

# The Patriot Reader

## VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

CHAIRMAN BILL DUDLEY

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Newsletter Editor Michael Rothfeld

Volume 3, Issue 10

Newsletter Date: October, 2014

### Message from the Chairman



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*Fellow Veterans , For those who attended our Veterans Council meeting on Thursday, 25 September, you heard an excellent presentation by Howard McGillin and Charlotte Matthews on the status of our Veterans Treatment Court ( VTC ). Most of the preparation has been completed to activate the program in the January time frame. One of the key components of the VTC Program is having volunteer mentors who are prepared to spend time with those veterans who have been selected through the courts to participate in the VTC Program. We currently have two volunteers but can certainly use several more. There will be a screening process for each mentor; a DD214 is required to assure your veteran status, and a training program necessary to provide the guidelines to be followed as a mentor.*

*The Veterans Council is very excited that we are near the implementation date for this program. Providing another service for our deserving veterans, many who are suffering from PTSD and other issues, is of major importance to help these veterans get their life turned around. Many of these men and women just*

*need a second chance and not have a criminal conviction hanging over their head. That opportunity is there if they successfully complete the demanding VTC program which in most cases is 15-18 months duration with a stringent reporting and accountability to the courts. But there are many programs available through the VA and other sources to help them deal with their needs.*

*The Veterans Council Executive Committee has unanimously voted to support another Documentary and Video project. FVPPI in cooperation with the Veterans Council has just finished filming “Unleashing the Underdogs: The K9’s for Warriors Story”. The tentative plans are for a date in the March timeframe of next year. The plans are for showing the film at Anastasia Baptist Church as we have successfully done for the past two films. All of the films we have done to date have been extraordinarily well done, but I think this is one of the best we have done yet. It touches the lives of many our veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan and who have returned home suffering from PTSD*

*and other issues that have led to a huge rate of divorces and suicides by our veterans. The medical community has seen a significant improvement in many of these veterans who have entered the K9’s for Warriors programs. Although there is very little scientific proof, we do know it works as you will see and hear from these veterans.*

*Your Veterans Council along with the local MOAA chapter is making plans for our Veterans Day ceremony on Nov 11 at Francis Field in the downtown area. We have invited Brigadier General Craig Crenshaw, USMC, Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics ( Plans ) as our keynote speaker for this year’s ceremony.*

*Also, don’t forget to buy your wreath(s) for this year’s Wreaths Across America ceremony which will take place on Saturday, December 13 at our St. Augustine National Cemetery. Bill Dudley, Chairman Veterans Council of St. Johns County*



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# Clyde E. Lassen State Veterans Nursing Home

*Patriotism is our Motto*



Nease ROTC Cadets assisted with our POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony



Thank you to the Clay County Community Band for a wonderful September performance!



Belly Dancers entertained during the month of September



Nease ROTC Cadets assisted with our POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony



Mr. Fitzstephens puts together a puzzle



## The Jacksonville National Cemetery Greetings from the Support Committee at the Jacksonville National Cemetery!



The Support Committee invites everyone to attend its next scheduled meeting on **Monday, November 3rd** at 7:00pm. The meeting will take place at Community Hospice, 4266 Sunbeam Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32257 in Conference Room A

Chairman Howard McGillin,  
COL US Army ret.

Pictures below, taken by Larry Feltner, are from a recent burial at the Jacksonville National Cemetery.



## Veterans take VA to task, repeatedly and loudly



By Michael Isam, St. Augustine, Fla, (September 5, 2014)

St. Augustine has not seen such a brouhaha since Mumford and Son turned the well established community way of life on its head.

On Wednesday the large meeting room at Elks Lodge 829 located at 1420 A-1-A South, St. Augustine, FL was filled to capacity for the much touted VA Town Hall Meetings ordered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert A. McDonald.

What was the outcome after the dust settled? To quote from an almost forgotten poem by Earnest Lawrence Thayer, “There was no joy in Mudville.”

After the introductions of the VA representatives, Thomas Wisnieski, Director of the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System began by attempting to read a statement from a VA Under Secretary. He was cut short by a woman veteran proclaiming, “Cut the fluff, we want to know about our CBOC, (Community Based Outpatient Clinic).” For the rest of the meeting, the VA was on the defensive.

The statement “We are forbidden by a law, issued by congress, from saying anything about the process,” was repeated many times. It was like a person on trial repeating “I am invoking my rights under the 5<sup>th</sup> amendment.”

Bill Dudley, Chairman of the Veterans Council of St. Johns County, repeatedly voiced his displeasure with the way the VA has been handling the process. “I find it abhorrent that you will not, under any circumstances, give us any information about the location of our much needed CBOC. I find the fact that you and those who work for you appear so arrogant that you will not even reply to letters written by our two senators and a member of congress. This is totally unacceptable.”

Wisnieski quite frequently used the term “We are listening to you and we will take all this back with us for review,” while frequently glancing to his left where the two members of the Office of General Counsel sat stoically listening to the proceedings. For what were they listening? It was not clear, but the general consensus in the room was to make sure the line was properly toed by the VA. But the real elephant in the room was “You say you listening to us, but are you really hearing us?”

Toward the end of the meeting, Nick Ross, Deputy Director for Outpatient Clinics, Dept. of Veterans Affairs, offered his feelings on the matter. “I could tell you everything about the process, what stage it is in, what we know, the whole ball of wax, but if I did, these two gentlemen, indicating the general counsel representatives, would haul me off to jail.” “As we have said repeatedly,” continued Ross, “We are forbidden by law from saying anything about the process.”

A term bandied about many times during the meeting was “There will not be an interruption in the medical care for the veterans of St. Johns County. You will not have to leave the area for your healthcare.” Later on in the meeting Wisnieski added, “Some specialty care may take you to Jacksonville or Gainesville.” Just which specialty care items were not brought forth as he quickly moved on to another subject?

Veterans were not the only interested parties in the room. Members of the St. Johns County Board of Commissioners were present as well as several members of the administration.

District 5 Commissioner and Commission Vice-Chair Rachael L. Bennett was none too gentle in voicing her discontent with the VA and the process. “You folks have had 4 years, 4 years, to act! I find your actions and statements here today just a bunch of BS.”

Information obtained from the county indicates the VA has used incredible reasons for not accepting the county proposal to move with the health and human services to the new location on San Sebastian View. “The proposed location is in a flood plain; it is outside the center of veteran population, (by four blocks); there are not enough restaurants in the immediate area for the staff.”

Information brought forth by the County Administration indicates the VA used information at least five years old and, in some cases, some older.

There was a short-lived bright spot in an otherwise gloomy afternoon.

Jessica L. Kaplan, Director, Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction, Real Property Service said “In terms of the long-term procurement for a new clinic, the VA is in the process of reviewing proposals and that as soon as a contract award is made, scheduled for spring 2015, the VA will be able to share the location of the permanent solution.” Kaplan continued, “

Regardless of where the permanent location will be, there will likely be a need for a temporary solution once the March deadline arrives. By next Wednesday (September 10), the people that did offer their facilities will be notified as to whether their proposals were deemed acceptable or not.” There was no answer to the underlying question of “When will the veterans know?”

Many look at the process as the VA owning a building for veteran care facilities. In the case of a CBOC, this is not true. CBOC’s are located in leased spaces. The VA will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a builder to procure property and build the structure to the VA specifications. The VA will then rent that space. In the case of the much needed CBOC opened in Putnam County, it was located at a shopping mall.

“Did we really expect the entrenched VA bureaucracy to just roll over and die for the good of the veteran?” said a Vietnam Veteran who asked not to be identified. “We have been fighting 50 years for what is due us. Just a different day, same stuff.”

Veterans Council Chairman, Bill Dudley put it best, “Our veterans deserve better than this. They didn’t ask questions about when they had to go and serve. They didn’t question that, they went and served.” “Now all they’re asking is ‘Where is my health care going to come from in seven months?’ And they are not telling us.”

# # #

[Disclosure: The author of this story is the current Commander of DAV Chapter 6 who receives his medical treatment from the VA and is assigned to the St. Augustine CBOC.]



Director Thomas Wisnieski



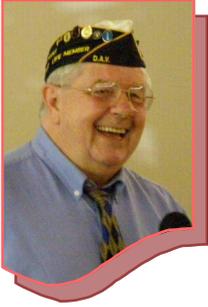
Post 194 listening intently



Chairman Dudley expresses displeasure



Commissioner Bennett



## **Florida National Guard recognizes 449 years of civilian service.**

By Michael Isam

St. Augustine, Fla, (September 13, 2014) – At the appointed hour of 1500, or 3:00 p.m. for civilians, on Friday, September 12, the order was barked to bring members of the Florida National Guard to attention. Thus began the "Retreat" ceremony. Like a well oiled machine, guard members performed admirably giving credit to the memory of all who proceeded them.

There is not a member of the Armed Forces who does not remember their first formation. Words, coupled with individual and group motions, appearing as one mind. Words and motions cloaked in layer upon layer and sometimes even more layers of tradition.

The Florida Living History joined the Florida National Guard and Florida Department of Military Affairs to commemorate 449 years since the first recorded occurrence of pressing the male civilian population into service to protect the women, children and the elderly. The first muster of militia troops in the continental United States took place on Sept. 16, 1565, in the newly established presidio of San Agustín de la Florida, present day St. Augustine. The order was issued by Pedro Menendez de Aviles who served as both the civil governor and the commander-in-chief of the military establishment

Major General Emmett R. Titshaw, Jr., Adjutant General of Florida began the ceremony 5 years ago to link the Florida National Guard's heritage to its horizons. The event will culminate in 2015 with the 450th anniversary of both the founding of St. Augustine, and of America's first militia.

With that knowledge came a shocking announcement by Titshaw that "Unfortunately this is my last muster." Titshaw is retiring in March, 2015. The Florida Living History soldiers made up for it by inviting him to fire the cannon once the ceremonies ended. With a grin from ear-to-ear, he became a young man with a new toy.

During the ceremony, the Florida Living History members, dressed in period attire came forward and gave two demonstrations of the military might

of the era; musket firing and the awesome power of the cannon. In keeping with tradition, all commands were issued in Spanish

In 2013, the parade field was consecrated with soil from each of the 19 sites upon which members of the Florida National Guard have served; from the original site at what is now the Fountain of Youth Archeological Park site to Operation Iraqi Freedom protecting personnel as the last of the American military crossed the Iraqi border into Kuwait.

This year, the "Parade Field" was officially renamed to "Patriot's Field" with a simple statement from Major General Titshaw. As he spoke, a member of the Florida National Guard and Florida Living History placed a canister containing soil from all 19 locations in a specially constructed pillar and covered it with a bronze plaque proclaiming the new name. It is located in the middle of a line of similar pillars, each one supporting a plaque recognizing a location of service.

According to a 2010 article in the [\*Fort Hood Sentinel\*](#), "Retreat is a daily ceremony held at all Army installations as the national flag is lowered at the end of the day. It is scheduled at a definite time in late afternoon; the precise time left to the discretion of the installation commander. Retreat has always been at sunset and its purpose was to notify sentries to start challenging until sunrise, and to tell the rank and file to go to their quarters and stay there."

Dating back to the American Army during the Revolutionary War, it was sounded by drums, the normal musical instrument found in infantry units of that period. Today, the ceremony remains a tradition. The ceremonies of Retreat in the afternoon, coupled with Reveille in the morning, constitute a dignified homage to our national flag from its raising to its lowering.

The bugle call sounded at Retreat dates back to the crusades and was first used by the French Army. When you hear it you are listening to a melody that has come to symbolize the finest qualities of Soldiers for nearly 900 years.

###

Photo credit Michael Isam



Volunteers from Florida Living History of St. Augustine performed a "Load and Fire" battle drill. Adjutant General of Florida, Maj. Gen. Emmett R. Titshaw Jr. prepares to touch fuse to powder to fire a replica 1700s cannon.



Adjutant General of Florida, Maj. Gen. Emmett R. Titshaw Jr. stands in the smoke from his "Load and Fire" drill.



The "Parade field" is officially "Patriots Field".



Soil from 19 locations where Florida National Guard have served is placed in a specially prepared pillar for perpetuity.



The order to bring members of the Florida National Guard to attention was barked loud and clear.



Guardsmen lowering "Old Glory" at the end of Retreat.

Jeannie Blaylock, First Coast News

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- It's not just a building. It's an entire complex. The new **K9s for Warriors** facility in Nocatee is going up quickly. It is set to open in January 2015.



K9s for Warriors is a non-profit group in Ponte Vedra which trains mostly rescue dogs to become certified service dogs for warriors with PTSD. The veterans come from all over the U.S. to our First Coast to train 120 hours with their new "best friends." The veterans are not charged a penny.

In some cases, the veterans report the dogs save them from suicide.

The new facility will be able to handle 16 warriors at a time; the current facility, a house off Roscoe Road, can only handle 4 to 5.

K9s for Warriors founder Shari Duval says the new complex will be the "leading PTSD recovery center" in the nation using certified service dogs.

Summit Construction and the Parc Group are donating the construction and land.

The new complex will include a kennel, which has outside runs and inside structures for the dogs. The group will be able to go from 12 or so dogs at a time to 65.

Duval says she's excited about many new features, including a bone-shaped swimming pool, two-feet deep, for the dogs. There will also be play areas for the dogs to exercise and romp.

The main clubhouse will have an exercise room and a place for the veterans to watch movies, play games, share concerns and eat home-cooked food. Veteran's quarters will feature outside access for their dogs. Two veterans will share a bathroom in the sleeping quarters, and they will have full access to technology to Skype with their families or work on projects on computers.

Duval says her "K9s for Casseroles" volunteers bring homemade lasagna, chicken and dumplings and fresh cookies so the warriors can feel at home.

The back porch, she says, will have 40 rocking chairs and a grill for the veterans.

The idea is to help them find their "reset button," Duval explains. The warriors need time to relax, but not too much idle time which can throw them into bad memories and anxiety.

Duval points to stats from the Veterans Administration saying every 65 minutes a veteran commits suicide. She says that's why the waiting list she has now -- more than a year -- makes her nervous.

Operation Orion, an FCN project launched four months ago, is raising money to help the facility operate when it quadruples its new program and facility.

If you'd like to donate, the Weavers -- through their community match programs -- will double your donation through the end of 2014, [www.k9sforwarriors.org](http://www.k9sforwarriors.org)

The Veterans Council of St. Johns County, (with Bill Dudley, Chairman & Michael Rothfeld, Treasurer producing), have just finished a full length documentary about *K9s for Warriors: Unleashing the Underdogs*. Here is a link to the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6k4XEWGbWo&feature=youtu.be>

## **A message from the Editor**

In 2007, a small group of veterans and non veterans formed a 501 C3 Not for Profit, *Florida Veterans Programs & Projects, Inc.* to accomplish two Missions. First was to mail “care packages” to troops in combat zones. This mission was carried out by the Coquina veterans and it was wildly successful. They mailed out about 1500 packages. The second mission was to record and educate the public about what sacrifices local veterans have made for all of us by serving in the Armed Forces. By all accounts, we have been successful in this mission also.

Over the years the need for sending packages overseas waned as our troops withdrew. By the time you read this article FVPPI will have finished its most current documentary: *“Unleashing the Underdogs: The Story of K9s for Warriors”*. Unfortunately, this will be FVPPI’s last documentary as it has been difficult raising money to fund it. It has also become unnecessary to continue with FVPPI as we have been given complete support by Veterans Council Chairman Bill Dudley, who served as co-producer on this documentary. Any future documentaries will be under the auspices and control of the Veterans Council.

The Veterans Council and FVPPI have always donated the documentaries in dvd format to schools, colleges, libraries and museums. With YouTube being so popular we have put all our documentaries online on the Veterans Council website: <http://www.veteranscouncilofstjohns.org/>

The documentaries can also be viewed at:

Korean War documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MH33aYTHwvg&list=UU5TLKyliWlqXdbKz2vRsXGg>

WW II documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OudeFMMHQJ8&feature=youtu.be>

Vietnam documentary: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_5qJVXK0gl&list=UU5TLKyliWlqXdbKz2vRsXGg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_5qJVXK0gl&list=UU5TLKyliWlqXdbKz2vRsXGg)

POW documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApZQRgT9e4c&feature=youtu.be>

K9/PTSD trailer: (The full K9 documentary will be put online after it is premiered locally and entered in a local film festival). Here is a link to a short trailer of the K9/PTSD documentary.

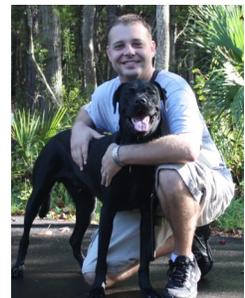
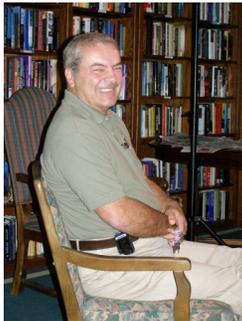
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6k4XEWGbWo&feature=youtu.be>

Please forward these links to all your contacts, friends, family, veteran friends and to your veterans organizations. By sharing we preserve our history.

Our overall Mission has been to try to preserve our history by recording the heroic exploits of our neighbors, you, the veterans of NE Florida.

Thank you, Michael

# Here are some pictures that I've collected over the years



# The Ride Home

The Ride Home began in 2002 as a retreat and rededication. Our founding members, choose the National Historic Site at Andersonville, GA, home of the National Prisoners of War Museum.

We took up the challenge of a Presidential Proclamation, "I call upon the people of the United States to join me in honoring and remembering all former American prisoners of war and those missing in action who valiantly served our great country. I also call upon Federal, State, and local government officials and private organizations to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities."

Our goal each year is to invite, as our guests, former POWs and MIA family members, offering a recognition commensurate with their extraordinary courage and valor; to increase the number of participants paying tribute; and to increase public awareness and commitment that we will never forget.



Photos by Monica Vetula Cash



**Building Careers for Veterans: Full Scholarship Training  
for Florida Veterans**

**Home Builders Institute**

HBI is a national nonprofit that provides training, mentoring, curriculum development and job placement assistance services in support of the **building industry**. With an 80 percent job placement rate, HBI training programs are taught in local communities across the country. HBI credentials and certifications are recognized by the Department of Labor and National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

Visit [www.hbi.org](http://www.hbi.org) for more information

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**All Veterans must register in Employ Florida (CareerSource) and provide a resume/career assessment**

**Eligible Veterans must possess proof of Florida Residency, at least one of the following: FI. Drivers License, FI. Identification Card, Mortgage or Lease, Major bill addressed to Florida Residency (cable, utility, or phone); Letter from Homeless Shelter on official letterhead of the shelter.**

**DD214 with Character of Service Identified (Dishonorable or Court Martial are not acceptable. DD214 must have no sections blacked out or unreadable).**

**Proof to work in the United States; Social Security Card required. Agree to provide written proof of Employment Placement in the Building Industry Trade (including a copy of a pay stub and communicate monthly with HBI Representatives).**

**Building Careers for Veterans Jacksonville Evening classes will be held at Naval Air Station Jacksonville-Building 13 (Career Source), Yorktown Avenue, Jacksonville, FL 32212**

**Thursday classes will be held from 4:00 pm-8:00 pm: October 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>**

Contact **LaTanya Guillory, Senior Program Manager** for additional information: [lguillory@hbi.org](mailto:lguillory@hbi.org)

Office number 904-625-3299; Fax number 202-266-8999

## Veterans Treatment Court

*The article was written by Howard McGillin, Colonel, US Army JAGC (Ret). The VTC team consists of Col Howard McGillin; Charlotte Matthews, LCSW, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator; and Bill Dudley.*



Early this summer, I was privileged to attend a session of the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) presided over by Judge David Beck in Volusia County Florida. VTC is an innovative program that attempts to replace retribution and punishment with rehabilitation and treatment for justice involved veterans. It is not a free pass for a veteran. The St. Johns County Veterans Council has been working to develop a similar program in our county.

VTC had its origin in Buffalo New York. After the commencement of hostilities in our current Gulf conflicts, Judge Robert Russell recognized that he was starting to see veterans come to his court there were suffering from physical and psychological injuries sustained in combat. Notably, justice involved veterans were experiencing symptoms and problems related to posttraumatic stress disorder, dramatic brain injury and other psychological and physiological problems. These are manifesting themselves in justice involved veterans committing acts of domestic violence, social disobedience, substance abuse crimes, and similar relatively small level crimes. Judge Russell recognized that these veterans might benefit from treatment rather than traditional punishment.

VTC is related to two other programs that are currently being run in our state and elsewhere in the nation - drug treatment courts and teen courts. The focus of these alternative court programs is on treatment and rehabilitation rather than retribution and punishment. However, it has to be emphasized that none of these programs amount to a free pass for the offender. All of these programs require that the offender admit culpability for the wrongdoing. In return for this admission of culpability, and in recognition of the justice involved veteran's commitment to participate in treatment modalities with the VA and other medical providers, and to work towards rehabilitation and self-improvement, the programs is made available as an alternative to traditional adjudication for sentencing.

VTC is, in many ways, a more difficult program to navigate than either drug court or teen court. As it exists currently in Volusia County, VTC is a rigorous program of supervised activity by the veteran. These activities include, but are certainly not limited to, active participation in medical and psychological treatment administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs and other social welfare agencies, frequent check-in's with a probation officer, active participation in community or

veteran service, substance abuse testing and other conditions. In addition, the participants in veterans treatment court are expected to attend regular court sessions of the VTC. The purpose of these court sessions is to have a review of their case and an opportunity to fine tune their treatment program

The session of VTC that I observed in Volusia County involved offenders whose offenses ranged from driving under the influence to disorderly conduct and minor level domestic violence. In order to be considered for VTC, each of the offenders had to both volunteer to participate in the VTC program and had to be accepted into the program by the judge, the state attorney and the defense counsel representing them. In addition to those participants, VTC also included active participation by veterans groups, community service agencies, the US Department of Veterans Affairs, and the probation and post trial services office of the court. Finally, the participation and active engagement by the clerk of court and the Sheriff's office were also critical portions of the team involved in the veterans treatment court.

A typical session of VTC begins with a pre-coordinating meeting that is open to all participants, except for the justice involved veteran. This meeting includes the presiding judge, representatives of the Sheriff's office, US Department of Veterans Affairs, the pre-and post trial services office, the state attorney's office, the public defender or private defense counsel, and the veterans service organizations. This pre-meeting was a candid and open discussion of the justice involved veteran's participation in the program, the projected sentence or pretrial diversion program that they were engaged in, and a candid assessment of whether the veteran was going to be successful in the program. Since this is a court annexed meeting, all parties need to be present to engage in this discussion and avoid the problem of ex parte communication with the court. To that end, the public defender, state attorney and members of the private defense bar were invited to attend the meeting. While this is not a formal hearing, and no transcript is recorded, it is a necessary and critical adjunct to the veterans treatment court program.

The actual session of VTC presided over by Judge David Beck, proceeded much as a normal court session with several significant exceptions. The first obvious exception was the Judge Beck asked everyone to introduce themselves at the beginning of court. It was gratifying to see how many of the participants in the veterans court, were either veterans themselves, such as members of the probation staff, the Sheriff's office and court clerk staff and Judge Beck himself, or had family members who were veterans. After introductions the judge gave a brief discussion to all the participants of the anticipated plan for the day.

In order to minimize the cost to veterans, the first cases heard were those in-

volving private (paid) defense counsel. Since, as Abe Lincoln observed, "a lawyer's time is his stock in trade," the judge handled cases involving private counsel first so that the veteran would not bear any extraordinary cost of having his or her lawyer in the court for a long time waiting to be heard on their case.

The judge then handled cases involving incarcerated veterans. These veterans, who were "guests of honor of the Volusia County's Sheriff" were brought to the front of the court. Their cases were heard and in appropriate cases they were either admitted to the VTC program, were readmitted to the program, or their adjudication was handled as in a standard court session. One of the reasons for having incarcerated members present, was partially as an object lesson for the other members participating in the court. While the judge in the VTC model engages in a more positive discussion with some participants, to encourage them to continue their active participation in the court, the judge also represents the hand of justice. In some cases, the object lesson was necessary both the offender in question and for the general public.

I was also fortunate to be present in this court on the day of the first graduation from VTC. The veteran in question had been arrested for a substance abuse related offense. However in the six months that he had participated in the veterans treatment court, he had become a model citizen. In addition to attending all of the treatment prescribed by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, he had also engaged in substantial community service. This particular veteran served much of his community service performing acts of charity and service to other veterans. In fact he exceeded the court mandated number of hours and was now a member of the local Veterans' Honor Guard. He appeared in court in uniform looking very STRAC! The judge publically reviewed his treatment record, obtained recommendations from probation, the state attorney, the Department of Veterans Affairs and heard the statement of the veteran. At the end of the session, the judge came down from the bench and presented the veteran with a coin as a token of graduation from the VTC.

One essential component of VTC in other jurisdictions currently missing from Volusia that we will be looking to add in St. Johns County is the addition of Veteran mentors. The concept is to provide a fellow veteran to serve as a mentor to the justice involved veteran. Their responsibility will be like that of a battle buddy. We will be looking for volunteers and will be providing training to these mentors when the program commences in St. Johns.

Conceptually, we have had meetings with the Sheriff, the State Attorney, the Public Defender, the US Department of Veterans Affairs and the judiciary to get this program underway. We are working to formalize the procedures and make this available in St. Johns in appropriate cases. We will provide updates to the Council as this initiative progresses.

We received the following historical accounting of a sailor who lost his life in one of the many battles in the Pacific. It is a horrendous story of a kamikaze attack on one of our Navy vessels, the USS Macomb ( DMS 23 ) known as the Mighty Mac. The Mighty Mac was considered a “charmed ship” as she had been in many battles in both the Atlantic and Pacific and had hardly received a scratch.

This is just one of many tales of the fighting spirit of our men during WW II and wouldn't be of significant importance to most of us except that the sailor in this battle was the uncle of one of our local County employees. Seaman First Class George Wanchick was the uncle of our St. Johns County Administrator, Michael Wanchick. This personalizes the story in many respects and further exemplifies the courage and commitment of these men who became known as “The Greatest Generation”.



Michael Wanchick



The Veterans Council would like to thank Mr. Wanchick for sharing the story of his uncle's heroic deeds aboard the USS Macomb and giving his life for our country.

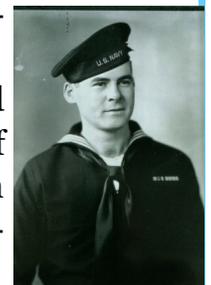
There are many stories just like Seaman FC Wanchick's that reside with families within the readership of the Patriot Reader and we encourage you to please share them with our us.

*Bill Dudley*, Chairman, Veterans Council St. Johns County

*This article is excerpted from the Destroyer History Foundation: USS Macomb, DD 458, DMS 23, 1630ton  
Gleaves Destroyer: Ellyson- Class high speed mine sweeper in World War II  
A Personal Tale of Macomb off Okinawa in 1945 by shipmate Joe Bazzel, Chief Pipe Fitter.*

Burned almost beyond recognition, one of my shipmates lay hoping for death to release him from his torture. That was hard to take. It was doubly rough when I, myself, was in the wardroom grievously wounded suffering from second degree burns of my own, and the man I listened to was a buddy I couldn't help, but who obviously was suffering the tortures of hell.

That was the situation I found myself in on the night of 3 May 1945 aboard the United States Ship *Macomb* (DMS23), circling somewhere in the vicinity of Radar Picket Station Nine. The man suffering most in the wardroom was Seaman First Class George Wanchick. He had been in number three turret when a Japanese Kamikaze “Tony” had ploughed into the mount, igniting powder and spreading a sea of blazing gasoline in every direction. Some way, somehow, Wanchick had come out of that mount and fallen off the after deck house into the fantail, but he was burned to a crisp. Actually, the only place the doctor could find to administer needed plasma to George was the small area of his feet that had been protected from burns by heavy shoes. Now, with other wounded, he lay in the *Macomb's* wardroom, which had been improvised into a sick bay, and prayed for the merciful death which might have released him from intolerable suffering.



Seaman First Class George Wanchick

I wasn't feeling too good myself. I stood it for a while. After that, burns, or no burns, I went on deck. I simply couldn't take any more. George died early that morning.

Why I didn't accompany George Wanchick into the “Valley of the Shadow of Death” I'll never know!. When the Kamikaze hit us, my mind went momentarily blank. My clothing was afire and I was stretched out, not only insensible on the fantail of the *Macomb*, but trapped there by the furious flames which spread from number three mount when the Kamikaze hit and blazing gasoline enveloped everything aft. As luck had it, however, our captain, Lieutenant

Commander Alton L. C. Waldron, called for flank speed just about that moment. As the *Macomb* charged through the night her fantail settled; she took small seas aboard aft, and this water was enough to extinguish my flaming clothes. Revived and once more on my feet, I had a couple of shots of morphine. After that, I hardly knew I was burned, and when Chief

Bo'sun's Mate John Reagan called for volunteers to sew the skipper had received an urgent call for aid from the destroyer *Aaron Ward*, which had been hit by five Kamikaze planes. In our condition we could not respond to the *Ward's* appeal for aid, so we recovered our own casualties overside with the aid of supporting small patrol craft and finally got underway for Okinawa. Meanwhile, a chap named Rogers and I managed to get a stretcher from forward, and we were able to get Wanchick down to the wardroom. As previously recounted, I subsequently joined him there, after helping to prepare a half dozen or so of my shipmates for burial.

Slowly and painfully, as the stricken *Macomb* plunged through the night, a small party of us made our way to a little shack amidships. There the dead were laid out. Also, there was stout twine, triangular-shanked and curving sail needles; leather palms for pushing the needle points through tough canvas and a supply of used fireproof mattress covers, to serve as shrouds. Silently we fell to work. Stitch! Stitch! Stitch! We handled the bodies of our mates with reverence. It was a somber experience. After we had finished the job, I happened to meet the ship's Chief Pharmacist's Mate in the gangway. He took one look at me—and that was that!

“OK, Bazzel, come with me!” he ordered. I followed him to the wardroom where they dressed the burns on my hands and arms. That was the second time that night I saw Wanchick. As I say, I saw him come out of the aft five-inch gun mount, seemingly burned to a crisp, seconds after the “Tony” had hit us. Now he was lying in the wardroom praying to die, and, as I have said, I just couldn't take it for more than a short time. After that I went on deck and stayed there until death effected Wanchick's merciful release from what must have been intolerable pain. Finally the firefighting party brought the blaze under control. We immediately checked the deckhouse, and were sickened to find the youngest kid in the ship lying dead inside. Meanwhile, despite our own distress, Although the ship had seen plenty of action, I suppose this story really should start at the moment shortly after dusk on 1 April 1945, when Captain Waldron, on the bridge, grasped the lever of the ship's PA system, closed the circuit, and told us: “This is the Captain speaking! Now hear this! We have been proceeding under sealed orders. In compliance with instructions, I have just learned the contents of those orders. We are to perform sweep operations and later on we are to participate in the invasion of Okinawa. We are out in front of the Third Fleet. From here on out we should be joining up with additional vessels all the time. I want to caution every man to be doubly alert during the days and nights ahead, and I'm sure that no man aboard the *Macomb* will fail of his duty. God be with you all!”

All in all, it had been a lively night on station Roger Peter Nine!

*Additional reading about the USS Macomb can be found at:*

<http://destroyerhistory.org/benson-gleavesclass/ussmacomb/index.asp?r=45800&pid=45808>

[http://www.oocities.org/pentagon/Base/1250/macomboky\\_2.html](http://www.oocities.org/pentagon/Base/1250/macomboky_2.html)

<http://ussjpkennedyjr.org/macomb458/macmem.jpg>



**I have just finished refurbishing a Go-Go Elite power chair to go to a War Veteran.**

***For more information,  
contact A. J. Sartin (904) 669-1946***

Offered by the Vilano Beach VFW [VilanoBeachVFW@att.net](mailto:VilanoBeachVFW@att.net)

**Vilano Beach VFW collects Walkers, Wheel Chairs, and Power Wheel Chairs for distribution to other Veterans in need.**

**VETERANS HELPING VETERANS**

**Go-Go Elite Traveller 3-Wheel**

by Pride , Model No. SC40E

**Lightweight, agile, the Elite Traveller.**

18AH battery option for extended drive range

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**Key Specs**

Top Speed: 4.25 mph

Drive Range: 10.00 miles (this may vary, depending on charge and life of battery)

Heaviest Piece: 28 lbs.

Rider Weight capacity: 300 lbs.

Weight: 96 lbs.

**The Disabled American Veterans Chapter 6, of St. Johns County, has a EZ-Access Modular Ramp System available for a Veteran that needs one that requires a turn, and two ramps to get from the porch to the sidewalk. This ramp cannot be parted out...must be used as manufactured.**

**For more information,  
contact A. J. Sartin (904) 669-1946**



# WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

## ST. AUGUSTINE NATIONAL CEMETERY CAMPAIGN

### All Veterans & Veterans Organizations



The St. Johns County Veterans Council is proud to announce that the campaign to fill “our” St. Augustine National Cemetery with holiday wreaths is underway. We are dedicated to placing a wreath at each gravesite.

**YOUR HELP** is needed. We ask that your organization begin immediately to collect donations to purchase wreaths.

Wreaths are \$15.00 each. If you purchase two (2) wreaths we receive and additional wreath free ( 3 for 2).

Checks can be written in any amount (\$100, \$200 etc.)

Please contact your friends and neighbors as well as your organizations and ask them to participate as well.



Former County Commissioner Mark Miner presents a check to Ray Quinn from the St. Augustine Sons of the American Revolution

**HOW:** Make checks payable to:  
Wreaths Across America

Send to: St. Johns County Veterans Council, P.O. Box 2117, St. Augustine, Florida 32085-2117

Contacts: Co-chair: Ray Quinn, 904.540.1630 Co-Chair Judy Davis, 904.797.2686



*The City of Jacksonville as part of its November “Week of Valor” has selected the Veterans Council of St. Johns County’s documentary, “Unleashing the Underdogs: the K9s for Warriors Story to be presented at UNF on Friday, November 7th at 5pm. Following the documentary, Dr. Anne Freund will lead a panel discussion of former Iraq/Afghanistan veterans .*

*We are inviting all of you to attend this free event. Parking on campus is free after 5pm and finger food will be available prior to the presentation.*

*More info to follow in next month’s Patriot Reader*





## From Conrad at the Pirate House

The public is invited to join us on Saturday, November 15, 2014 for a day of fun, fellowship, great food and to help raise money for an extremely worthy cause.

For this year's event, we have chosen again as the benefactor, Homes for Our Troops. Homes for Our Troops (HFOT) is a national non-profit 501(c)3 organization based in Taunton, Mass. founded in 2004. Their mission is to build specially adapted homes for service members who have been severely injured in combat operations since September 11, 2001. All homes are built at no cost to the veteran through the generous support of individuals, foundations, and corporate contributors. Homes for Our Troops has received a Four Star Rating from Charity Navigator. Visit their website ([www.hfotusa.org](http://www.hfotusa.org)) for more information.

The unescorted ride starts at the employee pavilion at Seminole Electric. The closest address for this is 271 West River Road, Palatka, FL. This will be our beginning and ending point for the ride. The ride will cover approximately 100-120 miles, with three stops.

You will receive a Ride Package which will include a map route and detailed instructions of the run at sign-up. There will be prizes for best and worst roll of the dice, and drawings for door prizes. Additional dice roll sheets and 50/50 tickets will be available for sale. The cost is \$25.00 per rider which includes, an event t-shirt, a raffle ticket for door prizes, goodie bag, dice roll sheet with instructions, and a meal bracelet for the end of the ride. If you list your e-mail address on the registration form, a confirmation e-mail will be sent to you.

Pre-registration deadline is October 31, 2014, or you can register the day of the ride.

**YOU MUST BE PRE-REGISTERED** to be guaranteed a t-shirt, ride packet and other items.

(Some t-shirts will be available the day of the ride.)

**Thank you! Contact Conrad Matt at 904-501-0391 for further info**

*Veterans Council of St. Johns County,  
"Helping All Veterans"*

The Veterans Council of St. Johns County welcomes article submissions from all County Veterans & organizations. Articles should be of interest to all and veterans related. Submissions may be edited &/or shortened and used if space permits.

Send to: [mrothfeld@anyveteran.org](mailto:mrothfeld@anyveteran.org)



**Bob Dinkins - President  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Chapter 1084, St. Johns County, FL**

This month's featured site:  
*K9s for Warriors*  
[www.K9sforWarriors.org](http://www.K9sforWarriors.org)



**The Veterans Council of St. Johns County, Inc. is a  
Not For Profit Florida Corporation.**

Our formation date was July 4, 2001 in a proclamation issued by the St. Johns County Commissioners. It is composed of representatives of the various veterans' organizations within St. Johns County.

The Veteran's Council will work with city and county governments and other local organizations to achieve the mutual goal to provide a central agency to assist in the coordination and presentation of matters concerning veterans and veterans activities in St. Johns County.

The Veteran's Council will endeavor to precipitate, stimulate and assist various organizations as they perform patriotic events. One of the major purposes is the promotion and education of national patriotic matters.

**The St. Johns County Veterans Council meets the last  
Thursday of the month at 7 pm at the Elks Lodge,  
1420 A1A So., St. Augustine.**

Visit our Website: [www.veteranscouncilofstjohns.org](http://www.veteranscouncilofstjohns.org)

**Veterans Service Office  
1955 US 1 South, Suite 550  
St. Augustine, FL 32086**

*(physical location)*

*The VSO Office is located in the St. Johns County Health and Human Services complex, behind the VA Clinic.*

*The office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily,  
Monday through Friday excluding holidays.*

*Service is by appointment.  
Phone: 904-209-6160 Fax: 904-209-6161  
Joseph McDermott, CVSO  
Rick Rees, Assistant VSO  
Tammy Shirley, Assistant VSO*

*The views expressed in The Patriot Reader Newsletter articles, submissions and spotlights are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Veterans Council of St. Johns County or the editors of The Patriot Reader. It is the purpose of this periodical to share a variety of information that pertain to local veterans and their organizations.*