

VFW 118<sup>th</sup> National Convention  
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When comrade Mike asked me to write an article about the National Convention I wasn't sure I would have much to write about but after attending I find there is more than enough. There are a number of videos and a few written highlights that can be found at <https://www.vfw.org/news-and-publications/vfw-national-convention-2017> and if you find some time you might enjoy them. Obviously the length of my submission was way more than enough for a newsletter so Mike took highlights for the newsletter. However, I wanted to share the complete submission with anyone willing to spend some reading time and learn more about what we experienced.

I can honestly say that I never really considered attending a National Convention until Pat became a delegate for the Auxiliary. That started the wheel rolling and before I knew it we were registered and, when the post found out I was going, I became a delegate too. So, off to New Orleans we went. We were joined by Peyton & Jeanenne Lumpkin (they had to leave early, poor Jeanenne injured her eye), Susan & Dennis Mikulenska, Mike & Marge Warren and Rita Bailey.

The first thing I learned at the convention is to never trust Starbucks to provide you with a well-sealed cup of coffee. During the Joint Opening Session I waited in line for close to an hour to get a simple cup of coffee and when I took my first sip I ended up with coffee down and inside my shirt. I suppose I should have checked the lid but I assumed it was sealed. We all know what "assume" gets you. Bottom line is I cussed and smelled like coffee the rest of the day but was sure surprised, when I took my shirt off, to find I had a small burn patch that ended up like a very bad sunburn. I suppose, if I were at home and had time to deal with it, I could have complained. Beware. Starbucks coffee, at least at the New Orleans Convention center, is VERY HOT.

We arrived early Sunday afternoon and headed directly to the convention center, which is something in its own. Not only was it housing our convention of over 10,000 attendees and exhibitors but it also had over 100 girls basketball teams there for a tournament. We spent the entire afternoon getting our credentials and visiting the many exhibitors, including the VFW store, located in a very large area. It took 2 afternoons to visit everything. There was an entire different area just for health services. We collected many informational items that I plan to put on the web in the near future. I want to mention a few because I think they are important enough to share now.

- How many of you have ever heard of the USS Liberty? In June 1967 it was attacked by Israeli torpedo boats and jet aircraft killing 34 and wounding 171 Americans. I met 1 of the 2 Marines who were aboard. He was burned badly and the other did not survive. You can learn more by going to the link <http://www.uslibertyveterans.org/>
- How many of my fellow Army comrades know that they can get a complete set of ribbons from US Army TACOM Veteran Medals Unit. This program will provide a complete set of authorized medals and decorations at no charge for the 1<sup>st</sup> set. More information can be found in the flyer at <http://vfw9182.org/pdf-files/Army-Medals-JPG.pdf>
- A National Desert Storm War Memorial will be built and they are looking for support. This is something I feel our post should consider making a donation to, in support of our Desert Storm comrades and all who served in that war. During one of our sessions there was a great presentation about it. Find more information at <http://www.ndswm.org/>

- An Army Museum is currently being built at Ft. Belvoir and it sounds like it will be much larger than that other museum down the road from it, at Quantico. Sorry Henry and all you other Marines. You can learn more about this at <https://armyhistory.org/>
- For all our Vietnam veterans the VFW store now has a book just for us created by the VFW. It is called Brutal Battles of Vietnam, America's Deadliest Days 1965 – 1972. As soon as I saw the book I had to have it. It is one of the heaviest and greatest quality books I have ever had.

During the Tuesday session Medal of Honor recipient Retired Marine Corps Gen. James E. Livingston discussed the Vietnam War 50<sup>th</sup> Commemoration program and called the Vietnam War the “most misunderstood and misinterpreted conflict apart from the Korean War.” He corrected multiple myths about the war including the myth that most of those killed in action were under the age of 20. He said that more men over the age of 30 died.

He encouraged members to purchase the book calling it “an honest historical preservation” of the war. He participated in the May 1968 Battle of Dai Do, featured in the book, where he earned his MOH.

If anyone would like to see the book I'll be glad to show you. You can read more about this book at <http://vfwstore.org/products/31296?Action=SkipLogin>.

Besides various workshops there was a Joint Open Session on Monday morning and separate VFW and Auxiliary business sessions in the afternoon. On Tuesday and Wednesday there were separate VFW and Auxiliary business meetings with Wednesday finishing with elections and installations. All of the sessions I attended were very informative and Pat says the same about the Auxiliary sessions.

Highlights from the sessions include:

- VA Secretary David Shulkin announcing a 46% increase in medical appointment over the past year. He addresses several of his priorities.
- Donations from D.G. Yuengling and Son Inc. (\$100,000), Twisted X Boots (\$75,000), and Henry Repeating Arms (\$50,000)
- USAA Director of Military Affairs Bob Winzenried discussed the importance of providing help to returning service members. He told a very touching story about his son, who served in Iraq and suffered multiple concussions with long lasting results. His son didn't discuss his pain with anyone and died of those injuries last year. Bob said “We need to let those troops know it's OK to ask for help. It's easier to talk to someone who's been there.”
- Speaker and Comedian Bobby Henline, (also presented with the Hall of Fame Award, during the convention, for entertaining troops, especially the wounded at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio) who was severely burned in 2007 while serving in Iraq, told how he “turned lemons into oranges.” He has not let his severe facial and body disfigurement stop him and told how he took the worse of situations and found a way to laugh at it. He provided bits from his comedy styles such as: “I love to go to a movie showing Nightmare on Elm Street, sit in the front row, wait until it is over and the lights come up, stand, turn around, and say Sleep Tight” and how he likes to talk cremation at a funeral home and ask for a discount.  
I can't imagine how much he suffers from his injuries and gained a lot of respect for him and all who return with injuries to include those that never show.
- We heard about the VFW Veterans Village in Fort McCoy, FL <http://vfwveteransvillage.org/>. It is dedicated to providing a true home-like atmosphere to combat veterans or is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a spouse of a

qualified veterans and men and women who qualify for membership in a VFW Auxiliary. There was a silent auction with donations from many states, including the Village. My bid was the highest for their donation which includes a 5 night stay with all meals included, dinner with their Board President, a VIP briefing of the facility by their director USA Retired LTC Alcides Lugo, a sit down and speak with WWII, Korean & Vietnam veterans including the famous Rich brothers (98 and 96) one of which served with General Patton and the other flew one of the first missions to Berlin. What a treat! It also included a limited edition Mickey Mouse suitcase and a Directors special label bottle of Crown Royal. Not too shabby.

- We heard about Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) Survivors Helping Survivors Heal <http://www.taps.org>. This program was started in 1994 and provides comfort and hope 24/7 through a national peer Support network and connection to grief resources, all at no cost to surviving families and loved ones. They have assisted more than 70,000 surviving families, casualty officers and caregivers.
- We heard the National Voice of Democracy winner (\$30,000) Savannah Wittman present her essay which was very touching. During her reading you couldn't hear a pin drop in the hall. After attending her grandfather's funeral with full military Honors and seeing the flag presented to her grandmother, heard the rifle volleys and heard TAPS played, she realized her "Vision for America." You can see a video of her presenting her essay at the 2017 Legislative Conference <https://www.vfw.org/VFWDC2017> and look to the right for 2016-2017 Voice of Democracy Winner. You can also read it at [https://www.vfw.org/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Community/Youth-and-Education/2017-VOD-Winning-Essay\\_California.pdf?la=en](https://www.vfw.org/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Community/Youth-and-Education/2017-VOD-Winning-Essay_California.pdf?la=en).
- We were introduced to and heard from the three teachers of the year (Theresa Early - Elementary, Jeffrey Benes - Middle School and Steve Johnson – High School) as they received their \$1,000 award for having outstanding curriculums focusing on citizenship education topics. <https://www.vfw.org/news-and-publications/press-room/archives/2017/5/vfw-names-national-teacher-award-winners>
- We were visited by the 2017/2018 Buddy Poppy Child and her family. Her father expressed his sincere thanks for the support the VFW National Home for Children has provided his family. <http://www.vfwnationalhome.org/single-post/2017/07/24/Introducing-The-20172018-Buddy-Poppy-Child>
- There were many presentations, awards and citations, too many to mention. However you can read about a few at <https://www.vfw.org/news-and-publications/press-room/archives/2017/7/118th-vfw-national-convention-rolls-into-new-orleans>. This is just a small number and the links below provide a better description of them all. It humbled me to see all the VFW does for, not only veterans, but everyone.

You can read more about these highlights at <https://www.vfw.org/-/media/VFWSite/Files/News-and-Publications/Events/118th-Convention/118th-Monday-Highlights.pdf?la=en> and <https://www.vfw.org/-/media/VFWSite/Files/News-and-Publications/Events/118th-Convention/118th-Tuesday-Daily-Highlights.pdf?la=en>.

Yes we spent a lot of time in business sessions but we had time to have fun too. On Sunday evening we joined many from Texas on a riverboat cruise and buffet. Although it was a tight fit it was a nice evening with good food and friends. On Tuesday evening there was a VFW Patriotic Celebration with a parade that included many from each state "strutting their stuff" in Mardi-Gras style. It is hard to describe. You had to be there to witness it and see our Commander-In-Chief Duffy dance on stage. The parade was followed by entertainment by various entertainers. Our evening time allowed us to become more familiar with Rita, Susan, Dennis, Mike and Marge.

We were able to share dinner time, at great restaurants, with them and followed by side trips to Rita's favorite "watering hole" and, of course, a trip to Cafe Du Monde for Beignets and Coffee Au Lait. What better way to become closer to folks than to spend quality time with them.

If you haven't attended a National Convention you need to consider it. You won't be sorry. If you ever plan to attend a State or National convention, and have never been to one before, you need to ask folks who have attended just what goes on and the procedures that are followed during voting for amended changes to By-Laws and elections. It is a learning experience which I had no clue what to expect. Only someone who has attended can give you a better handle on what to expect and how to become involved as a delegate.

Next year the convention will be in Kansas City, MO from July 21 to 25. We plan on attending. Hope to see you there.