said Hible is the right person for the job.

"I've worked with Colonel Hible several times in the past 19 years, first deploying together in 2004 and then again in 2008," Gorup said. "I've watched him grow as an officer and as a leader. He's a great mentor and I've learned a lot from him. He's a great teacher and will explain

what the plan is and why it's executed that way."

Hible became the Director of Domestic Operations for the Joint Staff in early 2020 and according to Gorup, he had to learn very quick when the ILNG was activated for the COVID-19 response operations.

"As one of his very first duties in the Joint Staff, Colonel Hible had to plan and direct the Illinois National Guard's COVID-19 response operations," Gorup said. "It was a very high tempo operation, which was changing almost every day."

Gorup said from watching Hible over the years, he's going to go far in the ILNG.

"He's a great guy and is great for the organization," he said.

Hible and his wife, Laura, have three sons, Michael, Sean and Adrian.

Sherman Aviator Taxis into Retirement after 42 Year Career

By Barbara Wilson
Illinois National Guard
Public Affairs Office

The year is 1980. The U.S. boycotts the 1980 Summer Olympics, President Jimmy Carter signs Proclamation 4771, requiring 18- to 25-year-old men to register for a peacetime military draft and Ronald Reagan is elected 40th President of the United States.

Meanwhile in the small Illinois town of Winchester, 17-year-old David Hammon is enlisting in the Illinois Army National Guard, the first steps on a path to a 42-year military career.

“I was a small town kid interested in aviation, a very costly endeavor,” Chief Warrant Officer (5) David Hammon, of Sherman, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois National Guard said. “I wanted to be a turbine engine technician and the military seemed to be the way to go.”

Hammon said at first he reached out to the Illinois Air National Guard but ultimately decided to enlist in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1980 as an aircraft mechanic, serving with the 219th Transportation Company, based at Scott Air Force Base. He would serve in the 40th Aviation Battalion (Attack Helicopter) and the 1144th Transportation Battalion. But prior to his current position, spent most of his career with 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Decatur.

After 42 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard, Hammon will retire April 30.

“It’s time to pass the baton on to the next Soldiers in line,” he said. “I’ve been blessed with this opportunity to serve in the Illinois Army National Guard for the past 42 years. I’m looking forward to taking a break as

I decide what to do next.”

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard said Hammon will be missed.

“Chief Hammon has left an indelible mark in the Illinois National Guard, not only in the aviation community, but also in

because of his persistence and attention to detail. He knows every warrant officer in the state, knows their story, and has been a catalyst of their success and careers.”

Hammon has had a front row seat as the Illinois National Guard has undergone a transformation from an under-funded,

Hammon said his greatest achievement in the Illinois Army National Guard is service to the organization and the people it supports.

“I’ve been on flood response duty and for me the service is personal,” he said. “I have aunts and uncles who live in flood prone areas.”



Chief Warrant Officer (5) David Hammon, of Sherman, Illinois, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois National Guard, poses for a photo prior to his final flight as a Black Hawk pilot on March 15 at the Decatur, Illinois Aviation Facility. Hammon retired from the Illinois Army National Guard April 30 after a 42 year career. (U.S. Army photo taken by Mr. Robert R. Adams, Command Information Manager, ILNG PAO)

the warrant officer corps,” Neely said. “He has worked tirelessly to cultivate and mentor a new generation of warrant officers in the Illinois Army National Guard.”

Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General-Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard said the Illinois National Guard is better because of Hammon’s service.

“Chief Hammon has seen and done it all over the course of his long career,” said Boyd. “The organization is better today

under-used program to a fully operational force multiplier today.

“I’ve served during the lean years. When I first began my career, we had to share flight time with other states. The Army would give each state an allotted amount of ‘blade’ time and aviators had to share that flight time,” Hammon said. “Today, the National Guard is a fully operational combat ready force performing missions at home and abroad.”

After a four-decade career,

Hammon said in addition to stateside duty, he’s served overseas and witnessed the suffering in other countries.

“Those living conditions make you realize just how good we have it in the United States, despite our problems,” he said. “The National Guard has afforded me the opportunity to see that first hand. Serving in the National Guard has opened a phenomenal amount of doors.”

Hammon said he’s thankful for the opportunity to wear the uniform since 1980.

“I’m totally grateful for the career I’ve had,” said Hammon, who has served in a variety of enlisted, commissioned, and warrant officer positions throughout his career. “I signed up for every deployment that came down the pipe since I was a private and oddly enough I only deployed to Iraq twice, but I’ve been on training missions overseas to 14 other countries.”

Hammon became an aviation warrant officer with the 106th Aviation Regiment in 1996.

“I became a warrant officer to be able to remain in the aviation field due to the restructuring of aviation assets at that time,” he said.

After spending parts of five decades working for the same organization, Hammon offered advice to anyone just starting out in the military.

“Stay with it,” he said. “Seek out mentors to help you throughout your time in uniform. Think about what you want to accomplish as long range goals and how serving in the Illinois Na-

tional Guard helps you achieve those goals.”

Those who have served with Hammon throughout the years describe him as a leader with a simple approach to leadership.

“Mr. Hammon is uniquely rounded as a Soldier, having served in the enlisted ranks, as a commissioned officer, and as a warrant officer,” said Chief Warrant Officer (5) Thomas Black, of Springfield, who has known Hammon for 25 years, and will succeed him as the Command Chief Warrant Officer. “He’s an easy going leader who communicates well and encourages team building.”

Black said that Hammon is a tremendous asset to the Illinois National Guard who is able to bring people together.

“He’s a legend who gets to ride off in the sunset on his terms,” Black said. “I’m fortunate to step into his shoes as the Command Chief Warrant Officer. I hope I’m able to use some of the things I’ve learned from him to make a difference in the organization.”

1st Sgt. Jeff Nordmann, of St. Martin, Minnesota, Company A, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, called Hammon the enlisted Soldier’s Soldier.

“When we deployed to Iraq, our unit clocked 500 hours of flight time,” Nordmann said.

“Chief Hammon was always ready for any mission. He was committed to the job.”

Nordmann said Hammon’s retirement will have a huge impact on the Illinois Army National Guard.

“Soldiers can’t gain that experience overnight,” he said. “The loss will be felt for quite some time.”

Chief Warrant Officer (5) Herb Stevens, of Normal, Illinois, the facility commander at the Kankakee Army Aviation Support Facility in Kankakee, has known Hammon for more than 30 years.

“Dave swore me in as a warrant officer in May 1991,” Stevens said. “We went to flight school together and that was our graduation.”

He describes Hammon as the “guy who could get the things needed to make the mission successful.”

“The thing with Dave is if you mention ‘hey, it would be nice to have this or we need this for our deployment’, he was the guy who could make that happen,” he said. “He was always thinking about the needs of the Soldiers.”

Stevens said the Illinois Army National Guard is better for having Hammon in its ranks.

“We were fortunate to have him around for 42 years,” he said. “He was a mentor to all of us warrant officers which created success in the ranks. Under Dave’s leadership, the warrant



Chief Warrant Officer (5) David Hammon, of Sherman, Illinois, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois National Guard conducts pre-flight checks prior to his final flight on March 15 in a UH-60 Black Hawk at the Decatur, Illinois Aviation Facility. Hammon retired from the Illinois Army National Guard April 30 after a 42 year career. (U.S. Army photo taken by Mr. Robert R. Adams, Command Information Manager, ILNG PAO)

See AVIATOR
Continued on Page 7

Normal-based 404th MEB receive combat patch during deployment

By Spc. Kiersten Breunig
404th MEB Public Affairs
Members of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, headquartered in Normal, Illinois, celebrated a milestone in their military careers as they received their combat patch, for military members serving in hostile conditions, March 17, 2022.

Maj. Gen. William Zana, Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa commanding general, presided over the ceremony, noting the significance of the patching tradition and the importance of the 404th MEB's task-at-hand as primary staff and leadership with CJTF-HOA. As part of the ceremonial honors, Zana placed the combat patch on Col. Justin Towell, of Edwardsville, Illinois, CJTF-HOA chief of staff and also the commander of the 404th MEB, as well as the rest of the MEB command group.

"There are these moments in life... the moment you first get married; the birth of your first child; the loss of a close friend or loved one... these moments change who you are as a person and how you view the world," said Zana.

According to Zana, both the earning of and the experience that comes along with a combat patch is one of those monumental, life-changing experiences.

He reminded the U.S. Soldiers, especially those donning their first combat patch, the respect and responsibility that comes along with their milestone.

The 404th MEB now wears the U.S. Africa Command patch just below the American flag, signifying deployment in a combat zone. Their current combat deployment is with CJTF-HOA, located at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the only permanent U.S. military base on the African continent. The combat patch has been a symbol of military service during combat operations since World War I and continues to serve as an emblem of personal sacrifice.

"You all are going to live through history here," added Zana, regarding the MEB's next eight months in Djibouti, East Africa and the greater continent. "We are serving in Africa during a remarkable time. Over the past 20 years, CJTF-HOA has evolved to meet each new challenge; you are going to watch the task force continue to evolve, witnessing it first-hand."

While in a combat zone the patch is worn in a subdued color. The AFRICOM patch has a light blue oval-shaped embroidered emblem coming to a point at top and bottom, two palm fronds crossed at base proper, surmounted by a blue oval shield edged with a



Sgt. Maj. Derik Kraus, center, a member of Randolph County Post 2698, Sparta, serving with the Illinois Army National Guard's 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, headquartered in Normal, Illinois, waits to receive his combat patch, a military milestone earned while serving in hostile conditions, March 17, 2022. The 404th MEB Soldiers earned their patches while deployed to Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, located at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the only permanent military base on the African continent. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Cody H. Ramirez)

red border bearing the green landmasses of Africa. The use of blue alludes to the commitment to the unity and coordination of Africa's allies to promote the AFRICOM mission. The palm fronds indicate Africa's hope to achieve unity on the continent and to build partnership throughout the world. Red strands for liberation, and the green demotes prosperity. The landmasses of Africa symbolize

the continent's fortitude and the command's area of operation.

In 2012, a chemical brigade was established as the 404th MEB. Over the past ten years the unit has been building the skills, utilizing many training exercises in preparation for a mobilization. As a newly formed unit, this is the 404th MEB's first deployment. The significance of earning the combat patch was not lost on young Soldiers with

the MEB.

"One thing I really appreciate about the Army is the high standard we hold for recognition," said Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Andrea Polizzi, of Elburn, Illinois, CJTF-HOA and 404th MEB Soldier. "It's a great reminder of our 'why' behind serving and to remember those who came before us. Being here in Africa is an honor and I'm very proud of it."

AVIATOR

Continued from Page 6

officer ranks grew and he made sure the right people were in the right jobs."

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Wentworth, of Lawrenceburg, Company A, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, said Hammon commands a presence.

"He's a great mentor, someone you can talk out issues with," said Wentworth, who is a maintenance test pilot at the Decatur facility. "When I was attending flight school, anytime I had an issue, I could call and talk to Chief Hammon and he would guide me through the issues."

Wentworth said serving 42 years in uniform is definitely a goal to strive toward.

"He has seen it all," he said. "You really need support from the family and mentorship from fellow Soldiers along the way to last that long."

Hammon spent four years and six months as an enlisted Soldier, 12 years, six months as a commissioned officer and 25 years, three months as a warrant officer.

Hammon has reached the pinnacle in the career of a warrant officer in the Illinois National Guard, but said serving in the Illinois National Guard has taught him is to have more compassion.

"We have it pretty good in the United States despite our problems," Hammon said. "I've witnessed suffering outside of



Then-Pvt. David Hammon during Basic Military Training in 1980.

our borders, but serving in the military has created the opportunities to see how people in other countries live."

Hammon said his career would not have been possible without the support of his wife, Michelle, an Army veteran herself.

"I couldn't do my job without Michelle's support," Hammon said. "Marriage is a team effort and there are things I couldn't accomplish without her help and support. She possesses the uncanny ability to handle

every emergency imaginable, and to delicately balance all the obstacles that life and the Army throw at her."

Stevens agreed.

"Michelle has always been supportive of both Dave's career and the Illinois National Guard," he said.

Sgt. 1st Class Keith Michels, of Wheeler, 108th Sustainment Brigade, who serves as the aviation life support technician for the Decatur flight facility said any time he talked

with Hammon, they always had a great conversation.

"Anytime I talked with him, even if it's just a helmet issue, he was always so personable," Michels said. "Those conversations are so valuable. He is a world of knowledge."

As the aviation life support technician, Michels inspects Hammon's flight gear every six months per the National Guard Bureau's arms inspection regulation. That biannual inspection allowed Hammon to complete his final flight in his original

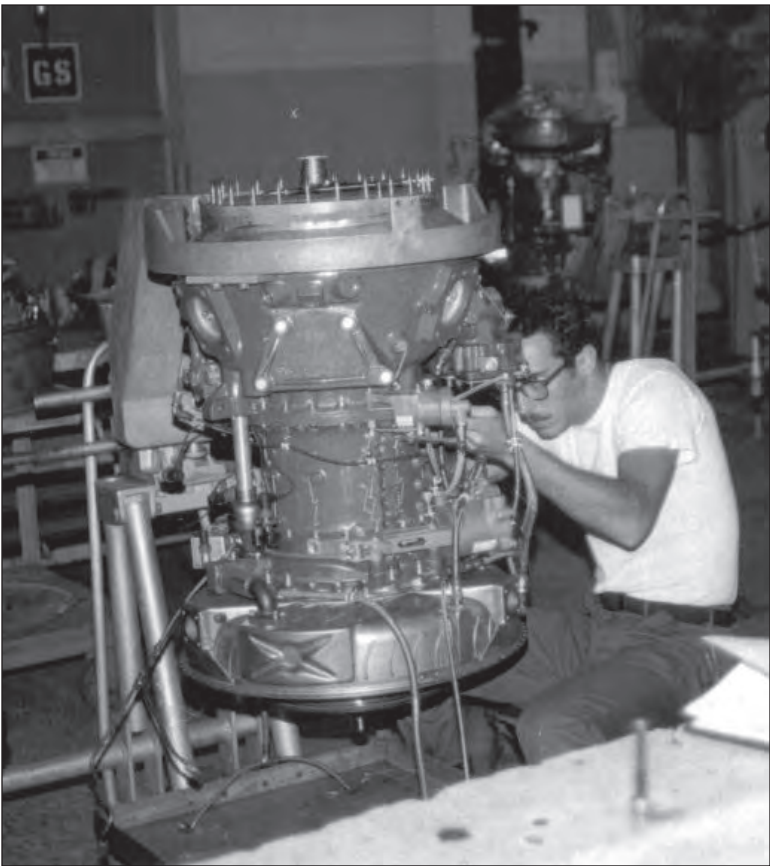
gear.

"The flight gear he was issued when he became a warrant officer is the flight gear he wore during his final flight," he said. "I'm sure that meant a lot to him to be able to do so."

As Hammon reflects on his 42 years of military service, his immediate future plans are to just step back and relax a little, but most of all he wants to thank

everyone overall. He said it took a lot of people to get him to this level, and he is truly grateful for the support from everyone over the years.

"I'm leaving my options wide open," he said. "I have no immediate plans. I'll take a knee for a minute and let things settle down. Whatever the future holds for me, I do know I will figure out a way to continue serving."



Chief Warrant Officer (5) David Hammon rebuilds a turbine aircraft engine at the Corpus Christi Texas Army Depot during his Illinois Army National Guard unit's annual training in the 1980s. Hammon retired April 30 after serving more than 42 years in the Illinois Army National Guard.

Kincaid man retires from Army after 32 years of military service

By Sgt. Trenton Fouche
Illinois National Guard
Public Affairs Office

Growing up in the small town of Kincaid, Illinois, Anthony Mollusky Jr., of Elkhorn, Wisconsin, a member of LaFore Lock Post 755, Springfield, didn't have a lot of options.

With only about 1,500 people, the former mining town had hit rough times. Jobs were drying up and the young man was uncertain about his future. So, he joined the Army.

It was the beginning of a 32-year journey that would take him across the world and then back to Kincaid. April 3, during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, he retired with the highest rank an enlisted Soldier can achieve, command sergeant major.

Command Sgt. Maj. Mollusky's last assignment was as the Command Sergeant Major of the 108th Special Troops Battalion based in Chicago. Now an information technology expert in the civilian world, Mollusky recalled what it was like as a young man trying to find himself.

"I didn't really know what I could do by staying in the area and was unsure if college was for me," said Mollusky. "I didn't have a lot of information about finances or student loans, but I figured if I ever did decide to attend college, the Army would eventually pay for it."

Mollusky enlisted into the active Army, serving seven years as a quartermaster and chemical equipment repairer. As the years progressed, he began to desire a change, informing his chain of command that he wanted to work with computers full time. Unable to change his military occupation specialty, he would transition to the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998, where

he joined the same unit that his father, Anthony Mollusky Sr., had once served.

"I was about to get out of the Army because I wanted to do something different," Mollusky said. "I wanted to work on computers and felt that's where my career was heading. It wasn't until I was doing my out-processing that they brought up the possibility of me going into the National Guard. That's how I ended up in the 3637th Maintenance Company, the same unit that my dad had once served in." But the elder Mollusky didn't often discuss his military service. "So I didn't learn a lot of stuff until after he passed away."

For example, while Mollusky's father was assigned to what was then called the 3637th Ordnance Company, he would be activated on Oct. 10, 1961 in response to the Berlin Crisis of 1961, sending him to Fort Knox.

Anthony Mollusky Sr. had some personal struggles and would pass away from a heart attack a few months after Mollusky returned to Illinois to transition to the National Guard, leaving behind a lot of unanswered questions.

"During our talks, the Guard never really came up," Mollusky said. "After he got out of the National Guard, he got a job as a welder, until he was laid off. I think my siblings and I realized that we just had to go out and work hard. I have two older sisters and growing up we all had paper routes. ... We knew that we needed to go out and make things happen to be self-sufficient."

Serving in the Army would allow Mollusky to meet his wife, Michelle, someone he credits with being a tremendous supporter since day one.

"I met her at Fort Riley, Kansas in 1992 and in 1994 we were married," said Mollusky.



Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Mollusky makes his remarks during his retirement ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, IL April 3, 2022. Mollusky is a native of Kincaid, Illinois. He entered the U.S. Army in 1990, before eventually transitioning to the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998. (U.S. Army photo by Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Trenton Fouche)

"She's been supportive through everything. Through my deployments and annual trainings, there are times where she's handled things by herself."

Mollusky deployed to Iraq from 2007-2008 while assigned to the 3637th Maintenance Company. During that time, Michelle would carry a lot more of the responsibilities of raising their children.

"I grew up a military brat, my father retired as a Chief Warrant Officer (3) so a lot of it was normal for me," said Michelle, his wife. "The biggest advice I can give is to communicate, even about the little things. It's been a journey and we've both grown through it."

Mollusky would also deploy to Kuwait in 1991, before meeting his wife.

As a family man and leader in the National Guard, Mollusky isn't necessarily the strict, stern Command Sergeant Major that

people often associate with the rank. Being a father with three children has helped teach him to be patient.

"I tell my kids that things take time," said Mollusky. "My oldest son is 28 and he works for the Department of Labor. I tell him to be patient and you will be able to move up and excel. My oldest daughter is 23 and has special needs, so I have my wife to support me in helping her. I also have a 19-year old son, who is still trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. Things just take time."

Although Mollusky will now have an opportunity to spend more time with his biological family, his National Guard family will miss his passion for his job and how much he cared for his Soldiers.

"I first met Command Sergeant Major Mollusky when I took command of the 108th Special Troops Battalion," said Lt. Col. Timothy Johnson. "His passion for Soldier care was clear. He welcomed me with open arms and we immediately became a team. With over 30 years of experience, he brought

a lot to the table as my Senior Enlisted Advisor. His long term relationships with Soldiers and families in our units gave him unique insights that as a commander, I didn't have. His frank and candid approach when discussing our Soldiers was invaluable. The thing I'll miss the most about him is his laugh and storytelling. Every drill, trip, and training event was filled with stories about his family and our Soldiers."

Despite retiring from the Army, Mollusky's values as a Soldier will continue to carry-over to his everyday life, even though he will no longer wear the uniform.

"I would encapsulate the Army values as simply doing the right thing," said Mollusky. "As a leader, making sure that you're looking out for your peers and subordinates. It's so much more than making sure that Soldiers are in the right uniform for a formation. What I'll always take away most from being with the STB is being around good people. I'll remember the great Soldiers and the great job they do."



Blazing a Trail for Women Veterans

Chatham-Auburn Memorial Post 4763, Chatham, is blazing a trail for women veterans, although not an intentional one. The post held its election April 18 for the 2022-2023 term resulting in the election of three women veterans tapped to serve in its top leadership positions. Kimberly Fuiten, Jeanie Howard and Stephanie Wells were elected Commander, Senior Vice Commander and Junior Vice Commander respectively. Post members acknowledged this could be a first for Illinois, but most definitely in District 10 and Post 4763. On hand to conduct the installation was Past District 10 Commander, Michelle Ramlow, the first woman to be elected as the District 10 commander.



Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Mollusky Jr., Command Sergeant Major of the 108th Special Troops Battalion in Chicago and his wife, Michelle, speak to family and friends after his retirement ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, IL April 6, 2022. Mollusky is a native of Kincaid, Illinois. He entered the U.S. Army in 1990, before eventually transitioning to the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998. (U.S. Army photo by Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Trenton Fouche)

Post 9284 member retires after nearly 33 years of military service

Sgt. Maj. David Owsley of Forsyth, Illinois, a member of Elk Grove Village Post 9284, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after nearly 33 years of military service during a ceremony, April 1, at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Owsley, the Plans, Operations and Training sergeant major, Joint Force Headquarters, Springfield, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in December 1989, serving as a traditional National Guardsman for 10 years and as an EMT-Paramedic in the Chicagoland area before entering the Active Guard and Reserve program in 2000.

“I have enjoyed being in a company level unit, teaching young Soldiers to be tactically and technically proficient, doing things young noncommissioned officers are supposed to do,” Owsley told family and friends. “I have enjoyed every minute of being an Infantryman.”

Owsley has served in a variety of AGR positions in the past two decades of military service, including serving as the Operations sergeant major for the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team prior to his current assignment.

Throughout his career, Owsley has participated in rotational training at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany and the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

He has conducted interoperability training with the Turkish Land Forces at Vincenza, Italy and the Polish Land Forces in Poznan, Poland and traveled to Honduras, Singapore and Ukraine in support of theater security cooperation exercises.

In addition, Owsley participated in division level warfighter

exercises at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, plus brigade level warfighter exercises and combat training capability exercises.

Owsley deployed to both Germany and Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“I was humbled to be asked by Sergeant Major Owsley to be the officiant at his retirement ceremony,” said Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, of Naperville, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “To give 32 plus years of your life to an organization speaks volumes of the individual and the family.”

Boyd thanked Owsley’s family for the sacrifices made in support of his career.

“Thank you to the family,” Boyd said. “Without your support, we couldn’t get 33 years of service out of our Soldiers.”

Boyd commended Owsley on his 32 years in the Illinois National Guard.

“Part of that 32 years is shaping the next generation. The true testament of a leader, whether you’re an officer or a noncommissioned officer, is how well you leave that position, how well prepared you have left that position, how well you teach and mentor your replacement because at the end of the day we will all hang up this uniform,” he said. “Thank you for 32 years of service and pride and for building a foundation in this organization that will take us into the years to come.”

Col. Eric Davis, Director of Operations, Plans and Training, Illinois Army National Guard, lauded Owsley’s technical and tactical proficiencies, and his ability to mentor and lead Soldiers.

“I’ve had the opportunity to serve with you throughout the years,” Davis said. “It is phenomenal to watch as you build and develop young Soldiers.”

Davis said leaders mold the technical and tactical proficiencies and mentorship together and provide a vision to subordinates and Soldiers around them and help Soldiers get to success.

“Leaders get them to success and it makes you successful, and in turn, makes the organization successful,” he said.

Davis also thanked Owsley’s family.

“I know I took him away from you to go to a lot of different places,” Davis said. “I appreciate you allowing him to be a Soldier. But now, the Army is no longer a competitor. It’s your time, don’t let him off the hook.”

Owsley also thanked his family for the sacrifices they have made throughout his career.

“Christy, you came along late in my career. You agreed to the Army when we married,” he said to his wife. “You have spent plenty of nights alone at home



Sgt. Maj. David Owsley speaks to those in attendance during his retirement ceremony April 1 at the Illinois Military Academy in Springfield, Illinois. Owsley retired after nearly 33 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard.

while I was off being a Soldier. You helped me through when I needed it most.”

Owsley shared a message with his three children, Aiden, Vivian and Elliott.



Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd presents Sgt. Maj. David Owsley with the Legion of Merit during Owsley’s retirement ceremony April 1. Owsley retired after nearly 33 years in the Illinois Army National Guard.

“Life has been hardest on you guys, but I’m looking forward to having lots more time together,” he said. “I look forward to seeing what amazing young adults become. If you are fortunate enough to find a career you are passionate about, I say pursue it with your time and talent and if it doesn’t love you back, give it 32 years.”

Owsley offered advice to the Soldiers and noncommissioned officers of the Illinois National Guard.

“Be a barrel-chested, red-blooded American freedom fighter,” he said. “Be competitive with each other. Know your warrior tasks and drills. They’re important. They are the cornerstone of our success in anything we do and it is why the NCO Corps is the backbone of the Army. Teaching those tasks to Soldiers will make them competent and able to survive fighting on the battlefield today.”

Candidates seeking offices at 103rd State Convention

(as reported to State Headquarters)

Elect
Bobby Edwards
State Commander

Re-elect
Joe Bartley
State Quartermaster

Re-elect
Eugene Blackwell
State Surgeon

Elect
Brett Nila
State Senior Vice Commander

Re-elect
Jayson Hoffman
State Judge Advocate

Elect
Maurice Bridges
State Junior Vice Commander

Elect
Gary Holmes
State Chaplain

This list is not inclusive of all who may seek elected offices at the State Convention. Nominations for elected office will be opened Friday, June 10 during the afternoon business session.

Nominations will be reopened and elections will be held during the business session, Saturday, June 11. Any member in good standing is eligible to seek office.



Illinois Army National Guard Honor Team members, Sgt. 1st Class James Yeakey and Staff Sgt. Trevor Cordery, pictured above, left, present arms during the Illinois House of Representatives Memorial Service. Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, The Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard participated in a wreath laying ceremony at the State Capitol building in Springfield April 6, paying



homage to the Illinois service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Pictured above, right, Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General for the Illinois National Guard, and member at large in the Illinois VFW, looks on as the Illinois Army National Guard Honor Team march down the aisle during the ceremony. (Photos by Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Trenton Fouché)

St. Juvin Post 1336 honors Coal City Middle School students

At the March 2 meeting of the Coal City Community Unit District#1 Board St. Juvin Post 1336 Veterans of Foreign Wars recognized the finalists in this year's Patriot Pen essay contest. Patriots Pen is a national contest sponsored by the VFW asking Middle School students to compose a 300 to 400 word essay on a subject chosen by the National Commander. This year's theme was "How Can I Be A Good American". Entries are judged at each Post then at the District level, the State level and finally the National level. Each Post can submit one entry to the District judging for each fifteen submitted. Contestants cannot identify themselves within their essay to include, but not limited to, their name, school, city, state, race, or national origin. Besides local recognition and awards there are over \$55,000 in scholarship awards available to participants.

While Patriot's Pen is a VFW program, without the cooperation of the Coal City District's Board, Superintendent Dr. Kent Bugg, and especially the Post's point man Social Studies teacher and Army veteran Jim Hitchcock and teachers Mrs. Jackie Larson, Mrs. Kate Cade, Mrs. Michelle Sobieck, our program would not be successful. All 151 participating students were given a US Flag pen in appreciation for their participation. The 10 finalists were invited to a pizza party held at Stone City VFW Post in Joliet. Middle School student Livia Sulzberger placed 3rd in the District out of 429 entries VFW District 18 presented her with a certificate and a \$25 award. All 10 of St. Juvin's finalists received a certificate and a power pack to charge their electronic devices. Livia also received a \$50 award and a personalized medal for her achievement.



Middle School student Livia Sulzberger placed 3rd in the District out of 429 entries VFW District 18 presented her with a certificate and a \$25 award.



All 10 of St. Juvin's finalists received a certificate and a power pack to charge their electronic devices.

HIGHWAY

Continued from Page 4

Oregon initiated the effort and states have followed as the Medal of Honor flag has been transported from state to state. Other veteran partners include the VFW, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Military Officers Association of America, and state coalitions of veterans' groups. Events commemorating the designations will be planned and announced throughout the year. The Illinois Department of Transportation will begin erecting the Medal of Honor Highway signs across the state.

Remembering the Fallen

Highway 146 from Anna to Vienna to be named in honor of Brian Romines

The Illinois State Legislature has adopted Joint Resolution 42, designating the section of Route 146 between Anna and Vienna, Illinois as the "Sergeant Brian Romines Memorial Highway". The highway will be named in honor of Sgt. Brian Romines, who served with the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment based in Milan. Brian was killed in action on June 6, 2005, when an improvised explosive device detonated near the vehicle he was travelling in near Baghdad, Iraq. Romines was born to Clyde Randall and Melinda Clary Romines on October 26, 1984 and was a graduate of Anna Jr. High School and Vienna High School. He was a member of Baker Ladd Post 1567 in Herrin, when he was Killed In Action.

Area student in art contest receives \$1,000

Check presented to Erica Zirkelbach of Mount Vernon

By Devon Jones
Sentinel News Staff

Erica Zirkelbach of Mount Vernon entered an art piece into a scholarship competition at the VFW Post 2055 Auxiliary in Centralia. After she made it to regionals in the Young American Creative Patriotic Contest, the VFW presented Zirkelbach with a surprise check for \$1,000 toward her education. According to Zirkelbach, the contest seemed like a good opportunity after applying for the St. Louis Holocaust drawing contest through school. Cindy Zirkelbach, the 15-year-old's mother, shared the artwork, centered on the Holocaust, on Facebook to other friends and family in the VFW, and they recommended the patriotic art contest. Missy Shaw, the Centralia VFW Auxiliary's secretary, said Erica Zirkelbach had to submit an essay with the sketch she made, that of a family being separated next to a letter. Cindy Zirkelbach said the representation of a letter has the names of Cindy's father, Stanley Merda, who was captured in the Battle of the Bulge, and one of Erica's great uncles, Charlie Grothoff, who was also a World War II veteran. According to Erica Zirkelbach, both of her father's uncles served, and Cindy Zirkelbach's grandfather served in the military as well. Cindy Zirkelbach said her cousin, Benjamin Cash, died as a result of a training accident in Fort Campbell in Kentucky. "At first, I wanted to honor the people in my family who had served. And while I was working on it, I was focused on that, but I wanted it to be special," Erica Zirkelbach said. Zirkelbach said that the piece took about two months overall to complete, and she is glad the contest offers a chance to showcase patriotism and talents and raise awareness for the VFW. Zirkelbach does not know if she will win first place's \$15,000 prize, but she would like one of the prizes, starting at \$500 for seventh place, to go toward her orthodontist schooling. Zirkelbach said she wants to go to Duke University. Those advancing to the national ranks will be announced by July. There are more than 4,000 applicants nationally each year, according to the VFW Auxiliary.



Karl Winter, right, President of the Centralia Post 2055 Auxiliary, presents a surprise contribution of \$1,000 to Erica Zirkelbach at the Post 2055.



VFW Auxiliary

Auxiliary President



Rhonda Borkgren

It has been a great year! I have had the pleasure of meeting many VFW members. It's been great working with the three

Post, starting new auxiliaries.

Congratulations to Carlinville, Chatham, and Springfield 755. I hope every auxiliary works with our Posts and we operate as one big happy family.

The above Posts wanted to start Auxiliaries before COVID shut everything down, and they continued to work on it this year after we were finally opened back up! Thank you so much for all your hard work. We will continue to help those Auxiliaries grow and learn the bylaws and traditions of the VFW Auxiliary!

To the Posts that still want to open new Auxiliaries, we will continue to get them opened! Thank you for working with my

team and I.

Congratulations to all the Posts and Auxiliaries on a great year. I hope you win many awards at Convention. Everyone has done a great job of rebuilding after the COVID shutdown. We still have a longways to go. Please continue to ask your friends and family to join us in our work for Veterans. Everyone has been respectful and kind to me. Those are the things that we all need, to make our Organization grow.

My greatest accomplishments this year have been working with unhealthy Auxiliaries and saving them. We have helped breath fresh life into dying

auxiliaries.

When a Post and Auxiliary won't work together because of personality conflicts, it seems to be a kiss of death. We have helped try to get Commanders and President's talking and working together for the same goals. We all joined this organization for the same reasons, to help Veterans. We are the family of members of the VFW. We need to remember that. We don't exist without the VFW.

As of the time I am writing this we need about 35 members to be 100 percent. The Department of Illinois hasn't been 100 percent since the year men could join the Auxiliary. I have every

confidence that we will be 100 percent this year!

We have the Dynamic Duo of Danielle Krull and Sarah Higginbotham to thank for their ways of making membership fun! Thank you, ladies, for a job well done! You have so much to be proud of!! Congratulations to all the Auxiliaries who are 100% in membership. Its everyone working together that made this possible! I feel that all of you have made my job easier. My goal this year was to leave this Department a little better than it was when I was installed. I think we might have done that.

Thanks to everyone of you, job well done!!

New VFW Auxiliary Installed at LaFore Lock Post 755 in Springfield



Department Auxiliary President Rhonda Borkgren (front right) congratulates LaFore Lock Post 755 on installing its new Auxiliary.

By Amy Watson
Senior Vice President
VFW Auxiliary Post #755

On Sunday, April 10, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Auxiliary for VFW Lafore Lock Post #755 was instituted and Officers installed. VFW Auxiliary Chapters and their programs bring needed services, information and assistance to veterans, active-duty service members and their families, and their communities.

For more than 100 years, the VFW Auxiliary has continued to support Veterans of Foreign Wars, serving veterans, service members and their families, and spreading patriotism nationwide. As a newly installed VFW Auxiliary, this group will work to provide community outreach, youth activities and scholarships, and build membership of the VFW and VFW Auxiliary.

In addition to inducting over 30 members to the VFW Auxiliary, the election of officers was held. The following officers were elected:

- Lori Owens, President
- Amy Watson, Senior Vice President

- Stacie Cook, Junior Vice President
- Cheryl VanEtten, Secretary
- Dawn Harr, Treasurer
- Tess Rhodes, Conductress
- Elizabeth Hadley-Houser, Trustee
- Cathleen Carroll, Trustee
- Patricia Hollinshead, Trustee
- Carrie Mack, Guard
- Jeff Boyer, Patriotic Instructor

Congratulations on all the hard work of President Lori Owens, the newly elected officers, and all Auxiliary members who have worked to make this dream a reality.

Thank you to Department of Illinois VFW Auxiliary President, Rhonda Borkgren, for committing your time to this group's establishment.

We appreciate our sponsors and their dedication of time, product and services - Anheuser Busch, MJ Kellner, and Ready for Petty. Thank you to all the VFW members, family and friends who attended to help celebrate this joyous day!

Tentative Schedule 98 th Annual Department Convention VFW Auxiliary Department President – Rhonda Borkgren			
Thursday June 9, 2022		Saturday June 11, 2022	
9:00 AM	Council of Administration Meeting	7 AM/Noon	Registration of Delegates
Noon /3:00 PM	Registration of Delegates	8:00 AM	Presentation of Flags and Banners
3:30 PM	Council Cocktail Party Borkgren/ Spindler By Invitation only		Report of Officers' Reports Report of Chairmen's Reports Presentation of Dept Chairmen Veterans & Family Support Awards Americanism Awards Auxiliary Community Service Awards Chief of Staff/Mentoring Awards Presentation of Auxiliary Presidents Historian's Awards Legislative Awards Scholarships Awards Youth Activities Awards Presentation of Dept Hospital Chairman VAWS Representatives/Deputies
6:00 PM	Joint Memorial Service		Hospital Awards Presentation of 45 Year + Members Program Coordinator Report Visit to VFW
Friday June 10, 2022		12:00pm	LUNCH BREAK
8:00 AM/3 PM	Registration of Delegates		
8:00 AM	VFW & Ladies Aux Joint Opening		
12:30 PM	VFW Aux Opening Session Escort of Nat'l VFW Aux Representative		
	Presentation of National Officers and Nat'l Appointed Officers		
	Report of Convention Rules Committee		
	Presentation of Past Dept Presidents Presentation of Chief of Staff, District Presidents and Deputy Chiefs of Staff		
	2022 Membership Awards Presentation of District President of the Year	12:30 PM	Presentation of 2022-2023 Membership
	Greetings from Patriotic Organizations Graves Registration Report Memorial Service Resolutions		Presentation of Pages
	Registration & Credential Reports		Presentation of Dept. Floor Officers
			Final Credentials Report Nomination and Election of Officers Installation of 2022 – 2023 Officers 2022 – 2023 Council of Administration Meeting

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BURDENS

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Stone said he wrote ‘Bury These Burdens’ simply to unleash his sadness and anger in a way where no one would get hurt. However, when a high school friend and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldier died by suicide in January 2020, Stone knew it was time to act.

“I had the song started, but after Tyler Zellers passed away, I really focused my mentality on getting the message out,” Stone said. ‘I wanted others to know that it’s okay to talk about your feelings. For me, it helped talking about what I was going through. You can’t hold it in. I want others to know they’re not alone. You can talk about it. There are many others going through similar struggles just like you.’”

Zellers’ sister, Chrissy (Zellers) Arvin of Hutsonville, Illinois, said she doesn’t want to see others endure what they’ve gone through as a family.

“Because of what happened, so many people have opened up about things,” Arvin said. “If it changes one mind not to make the final decision Tyler did, then it’s absolutely worth it. Tyler didn’t die in battle, but he lost his life for this country.”

Stone’s biggest advice to people struggling with depression and thoughts of suicide is to find something you love and you’re passionate about and surround yourself with positivity. Stone said embracing his passion for music helped save his life and now he wants to help others with similar struggles.

“If you’re going through depression or dealing with alcoholism and don’t think life is worth it anymore, start hanging out with people who give you positive verification you are good person,” Stone said. “You’re on this Earth for a reason; you just haven’t found your purpose in life yet. Surround yourself by people you admire and find an escape from reality.”

Suicide rates in the military community are at an all-time high since record-keeping began after 9/11 and those rates have been increasing over the last five years at a steady pace.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports there are an average of 20 Veteran suicides per day, and suicide among Veterans account for approximately 14 percent of all suicides in the U.S. every year.

The Illinois National Guard has taken a strong proactive approach to Veteran suicide, hoping someday there will be zero suicides in the force. Part of the prevention effort is training Soldiers on what to look for and how to help someone who may be contemplating suicide.

“Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) equips the Soldier with the ability to identify risk factors and intervene in a suicide situation,” said Erica Metzger, Illinois Army National Guard Risk Reduction Coordinator.

The Illinois Army National Guard has 370 Soldiers (four percent of the overall force) trained to intervene if someone shows signs of suicide.

In addition to ASIST, Illinois Army National Guard leaders can enroll in an 8-hour ‘Ask, Care, Escort (ACE) Suicide Intervention Course.’

Thirty-five Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers have taken their own life since 2003. However, those numbers have decreased over the last few years. In 2019, four Soldiers died by suicide. Since 2019, four Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers have died due to self-inflicted wounds.

While it may be difficult to find positives in life when you’re coping with depression, Stone encourages others to find outlets to channel their emotions so those feelings aren’t bottled up inside.

“Music is my escape, but it’s



Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class David Allen Stone performs ‘Bury These Burdens’ prior to kick-off of the Southern Illinois University Military Appreciation football game against Missouri State University Nov. 6, 2021. Stone, a member of Crawford County VFW Post 4549, Robinson, Illinois, wrote and recorded the song to help anyone coping with mental illness and thoughts of suicide.

also a way to put your emotions into something,” Stone said. “If I’m angry, my music will reflect that. If I’m sad, the song I’m writing will reflect those feelings.”

Stone said he was sad and depressed when he wrote ‘Bury These Burdens.’

“I just wanted to help,” Stone recalls. “With that mentality, I wrote a song that can help others if they listen to the message. I want others to know they’re not alone. There’s always someone there for you. You just have to reach out and talk. That is the key behind the song. Don’t hold it in anymore. Talking to others helps you understand there are other people struggling in similar ways.”

Arvin doesn’t understand why we think it’s taboo to talk about suicide.

“Our brains are just as important as everything else,” Arvin said. “If we’re sick, we go to the doctor to get medicine. We don’t think twice about it. We need to start treating ourselves the same way and learn what to look for in others.”

Frances Hill of Robinson,

Illinois, Stones’s mother, hopes this song will give others comfort knowing it’s okay to talk about your feelings.

“It has a very important message,” Hill said. “Don’t be afraid to reach out to others. There’s always someone who will listen. If you need to talk, David is the type of person who will be right there. Even if you’re miles away, he will get in his car and come talk to you. He has been there and he knows how important it is to talk through your feelings.”

Stone and his wife Brittany have been married since September 2010. Together, they have two young boys, 10-year-old Draven and 8-year-old Bayne. Brittany says she has witnessed the ups and downs during their marriage and believes in the message of this song.

“I think everybody needs something where they can take a break from life and do something they love,” Brittany said. “David is able to use music to escape from reality and the stress of life. I think it’s important for people to find something that makes them happy, some-

thing that helps them escape from reality for a little bit.”

Stone hopes his battles with depression will help show others there isn’t a negative stigma with mental health. Admitting you are struggling is the biggest step to recovery.

“We’re Soldiers. We don’t talk about our feelings,” Stone said. “Talking about your feelings doesn’t mean you’re weak. It doesn’t mean you are less of a man. It just means you are strong enough to know you need help. That is important for everyone to understand, not just those serving in the military.”

Stone has performed at a handful of places since the song was released on Veterans Day 2021.

Once the pandemic subsides, Stone is hoping he is able to be more active in suicide prevention, especially in the Veteran community.

“I don’t care if this song hits five million people,” Stone said. “If it affects just one person in a positive way, the song is a success. If this song can help just one person from taking their life, then I’m happy.”

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Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class David Allen Stone, a member of Crawford County VFW Post 4549 in Robinson, wrote and recorded the song ‘Bury These Burdens’ to help anyone coping with depression and thoughts of suicide.

CONVENTION

From Page 1

Outstanding Unit Award with valor, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Southwest Asia Service Medal with three campaign stars, and numerous other awards and decorations.

He joined the VFW in 1991 at VFW Post 3034 in Sumter, South Carolina, and became a Post Commander at VFW Post 4542 in Spring Lake, North Carolina. He now maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership at VFW Post 3219 in Phoebus, Virginia.

Hal has served in elected and appointed positions at the Post, District and Department levels, culminating with his election as VFW Department of Virginia Commander from 2008-2009. On the national level, he has served on the Council of Administration from 2010-2012 and as the Inspector General from 2016-2017.

He is currently a financial advisor with First Command Financial Planning. He received his Associate of Arts in avionics system technology from the Community College of the Air Force.

Hal is a Life member of Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, American Legion, Military Order of the Cootie, and the VFW National Home for Children.

He has one daughter and son-in-law; Sara and Jason Tricker, and two grandsons, Max and Owen. Hal, and his bride, Beth reside in Hampton, Virginia.

Sandi is a life member of Yingling-Ridgely Auxiliary 7472 in Ellicott City, she joined on the eligibility of her father, a World War II and Korean War U.S. Army veteran.

She has served the organization in several capacities, including as Auxiliary and District President, and as Department President, for which she earned

Outstanding President of the Year in her membership group in 1996-1997.

On the National level, she served as National President in 2018-2019, and as National District Council Member, Eastern Conference Chairman for the Americanism and Membership programs, and National Director for the Cancer Aid & Research, Hospital and “Buddy”® Poppy programs. She has also been National Patriotic Instructor.

Sandi is a Life Member of the VFW National Home for Children and a member of the Military Order of the Cooties Auxiliary (MOCA).

In her spare time, Sandi enjoys collecting thimbles and cameo broaches, watching old movies and spending time with her family: husband Paul, three grown children (including a son who is a 100-percent disabled veteran who served in Desert Storm), seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.