

SUPPORTER QUARTERLY

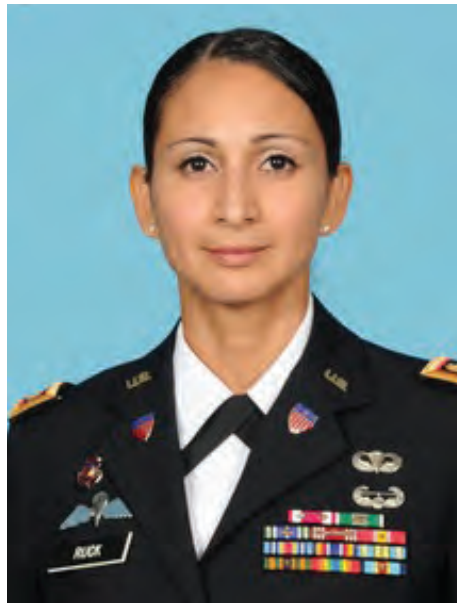
AN UPDATE FOR PATRIOTIC SUPPORTERS ★ JUNE 2019

Airborne Veteran Grateful for Help From VFW

Dina Ruck joined the Army in 1990, leaving the comfort of her hometown to pursue bigger dreams. Her military career took her around the world and to the skies many times as she jumped from planes for her airborne training. It's been thrilling, but tough on her physical health as well.

Ruck was stationed throughout the U.S., Germany, Kuwait and at the Pentagon. From the beginning she was inspired by the slogan to "be all that you can be" and although she enlisted as a Private, Ruck achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before retirement.

Now 48 and residing in Virginia, Ruck experiences persistent pain throughout her left ankle, knee, hip



Pictured above: Dina Ruck

Ruck had not heard of the VFW's Benefits Delivery at Discharge Program until she was in the office of the Fort Belvoir's Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program (SLF-TAP). There she picked up a brochure which had VFW Pre-Discharge Claims Representative Daniel Fletcher's contact information.

"I was excited to have a VFW representative located on my post and very grateful that Mr. Fletcher reviewed my medical record and did the claim," she said.

Prior to helping veterans receive

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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.

"I chose to be with the VFW due to their long, rich history and outstanding reputation."

—Daniel Fletcher

and shoulder as a result of learning how to do a parachute landing fall (PLF). She has to be deliberate about pastimes that used to be purely enjoyable.

"I run for fun, it cleanses me. But the last couple of years, the pain has gotten worse. Now if I run, I'm unable to go for walks with my family and my hip pain increases," Ruck describes.

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

VFW Supports Grieving Widow and Daughter

Katie Bouchard and 6-year-old daughter, Piper, are getting a little bit better every day.

Katie and veteran Keith Bouchard had been married for over a decade when he took his own life. A family in despair, with so many details to handle, have managed a lot in the past year. What seemed to be a sudden occurrence had a long, telling trail leading to the loss of their hero.

Iowa native, Keith Bouchard joined the Marines in 1988 at 17 years old with the permission of his mother. In his 10 years, he experienced the Gulf War, deployments to Panama and Okinawa and cold weather training in Norway. These trips were not without injury. Bouchard broke both legs during a helicopter jump performed in Panama.

Bouchard went on to join the United States Coast Guard after departing from the Marines. In addition to the Panama injury, he had to go through shoulder and back surgery. But, he truly loved the work he did in his 16 years with the Coast Guard before retiring in 2014.

“He was very good at what he did. He was in federal law enforcement and did search and rescue. He was very passionate about it. He loved being out on the water and serving the community,” Katie recalled.

Despite a career that meant so much to him, Bouchard started to lose himself. Gradually he lost interest in hobbies and activities that he used to

regularly enjoy.

“It was so hard to watch. I look through pictures and I can see him deteriorating; I see his mannerisms and expressions change,” Katie said.

He finally reached out for help, *but it was simply too late.*

Understandably, Katie had a difficult time keeping everything running while giving her all to making sure Piper would be okay. She needed support to get home to her parents, but with no life insurance and a lengthy paperwork process for benefits, Katie was stuck.

That’s when a friend told her about the VFW’s Unmet Needs grant. But Katie was so distressed she felt she was “not in a position” to apply for assistance. So, her friend helped her fill out the necessary online form. After the simple application process, Katie had the funds to cover moving expenses.

“It is so important for people who are in my situation. I was completely left hanging and didn’t know what to do or where to go. It is amazing to have the help, it means a whole lot. I couldn’t have moved home without it,” Katie said.

And moving home was just what she and Piper needed. Piper started at a brand new school and Katie says she is doing well. While nothing about their situation is easy, they are piecing together the best life possible.

Katie remains concerned for the mental health of veterans, and she

believes proactiveness is the answer. She urges service members to get in a program and attend to their psychological and emotional well-being as soon as they return home from deployment.

“Even if they think they don’t need the help, even if they think they’re okay. I’ve witnessed firsthand, by the time they get to a certain point, it is too late. Without help, it ruins



Pictured above: Katie and Piper Bouchard

relationships and affects children,” Katie concluded.

Veteran Keith Bouchard’s story is all too common for veterans across the United States. Tragically, an astounding 20 veterans commit suicide every day. There is help. The VFW is committed to changing the narrative and stigma surrounding mental health in America with the VFW Mental Wellness Campaign. Learn more at vfw.org. ★

Airborne Veteran Grateful for Help From VFW

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their deserved benefits, Fletcher was in the Marine Corps for 16 and a half years. Upon retirement he attempted to navigate his VA disability claim on his own, unaware there were trained advocates to assist him. Fletcher’s process did not go well, but he was inspired to make sure his fellow veterans wouldn’t have the same experience.

“When I found this position, I told myself I would do my best to ensure that what happened to me, would not happen to someone else. I chose to be with the VFW due to their long, rich history and outstanding reputation,” Fletcher said.

With his assistance, Ruck got through the VA process quickly and with less stress. She now has a 60%

combined service-connected rating and hopes others will lean on available VFW resources.

“There are so many services available to us as veterans; we are just not aware. Pick up all the brochures you see at your SFL-TAP office and read them all. Then, pass the info onto others,” Ruck advised. ★

Letters from the Heart

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

"I just want to take a moment to thank you and the rest of the people at the VFW and Sport Clips for being so generous and creating this scholarship for veterans like myself. It really helps knowing I still have people who support me and my academic success. So again, thank you."

"Before my retirement, I had the daunting task of submitting my disability claim to VA. I was put in touch with a VFW claims support person, and he was terrific. It was easy to set up an appointment, and he was extremely responsive to my inquiries, no matter if they were via email or phone call. They did not charge me anything for this service. It was extraordinary. I highly recommend the VFW for this service as well as any others they provide."

"I wish to express my sincere gratitude for all you stand for and do helping fellow veterans such as myself. I can't thank you enough for the assistance you provided me. Know that what your program provides is far more than financial assistance. It allows fellow veterans to be reminded we are never alone. Thank you so much."

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"The VFW truly thanks committee members and staff for their hard work to shape and pass the VFW-supported VA MISSION Act of 2018. Now it is time to focus on the implementation of this multifaceted law. VA, Congress and veterans organizations must work collaboratively to ensure it serves the intended purpose of improving the health care a grateful nation provides its veterans."

—Statement of B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief of the VFW, before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees. Lawrence provided the VFW's perspective on a wide range of issues affecting veterans in his testimony, which capped the 2019 VFW National Legislative Conference.



"Veterans with dependent children face diverse burdens with access to homelessness benefits. The VFW supports this legislation, which would ensure Grant and Per Diem providers are better able to provide much needed housing to homeless veterans with dependent children. The brave men and women who have worn our nation's uniform should never have to worry about whether their children will have a roof over their heads or food on the table."

—Statement of Patrick Murray, Deputy Director, National Legislative Service of the VFW, before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.



From the Adjutant General

Service members and their families make huge sacrifices for us. When a brave man or woman retires after decades of defending freedom, they should get the full pay and benefits they've earned. And when a hero gives their life, their family should have full support.

Tragically, this is not what all of our veterans and their families receive. But thanks to you, the VFW is on the front lines fighting for justice.

Right now, some retirees are required to offset pay with the amount of VA disability compensation they receive. Your support keeps us on Capitol Hill urging passage of H.R. 303 or S. 208, the "Retired Pay Restoration Act," which would enable disabled retirees to concurrently receive all of the pay and VA disability compensation they've earned.

Similarly, surviving spouses of retirees who die from a service-connected injury must endure offsets of Survivor Benefit Plan payments and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. With your help, we're advocating for H.R. 553 and S.622 which honor sacrifices made for our nation by removing the financial burdens often called the "Widow's Tax."

In both cases, the VFW believes the offsets are unjust. Those who've committed to a life of service should not be asked to make additional sacrifices. I'm grateful for patriotic friends like you who feel the same.

Thank you for all you do to make sure we can win this battle FOR VETERANS. ★

Veteran Seeks Federal Position With VFW Assistance

At 21-years-old, veteran Lexy Llewellyn has plenty of years to achieve her dreams. But this Maryland resident isn't wasting any time to begin her career in criminology. With the help of the VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" the road to graduation is a bit easier.

Before setting sights on school, Lexy felt a strong call to be part of an organization bigger than herself so she could become her best while helping her country. She joined the Army in August 2016 and deployed to Iraq for a year as a specialist. Now she is an ROTC cadet in the US Army Reserve and attends West Virginia University.

Eventually, Lexy desires a position with a "three letter agency" because she knows how important it is to her to serve her country once again, this time at a federal level.

**"I want to thank the people who made my scholarship possible. College is expensive, but it is also a vital piece to starting a successful future."
—Lexy Llewellyn**

While her motivation and work ethic have always been strong, the costs associated with school were intimidating. Lexy wanted to be set for success without having several loans that would take years to pay off. She began to search for answers online and found the VFW.

"I want to thank the people who made my scholarship possible. College is expensive, but it is also a vital piece to starting a successful



Pictured above: Lexy Llewellyn

future. Without the people who made this scholarship possible, who knows what I would have done when I returned home," Lexy stressed.

She is very grateful to have been given the comfort of being able to pursue her dreams with help and support from others. Currently, Lexy is not a member of the VFW but based on her positive experience with the scholarship program, she has intentions of joining after finishing her service in the military.

Lexy hopes her fellow veterans will turn to caring outside sources to reach their goals as well.

"There are ways through the military and private parties outside the military that will help and support your dreams the entire way. Do not give up on getting an education, where there's a will, there's a way!" ★

VISIT US ONLINE:



Kevin Jones,
Adjutant General