

SUPPORTER QUARTERLY

AN UPDATE FOR PATRIOTIC SUPPORTERS ★ FEBRUARY 2020

Veteran Can Hear Family Conversations Thanks to the VFW

VFW Advocate Helps Veteran Ensure a Better Life

Guy E. Wassather, 66, of Minneapolis, Minnesota joined the United States Navy in 1971 to serve his country. He was discharged in 1978. More than four decades later, he still feels the effects of his seven years of service.

Second Class Petty Officer Wassather worked as an Aviation Storekeeper. His first tour was aboard the USS John F. Kennedy. His second enlistment was at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.

Wassather was stationed on an aircraft carrier for four years. He worked receiving supplies on the flight deck. Each day, he was in earshot of landing and departing aircrafts. The noises caused permanent hearing loss and left him with constant ringing in his ears.

A proud father of four, Wassather struggles at times to communicate with his children and wife, especially in loud settings. “My family has to repeat themselves constantly.” He continues, “I can’t hear them in restaurants and at other large gatherings.”

He was at a loss for what to do until a friend referred him to the VFW’s National Veterans Service (NVS). He was soon connected with VFW



Guy Wassather

representative Robyn Kuznik. She worked quickly to help him navigate the claims process to receive medical treatment.

“I could not have done it without Robyn,” said Wassather. “There was a mountain of paperwork. It would have taken me hours to complete myself.”

After his first test, Wassather received a VA disability rating of 10%. Based on his results, the VA will provide Wassather with hearing aids at no cost.

According to Wassather, NVS representatives like Kuznik help veterans “dot all the ‘i’s’ and cross all the ‘t’s.’” They do this so veterans receive important medical care quickly and without hassle. ★

FIGHTING FOR VETERANS

Around the world, the VFW is reaching out to America’s heroes – during long, dangerous deployments, during the often difficult transition back to civilian life and always in the years that follow. The VFW supports our veterans and service members with programs that make a real difference ... educational resources and support ... financial assistance during hard times ... help navigating the VA system. These programs are available at no charge to veterans and their families, thanks to the generosity of members of the VFW, VFW Auxiliary and millions of patriotic supporters.



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Thank You for Your Support

We realize that much of our work would not be possible without your generous and dedicated support, and we would like to let you know how much we recognize and appreciate your continuing contributions.

VFW Helps Single Dad Avoid 'Rough Road'

For Jamie Biddix, 40, of North Carolina, a military career just made sense. His father, a veteran who served in Korea and Vietnam, was his hero. G.I. Joe and drawing helicopters filled his childhood. By the time he reached high school, he was working on diesel engines. Biddix saw the Army as an ideal career choice and enlisted, ready to take on training, education and life experiences while living his dream of being a soldier.

Biddix trained at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Fort Knox, Kentucky, as an M1 Abrams Tank System Maintainer. He was stationed in Germany and deployed to the Balkans with the 1st Armored Division. But the hope of a career in the Army was cut short – he was honorably discharged after three years and diagnosed with PTS and tinnitus.

Civilian life hasn't been easy for Biddix. He's ended up as a single father with two teenage daughters and had to leave a well-paying job due to service-connected health issues. As bills piled

up, he didn't know what to do. A hospital bill not fully covered by the VA was his breaking point.

"I was financially strapped, and I honestly wasn't sure how I could pay that bill on top of all the other things. Single fathers work their tails off to make stuff happen and I was looking at a rough road of uncertainty," said Biddix.

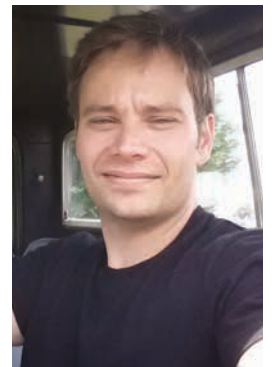
Biddix happened to hear about the VFW Unmet Needs program through a Facebook group for veterans. He decided to apply but didn't think he would get help.

"The criteria was quite specific and I assumed it was a lottery situation. To my surprise, I was called and notified that it was being looked at and they would be in contact with me soon. Two days later, I received an email that it was approved, and someone would be calling," Biddix said.

Biddix is very grateful for the help. Not only for paying a hospital bill but because he felt people truly cared and

wanted to make his situation better. He hopes more people will give to Unmet Needs so more veterans can get help like he did.

"Thank you to every person for sticking to their word, for being fast and helping handle something that I couldn't," said Biddix. "The VFW asks for very little, but it is these types of organizations that fill the gap between government RESPONSIBILITY and veteran ABILITY. It isn't a handout. Sometimes veterans don't know where to look for help or have too much pride. The VFW treated me like a person and let me know my situation mattered. All veterans matter." ★



Jamie Biddix

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Letters from the Heart

Every day, the VFW receives heartfelt letters of gratitude from America's heroes.

I really appreciate everyone involved in spreading this joy. It will be a warmer winter now, thanks to your assistance with our unmet needs.

Thank you so much! My wife and I appreciate the assistance more than words can express. You have greatly reduced the amount of stress in our lives.

Thank you and your organization for helping me during a hardship time in my life. I am very grateful. God works through people and I'm a firm believer that when I had no hope, God put you and your organization in my life. Again, I'm very grateful for the help I received.

To see the smile on my youngest son's face when I told him he could put all of his toys back into his room and that we didn't have to move. There are no words or any amount of money that could be worth more than that feeling he and I both felt at that moment. It brought me to tears, not of sadness or remorse, but of an irreplaceable feeling of joy. Please send me the information to where I could donate to the organization to help other veterans like myself, when I am able. To you and your colleagues, if any of you ever have a bad day or feel like you may not be able to help someone, please remember my family and the happiness you were able to provide for us. Thanks so much.

Issue Spotlight: VFW-Led Effort to End Half-Century Old Widow's Tax

More than 65,000 surviving military spouses and dependents are unjustly penalized because their loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

The Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) is purchased through Department of Defense by military retirees to ensure their surviving loved ones can maintain a modest standard of living. When service members or veterans die from injuries or illnesses related to their military service, survivors are eligible for VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Despite the two payments being paid for two different reasons from two different federal departments, all monthly SBP retirement payments are reduced by \$1,319 — the current payout for DIC benefits.

In May of 2019, the VFW convened a roundtable with other veterans' service organizations, staffers from Congressional Offices and widows to create a strategy to finally eliminate the penalty.

"The strategy from the May meeting has resulted in unprecedented progress on the issue," explained Kyle Kalman, Associate Director, National Legislative Service.

The VFW pressed Congress to include provision in the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA) that would eliminate the widow's tax. At press time, the NDAA had not received a vote, but was expected to pass. If so, it would bring closure to a nearly half a century long fight. ★



"We should not be debating in 2019 whether or not the use of Agent Orange more than 50 years ago was harmful for our veterans. We know it was and so does VA. We worry that this same scenario is already playing out for today's veterans exposed to open air burn pits and other toxins on the modern battlefield. Congress should take up legislation to establish a process for granting care and benefits for verifiable toxic exposures, and the VFW stands ready to work with this Subcommittee to make this a reality."

— Ryan Gallucci, Director, National Veterans Service, in testimony before the United States House of Representatives



"With more than 83,000 U.S. service members still unaccounted-for globally, Congress must support full mission funding and personnel staffing for DPAA, as well as its supporting agencies, such as the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory and the military service casualty offices. The fullest possible Accounting Mission remains a top priority for the VFW and we will not rest until we achieve all possible missing American military service members brought home."

— Vincent "B.J." Lawrence, Executive Director, VFW Washington Office, in testimony before the United States House of Representatives



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From the Adjutant General

We're incredibly grateful for patriots like you who know how important it is to care for our veterans. With your help, VFW service officers were responsible for the recovery of more than \$9 billion for veterans this past fiscal year according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Surpassing \$9 billion in benefits is a record for us – and it means hundreds of thousands of service members and military families are now getting benefits and services they need.

We're proud to say “No One



Kevin C. Jones,
Adjutant General

Does More For Veterans,” and we're thankful for your support which makes that possible. Our veterans and their families deserve nothing but the

best. With your generosity, we're fighting to ensure that's what they receive.

Every day, we help veterans file benefits and compensation claims with the VA through our global network of professional veterans' advocates. Our service officers are dedicated to staying on the front lines and they do all they can to get our heroes the benefits they've earned.

But there are still many more veterans who need our help. I'm glad we can count on you to make sure we can be there for them. We have a century of service on our side and we aren't backing down.

Thank you for all you do for America's veterans. ★

Veteran Buckles Down and Gets It Done with VFW Scholarship

Richard Bechtol, 28, of Coshocton, Ohio, is a third-generation service member. Growing up with a father who served in the Marines, he always saw the military as an option. Bechtol seriously considered joining ROTC out of high school but opted to play golf at a small school instead. The call of duty never left though, and he joined the Ohio Army National Guard while finishing his bachelor's degree.

Bechtol served for six years with the National Guard and completed a nine-month tour in Afghanistan doing air defense artillery work. He's now pursuing a Juris Doctorate at the University of Dayton School of Law and hopes to practice in the area of estate planning and probate work. He considers himself a numbers guy who enjoys the tax side and working with older adults and veterans.

At one time, Bechtol didn't think he would be able to attend law school because it's so expensive. He happened to be getting a haircut at Sport Clips one day and saw a flyer for the VFW “Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship” and applied. Bechtol was awarded funds that helped make law school possible and is extremely grateful for the scholarship. He hopes to repay the favor by giving back to the veteran community as a part of his law practice.

“I would like to say thank you to everyone who made this scholarship possible. Law school is very expensive, and I did not ever believe I would go because of the

financial obligation it is. However, between the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and this scholarship, it has truly made a dream become a reality,” said Bechtol.

“This scholarship has greatly reduced the financial burden and my student loan debt. This is going to give me a greater opportunity to help the veteran community in the future.”



Richard Bechtol

Bechtol also hopes more veterans are able to receive financial assistance to pursue an education and are motivated by stories like his to follow their dreams.

“You just need to buckle down and do what needs to be done,” Bechtol said. “Sometimes you may feel out of place because you are a little older than the traditional students, but that should never stop you from pursuing what you are passionate about.” ★

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