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A VETERAN APPROVED NETWORK PUBLICATION

VANSTATION

MAGAZINE

VETERAN SUICIDE BEHIND THE NUMBERS

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LAHAROLD WOODHOUSE

How do you pull yourself out of a dark place? We want to know. We ask LaHarold Woodhouse to share his journey from darkness to the light of fulfillment.

BRIAN HALSTEAD

Oplign is revolutionizing veteran employment by eliminating the resume and maximizing the veteran experience in today's job market.

RICHARD CORSON

VAN digs deep to find what drives Richard Corson. What keeps him healthy, happy, and motivated. Find out how Corson plans to help you.

DR. DAMON FRIEDMAN

Is there a louder or larger voice for warriors? We don't think so. Dr. Damon Friedman knocks our socks off with his passion, mission, and vision for every warrior.

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From the Editor

Welcome to VAN Station Magazine!

At VAN, (Veteran Approved Network) we proudly offer a publication that focuses on local veterans, service members, and those who support them.

The pages of this magazine are filled with stories of local veterans, veteran-relevant news, and powerful contributions from our partner organizations.

VAN, at its core, is a collaborator. We provide the space online, in print, and in person for veterans, vetted organizations, and businesses within the community to come together. VAN values the many incredible organizations working in Tampa Bay to serve and support veterans, and as part of VAN, we all work together in various ways to make the most significant and positive impacts on the veteran community.

In the first edition of VAN STATION Magazine, we focus on the veteran suicide epidemic. Our feature article dives

into the core causes of veteran suicide, the numbers, and how we can come together as a community to save veterans' lives. VAN will follow along on many veteran journeys throughout 2023 in our Veteran's Voices section of the magazine. In this month's 'Veteran's Voices' we ask veterans to

share their personal experiences and thoughts on suicide awareness, prevention, and community responsibility.

VAN's ongoing commitment to veteran health & wellness will include exploring holistic and revolutionary alternate treatments and services we discover in Tampa Bay through LTC Richard Corson (ret), VAN Health & Wellness contributor. Follow along each month as Rich shares his experiences with honest commentary.

As for the team at VAN, we hope the information you discover inside this magazine will touch your heart and encourage you to join our network and be a part of our mission to reconnect with the veteran community.

Alongside VAN, you can align yourself, your business, or your organization with incredible people, missions, and efforts.

Toni Hedstrom
President/Founder
Tampa VA Network



VANSTATION

A VETERAN APPROVED NETWORK PUBLICATION
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MAGAZINE

Tampa Bay Veterans need a voice and an outlet they can turn to for local information, resources, news, and events. VAN STATION Magazine is that voice.

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SITUATION REPORT [SITREP] LTC STEVE COKER (ret.) VAN VP of Veteran Relations

813-466-8555 SteveCoker@TampaVANetwork.com



Many great things are going on in the Tampa Bay area, and VAN is part of them...thanks to YOU!

I've spent the last seven months meeting veterans and learning about their needs. As a result, VAN has planned events for 2023 focused on the fun things that military and veterans enjoy doing outdoors. 2022 allowed VAN to assist several Gold Star Mother Organizations to plan and execute events for their programs like the My Warrior's Place 'Ducked up Derby' where VAN's efforts helped Founder Kelly Kowall be the first ever Gold Star Mother awarded a 2020 F-250 truck through the Progressive Insurance 'Keys to Progress' program. For Jean Uffalussy, American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. - Gulf Coast Chapter, VAN has helped to plan and coordinate the 'Remembrance Love Walk' to embrace the living on behalf of the fallen.

To honor the Women and Men that protect our Nation with opportunities to share their experiences and to have fun is at the heart of our Network. So many wonderful people are reaching out to be a part and share in giving back, and we are grateful.

Now, we are experiencing a new era of challenges and must disrupt the cycle of veteran suicide. To make a difference, we are partnering with leading experts and call centers to bring change. Everyone needs identity and purpose, which most find in work and family. Another way is through community events, local parks, and recreation. That is why we plan so many wonderful events FREE for veterans.

We have set the conditions for current military and veterans to come to VAN events and find like-minded veterans and Network members who want to help. For any veteran struggling with anything...we are set up to connect you with a resource that genuinely cares. Our Network is designed to have "Vetted for Vets" resources that honor and share in giving thanks and support to the Veteran community!

We don't do what you do. We tell people what you do!

If you would like to be a part of championing an event, volunteering at any of our planned events, or becoming a member of the Network, reach out, and I will join you for a coffee and make a new friend.

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VAN TEAMS UP WITH GOLD STAR MOM, JEAN UFFALUSSY TO
RAISE AWARENESS FOR VETERAN SUICIDE AT THE 1ST ANNUAL
REMEMBRANCE LOVE WALK FEBRUARY 2023

Embrace the Living on Behalf of the Fallen

Love Walk
Remembrance

**“Suicide can be prevented with
the correct help.” - Jean**

Jean Uffalussy has a vision: All of Tampa Bay would come together to embrace the living on behalf of the fallen. Jean lost her son Patrick during Operation Enduring Freedom and knows how devastating it is to lose someone you love. Alongside Jean and the Gulf Coast Chapter of Gold Star Mothers, VAN's Remembrance Love Walk held on 11 February 2023 allowed Tampa Bay to unite in solidarity to remember the fallen and support the living by raising money for suicide prevention.

Patrick died tragically alongside three other Marines and their military working dog in a devastating fire in Herat while supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. *“No parent should have to bury their child,”* says Jean. *“But, if we never loved, we would never experience this loss, and I wouldn't trade the twenty-nine years I had with Patrick. I will always be grateful for those years, even though the grief will stay with me until we reunite.”*

It is difficult for people to talk about their lost loved one, explains Jean, *“This is why I feel so strongly about holding the “Remembrance Love Walk.” “People need to remember their loved ones.”*

“*They need to talk and share their stories because it helps with the grieving process.”*

Jean has joined the fight to help stop veteran suicide because she has met far too many Gold Star Mothers who have lost their children to suicide due to their military service.

“*There is enough loss in the world, and NO ONE should die by suicide.”*

Jean believes in educating the public regarding the signs of someone suffering and knowing where to go for help. She recognizes that education and access to resources are fundamental in stopping someone from following through on suicide.

The Remembrance Love Walk proceeds benefited two critical organizations on the forefront of veteran suicide prevention, Mission 22 and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Out of the Darkness program.





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\$2700 was raised to support
suicide awareness and prevention

PROGRESSIVE



PROUD OF OUR VETERANS IN



KEYS TO PROGRESS
PROGRESSIVE

Who We're Talking To

LaHarold Woodhouse

iGolf4Vets

ROOTS

I was born and raised in Memphis Tennessee with the "Grit and Grind" mindset, which helped me to become the man that I am today. Most of the time, when I go back home, it's to support the Memphis Tigers basketball-football or Memphis Grizzlies Basketball teams. When I do get back home, I spend as much time as I can with family members I love.

MILITARY HISTORY

1988 TO 1995

My service officially began in 1988, and my first duty assignment was in Germany. After a few years in Germany, Desert Storm kicked off, and I was deployed. Upon completing that tour, my unit was deactivated, and I went to Hinesville, Georgia, at Fort Stewart. After Fort Stewart came Fort Hood, and from there, I was mobilized to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

I was in Cuba in 1995 in the middle of the Cuban \ Haitian migration crisis in Miami, Florida. After returning to Fort Hood, I began to notice some leadership seemed to be moving every three to five years. I had a family by that point and didn't want that type of life for them. I craved more stability and decided to get out and go into the Reserves back in Memphis.

95'-02'

After 6 years in the Reserves and working in the civilian sector, a time came when I looked at the promotions I was receiving, without a college education, and realized there wasn't much advancement opportunity. I once again found myself looking to the Military as an answer. Back on active duty I found myself in the middle-east working at the Kuwaiti Armed Forces Hospital.

2002

My time in Kuwait, included a TDY to Afghanistan teaching local hospital staff. After that tour, I returned to my unit in West Virginia, and attended Drill Sergeant School at Ft. Jackson SC. During that time, I completed my college degree and was promoted to SFC and sent to a unit in Anniston Alabama serving as the Operations Sergeant followed by promotion to MSG with assignment to Ft. Leonardwood MO.

2016

While at Ft. Leonardwood MO, I was promoted to SGM.

"While in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, I was the Senior Enlisted Advisor for the Army Reserves with 23 thousand Soldiers under my command. We were the center for chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. When Soldiers came to Fort Leonard Wood for training, I had a direct impact on them.

My final assignment landed me in Greenville, SC as an Operation Officer.

RETIREMENT

We came straight to Tampa, Florida after my retirement. I actually wanted to live in the Dominican Republic or the Bahamas and be somewhere warm and near the water. I had recently married my second wife and we decided that my kids had just graduated high school and were starting college and really needed their dad. . We still wanted to be somewhere warm, and near water, so we focused on finding a place along the American Gulf Coast. We eventually settled in Tampa, Florida, because it was day's drive to our extended families.

TRANSITION

I have chills right now because my transition story is crazy! I knew this question would come up, and I'd have to open up about that time in my life. We are about to get to the Nitty Gritty right now. When I left the Military, it was a very hectic time. I had been successful in the Military and believed I wouldn't have a problem being successful in the civilian sector. I spent a long time planning



exactly what I would do once I left the Army.

My initial goal was to open a Tropical Smoothie franchise in Florida. I was apprehensive about the time I knew it would take to get the franchise up and running. I wanted to open the franchise in Riverview, Florida. But, at the time, Tropical Smoothie was not interested in opening a Riverview franchise.

It's funny because right about that time, Tropical Smoothie opened here in Brandon, and then another one opened in Sun City – I was like, what the heck happened to Riverview?!

When the franchise didn't work out, I felt lost and my transition downside started to hit me. I thought I had everything figured out. I even prepared a backup plan to be a JROTC Instructor. But, right about that time a local JROTC Instructor was being sued by some parents for stopping a fight at a high school. He had tried to break up the fight, but the parents were suing because he 'put his hands' on the student. I thought, oh no, that is not for me. My hat is off to any Senior JROTC Instructors. It is a fine line they have to walk in schools today.

LIFE AFTER THE ARMY

I started to do some real soul-searching. We had transitioned out of the Military, to Tampa, Florida, with no family, and from single to newly married – it all took a toll on us both.

I didn't see how this 'transition' would happen, and I ended up at a very depressed stage in my life.

All of my goals had fallen through and I was thinking, "What am I going to do now?"

I remember being at my church (Love First Christian Center). I don't remember what the sermon was about, but it just really hit me. I had contemplated suicide during this time. I was mentally and emotionally depressed. *I didn't feel like I was worth anything after leaving the military.* That day, I went up to the altar and spoke to that Minister, he asked me, *"What do you need me to pray for?"* I told him I was having suicidal thoughts and just needed prayer and strength to make it through this. That day, he prayed for me. He just prayed for me, you know.

The plans I had made for my civilian life had not worked out, and it just hit me hard. Ultimately, these experiences sparked my desire to start my non-profit to help other Veterans. I have a clear understanding that *when your mental health is not where it should be, things can spiral.* Your mental health, physical health, spiritual health, financial health, all of it – it just trickles down.

Once I realized where I was, I told myself, look, this is nobody else's fault. YOU chose to leave the Military, YOU chose to move to Florida, YOU chose to get married, and I chose all of that in the span of 3 to 4 months. When I look at someone who is successful and suicide and mental health can impact them, it can impact anybody.

SEEKING HELP

Being a Sergeant Major in the Military, I knew the programs were out there. But when you get into that stage, none of that matters. At the end of the day, you are looking at yourself as the family's male figure or role model.

The resources are out there, and most veterans know the resources



REALITIES

are out there, but it takes the veteran going to the resources themselves or having a brother to say, *"Hey, you don't look right. Let's go."* We all need a battle buddy who can recognize those triggers.

In the Military, everything is HOOAH! You gotta be tough and strong. "Don't you think about going on a sick call" was the attitude. That messed up many people in the Military because you were looked down on if you went to sick calls or reached out for help or assistance. You would have been labeled weak by your peers or Senior NCOs.

The new leaders in the Military, the community, and veteran organizations need to set the atmosphere that *'NO', what you learned in the Military was incorrect.*

Once you get emotionally broken, it is hard to rebound. Some people don't rebound, and I consider myself lucky and fortunate I was able to. A lot of people have suicidal thoughts, they come up with a plan to harm themselves, and then they take action.

You have to catch someone in the planning phase because if you don't, that's a wrap.



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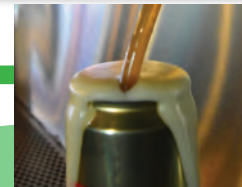


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WHEN GOLF FOUND ME

I had no interest in Golf. I did 27 years in the Military, and when I went to the Sergeant Major Academy, I quickly learned that it was the home of Golf in the Military. That is where all the enlisted bigwigs go for training. All they would do is be on the golf course. I didn't drink coffee, I didn't smoke, and I didn't play Golf, so they told me I would never make it at the Sergeant Major Academy," he says with a bellowing laugh.

Now, I play Golf, drink coffee, and smoke cigars from time to time. I'm just being genuine. How I found my love for the game of Golf is an interesting story of its own.

It was April 2021, and my wife and I pulled into a Waffle House. A man was there with his daughter; he was a Veteran. The man noticed the license plate on my car and knew I was a Veteran also. He asked if his daughter could take a photo with my car, and after, we all went inside for breakfast. I shared my business card for my

travel business, and he began telling me about a trip he coordinated that took 15 Veterans to the Dominican Republic to play Golf. His story was fascinating. We scheduled another meeting to talk about it some more. The second time we met, he told me more about what he was doing and trying to do with Golf and veterans. I told him I would love to tour the golf course in the Dominican Republic and plan an outing for 50 Veterans to go.

As it turns out, the first time I ever hit a golf ball was at Casa de Campo, in La Romana, Dominican Republic in June of 2021. Casa de Campo is where Sammy Sosa, the baseball player, and Yankee, Alex Rodriguez; all of the prestigious people hang out or have a place. It's one of the top golf courses in the world, and that is where I first tore up some greens. I mean, I literally tore up some greens. My wife had joined me on that trip, and we had a one-hour lesson with a PGA player. When the training session was over, he said, "now go out there and hit some balls." I call it, 'chasing balls' instead. I always hit the ball and then I go and try to find the ball, that is my level of Golf.

This Veteran I had met, who introduced me to Golf, wanted to do these golf trips for veterans, but needed to charge about \$1500 for each veteran to go, I knew that would be out of reach for most veterans.

I decided an alternate choice was to develop a non-profit organization for veterans and by July 2021, I had filed my 501c3 to startup my non-profit. From there, I just started practicing playing Golf, and now, I chase balls two or three times per week.

HELPING VETERANS

The first Tuesday of each month I take Veteran members to the golf course at MacDill AFB for a mini clinic and 9 to 18 holes of golf. The second Tuesday of each month, we meet at Pop Strokes, which is a mini-two putting course designed by Tiger Woods. There, we work on putting skills. On the third Tuesday, we meet at Rogers Park Golf Course. I chose that course because of its history as the first non-segregated golf course in Tampa. At Rogers Park, we practice our skills on an actual course. We round out the month with a visit to Top Golf

on the fourth Tuesday. At Top Golf, we can practice on driving and precision targetting.

I designed this process to help veterans work on their game of Golf while focusing on their mental health through camaraderie in a social setting. Each Tuesday, we spend four to five hours with each other. We learn from each other and help each other with pointers, tips, and resources. Sometimes, veterans will share their struggles with getting their disability benefits. Having worked at the Regional Benefits Office in St. Pete, I am able to give advice and suggestions to help them overcome obstacles. I have been blessed to witness new friendships develop within the program, and the great strides made by those who had suffered with mental anguish or anxiety.

CAN PEOPLE DONATE?

Absolutely, Veterans enter the program for free and proceeds donated would help support our weekly events and our scheduled tournaments throughout the year. I want to get the word out about the impact this program is having on local veterans. If we were to acquire corporate sponsorship, there is no limit to what we could accomplish. If there is a company out there who would like to support they can submit an inquiry through our website.

SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

We helped a veteran in our program suffering from a traumatic brain injury. His wife had shared that getting him out of the house was difficult; he didn't like to be around people. His work with iGolf4Vets has helped get him out of his shell. Another guy, retired Military, was spending his days drinking while his wife was at work. He is the reason I started the weekly events to get him out of the house once a week. His wife loves our program and is grateful her husband has a new outlet.

I am starting to help, change, and impact other veterans' lives. At the end of the day, that makes me feel like what I'm doing is a great cause and thriving. I can now help others and do it all from the heart

In my mind, I go back to that day at the altar when I asked for prayer. I see today, that with God's help, I have found my purpose on earth to help other veterans with mental health disabilities.





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Who is Oplign?



*We sat with
Oplign Founder
Brian Halstead
to learn about
Oplign, its origin,
its intent, and
its magic.*

There are four owners of Oplign, all veterans who had never worked together but were in the same industry. They like to say the word frenemies was designed for the government services. One day you are competing, chasing a big government contract, and the next day you are teammates.

"The four of us had never worked together, but we always dealt with the same problem," says Brian, co-founder of Oplign. "As a senior leader, I needed to get the right people to the right place at the right time, and so did they."

Brian and the team at Oplign don't want to bad-mouth HR (Human Resources), but understanding SHRM (Society for Human Resources Management) is essential to understand the enormity of Oplign's impact on the job market. "If you are connected in any way to HR, SHRM is your bible."

According to SHRM, 92% of people who visit a website intending to apply for a

job will abandon the website because they find the process for applying too difficult.

"Traditional HR systems want you to upload your resume, then chop up your resume and put one or two sentences at each one of these forty or fifty cells here and there, and then, oh by the way, join my talent community, and then, and then... it just doesn't work." Brian explains.

The Oplign Founders had tossed around the basic principles of Oplign a few years back but, back then, "a super-computer would have been needed to develop and run the software," he explains.

Brian says, "When AWS (Amazon Web Services) came out, and you could basically buy or rent computing power on the cheap and you didn't have to write the patch code, we all stopped what we were doing, looked at each other, and said, 'Okay, we can make this work.'"

The team spent about a year on their

laptops building a link association matrix. "Once we created the underlying schema and taxonomy of what became Oplign by hand on these computers, our study began to reveal patterns," shares Brian. "For example, you need an Accountant? Well, it doesn't really matter if they currently work at a restaurant, at Wells Fargo, or for the Federal Government. Around the world, criteria for a certified accountant position are the same: Are you a Certified Public Accountant? Do you understand GAP Principles? Do you have a four-year degree?"

Part of the taxonomy and schema study required the Oplign team to deconstruct why no one else was already doing this. They began the root cause analysis. "We had to go really far down the rabbit hole. Once we got down that hole, we started building a solution."

"It was just as long walking out of that dark hole as it was digging down into it," he exclaims, "When we had it all fig-

ured out and had come up with a viable solution, we knew it could only work if it was fully automated and none of us were code guys.”

After completing the initial taxonomy and schema, the Oplign team went to Silicon Valley to pitch their idea. “At first, we weren’t taken seriously,” he says, “but soon, when it was evident

what we were doing and that nobody else in the world was doing it, we became recognized as a multi-billion dollar idea.”

Oplign’s efforts in the valley resulted in a meeting with a code guru, a very high-powered Silicon Valley code guru whom they asked to take a look at their product. “When he got back to us,” says Brian, “he told us, ‘not only is this going to work, I want in.’” Thus, he became Oplign’s CTO (Chief Technology Officer).

When Oplign was ready to launch, they approached the wizards at AWS. “You know Amazon is more than just a product delivery service. Amazon manages more terabytes of information than anyone else in the world,” shares Brian, “They are the largest software company in the world. Let that sink in. They manage data for just about every alphabet soup in Washington, D.C.” Amazon had a need and

Oplign recognized it and proved their ML (machine learning) was a crucial missing piece in Amazon’s hiring processes. “So, if Amazon wants to hire a software engineer that writes three different types of languages and has a top-secret security clearance, they tap Oplign for that resource,” says Brian.

“Currently, nearly 100% of people with TS or above clearance make their way to Amazon through Oplign”

From that initial meeting, AWS became one of Oplign’s first actual customers. Meetings and well planned exposure quickly grew the company. “One of my business partners, a Marine, was at a big convention and literally ran into one of the senior guys from Verizon in charge of Veteran hiring,” says Brian, “After sharing the Oplign concept with him and after some fine-tuning to match their industry needs, Verizon became one of our first customers also.”

Oplign was formally founded in 2017 but the actual launch came later in late 2019. When most companies were dealing with the devastating impacts of 2020’s COVID epidemic, the Oplign team jumped to the front lines. “COVID worked in our favor,” he

explains, “there were many people in the first year of Covid, a lot of decision-makers sitting around with time on their hands, and man, we burned up the phone lines and got in front of a lot of people during that first year.”

Cold calls and Zoom meetings are how the team sealed up a lot of big companies like Amazon, Wells Fargo, and USAA in 2020. “In a typical business environment outside of COVID, we would have had a more challenging time getting in front of important people,” says Brian. The founders boast that Oplign sells itself, and that everyone who sees it falls in love with it. The only resistance they have had to deal with is from senior HR people who have become comfortable in the antiquated ways of managing human resource department objectives.

“Most HR folks,” says Brian, “believe their job as a recruiter is to gather as many resumes as possible, then do a boolean word search and kick those up to the hiring manager where the hiring manager then weeds through them again and kicks them up to the PM, who’s in charge of hiring.”

Continued Next Page

military

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"But that isn't really the job," he states. "The HR Department's job is to close demand as quickly as possible. If a position is open within a company, the job is to close that demand quickly."

According to Brian, there are two basic employment models; one is the government sector model, whether city, county, state, or federal, they are basically 'butts in seats' because the federal government **buys everything** because they **don't make anything**. Brian goes on to say, "If they need a ballpoint pen or a B2 Bomber, they need to contract it out, and every day they don't have that contract filled is a day they can't bill for it."

The other model being the private sector, they decide that although there is an increased cost with hiring another person, the increased profitability based on the position's increased production is worth it. "Every day they don't fill that position, they lose out on the downstream profitability."

Oplign has found that, historically, it takes about 96 to 126 days for a position to start from the point of the initial demand signal. 30 days of that is the onboarding process for a new hire, and Oplign can't fix that, but **Oplign can take the other 100 days and turn it into 10 or 15 seconds.**

"SHRM has a 92% failure rate, and at Oplign and Vetlign, we have a 98% success rate," says Brian.

"At Oplign an applicant doesn't have to research the job they are after and then tailor their resume to it. They don't have to create 15 versions of their resume because they want to apply for 15 different positions. None of that," he shares. The Oplign software is efficient. The ML asks the applicant a couple of questions that are auto generated by the ML (machine learning). "The initial questions get you into a range," explains Brian, "after that initial interaction with the program it understands how you've answered, matches you within an industry and recognizes that industry, as a whole, wants the answer to the following 30 or 40 questions. So, the machine creates the second questionnaire."

You can do all of this on your phone, and creating a profile takes about two minutes. "The machine doesn't care if you like to take long walks on the beach, but the industry doesn't, either," says Brian, "the data collection is strictly hard skills to determine if a person has the required degree, the number of years of experience required, the certifications required, and so on. Now, the hiring manager has three to five high-quality profiles to review instead of a hundred resumes."

For veterans, more specifically, Vetlign is changing veteran lives. When asked if Oplign could be an official part of the future transition process in the military, Brian explains, "TAP (Transition Assistance Program) offered by the military is about ensuring all military information and data are closed out correctly and in a manner most beneficial to a service member when they transition from the military. Is your SGLI going to go with you? Is your Tri-care going to go with you? The DOD wants to ensure that the people leaving the military benefit optimally from what they have earned. The other colossal half of TAP is about getting jobs. At least half of TAP is about getting a job. How to write a resume, interview, search for jobs, and everything else. Some guy will get up in the class and talk about how to present yourself at an interview. That you should wear a button-up shirt."

"Let me tell you something, nobody needs to be told to dress nice and comb their hair for an interview. It's a waste of everyone's time. What a veteran needs to know is, where are the jobs I'm qualified for?" That is what Vetlign is. **"It is a crucial missing key to the TAP program."** explains Brian, "all I have to tell transitioning veterans is to take their phones out because, in the next five minutes, I will get each and every one of you a job."

"I guarantee I can align you to a job where your (military) skills match those described in the job description."

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Jobs for Veterans

Vetlign, Oplign's Veteran Alignment Engine

The most advanced job tool available to Vets and Transitioning Military. Oplign understands veterans like no other system in the world. Oplign's algorithms update daily. As new skills emerge in the workforce, Oplign makes the connection.



Jobs for Spouses

Vetlign's Military Spouse Alignment Tool

Military spouses bring unique perspectives, skills, are flexible, and committed employees. Oplign's military spouse alignment tool helps to match these unique characteristics with skills in the workforce.



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Gradlign, The New Graduate Breakthrough

Oplign shows new graduates their aligned opportunities. Oplign begins with your educational major, then zeros in on full and part-time entry-level opportunities including internships. Oplign uses the power of big data to provide complete market awareness.

VETERAN VOICES

LATORA | STEVE | LAHAROLD | RICH | DAMON

LATORA

*"I WAS PUT ON HOLD
FOR 15 MINUTES. DO
YOU KNOW WHAT COULD
HAPPEN IN 15
MINUTES?"*

LAHAROLD

*"I WAS A SERGEANT MAJOR,
I KNEW THE PROGRAMS
WERE THERE. BUT, NONE OF
THAT MATTERED"*

DAMON

AIR FORCE | MARINE

*"WE HAVE TO EMBRACE
OUR DIFFERENCES"*

There can be a room full of PhDs trying to understand the causes of veteran suicide. Their collective knowledge and analysis are crucial, but they lack the experience and the feeling of living in the dark. What happens when you have five veterans, all of whom have very different backgrounds and military experiences sharing their stories? Enlightenment. Having all walked through that darkness and battled their demons, these five veterans help answer the question; as a nation, are we doing what it takes to stop veteran suicide?

Meet Latora, LaHarold, Steve, Damon, and Rich, five veterans.

Five people, your neighbors.

Latora: In a nutshell, I feel like everyone in the military has a discerning spirit; we know good people from bad. We know BS. If we see sincerity and true love, we will venture more toward that help. At the end of the day, we are not a number; we are people. When we look at all these organizations starting programs to help veterans, we wonder, *are you just money hungry, or are you sincerely trying to help us?* I remember thinking about those things when I was going through my issues. I tried the National Suicide Hotline, and they put me on hold for 15 minutes. Do you realize what could have happened in 15 minutes? Even in 2 minutes? They were like, 'please hold.'

*Military folks have
their community, and
when they are removed
from that through
transition, it is es-
sential to reestablish
a sense of community
in their civilian life.
The civilian community
needs to understand
Veterans and learn how
to help.*

Damon: People are so focused on division, what divides us and not enough of us really look at what unites us and what makes us similar. We have to embrace our differences.

Steve: There is a real need for community suicide awareness to effect suicide prevention. All people, not just military people, need identity and purpose. To get up and get dressed, you need identity and purpose.

Latora: There have been many times when I was just on the brink, and many times, someone, usually a complete stranger, would embrace me and tell me it's going to be okay. Just random runs with someone who saved me. When the struggle gets real enough, we understand to take what we need from a situation.

The Civilian: All three of you have personally dealt with debilitating thoughts of suicide. During those times, did you feel like you were the only one even though you heard about '22 a day?

Latora: I didn't feel that way, but I did feel *no one understood on the level.* Everyone has different things they have gone through. I had a tough upbringing, and I've been around the world. I have done a lot, and I've seen a lot.

LaHarold: especially being a woman in the military. I can attest to that. I've seen what women go through in the military. Women in the military, I take my hat off to them.

Steve: The point is being heard. Where can you find the right place to be heard? Whom can I tell? When and how do you reach a point when

JUST

STEVE

*"EVERYONE NEEDS
IDENTITY AND
PURPOSE"*

RICH

*"I'M GETTING HELP AND
I'M FEELING MUCH
BETTER"*

you want to talk about it?

Latora: I grew up in a religious family and have always had God at the center of my life. But, amid those suicidal thoughts, *it's not that I lost faith in God; I lost faith in humanity and felt like the world lacked genuine people.*

LaHarold: I found what I needed in my church. When I was lost and unsure of my place in this world, finding someone to pray for me pulled me through honestly. I know that it is hard to return once you are broken. *We need each other also, and we need people watching out for us who recognize when things are not okay.*

Latora: Leaving the military, you go from being around people with the same purpose. Out here, you have people battling for jobs and positions. In the military, if I'm an E3 and a cook, and you are an E3, but you are a lawyer, we still get the same pay. It doesn't matter what your profession is. It only matters who you are as a person; when you get out, you lose that level playing field. Out here, you don't know who that work friend is or how they think about you. You don't know if they are jealous because you were able to buy a house with no money down. After all, in the military, it doesn't matter; we all get the VA Loan. We all get the same things. We didn't experience that type of competition in the military. That was the hardest for me, losing the loyalty.

Steve: If people could ever get to the point where they genuinely understood how to show love and respect, veterans would be more likely to open up.

Latora: Nobody wants to feel like they're just laying on a couch

LISTEN HAND ↑ YOU MIGHT HEAR

spilling their guts and looking crazy, you know?

Steve: It's true; no one wants to be told they are all screwed up.

Rich: When I left the military, *I had no clue what was out there, so I didn't get a lot of help.* It hasn't been until the past five years or so that I've realized my personal PTSD and TBI, and I'm getting help for it, and I'm feeling much better. I've apologized to my wife, our family, and our friends. Even my ex-wife because I realized I was an asshole. I wasn't in control of it, but I learned these things affected me and caused me to be not a good person. I'm not afraid to say it; if my saying it will help one person get up and admit it and seek help, I am all about that. It's nothing to be ashamed of. It's just the experience you had, and it affected you one way or another, and trust me, I'm not anywhere near what a lot of guys are going through. Maybe to the average person, I am screwed up, but comparing myself to other military folks who have PTSD or TBI is much worse than I do 'there, but by the grace of God' God bless them for what they go through.



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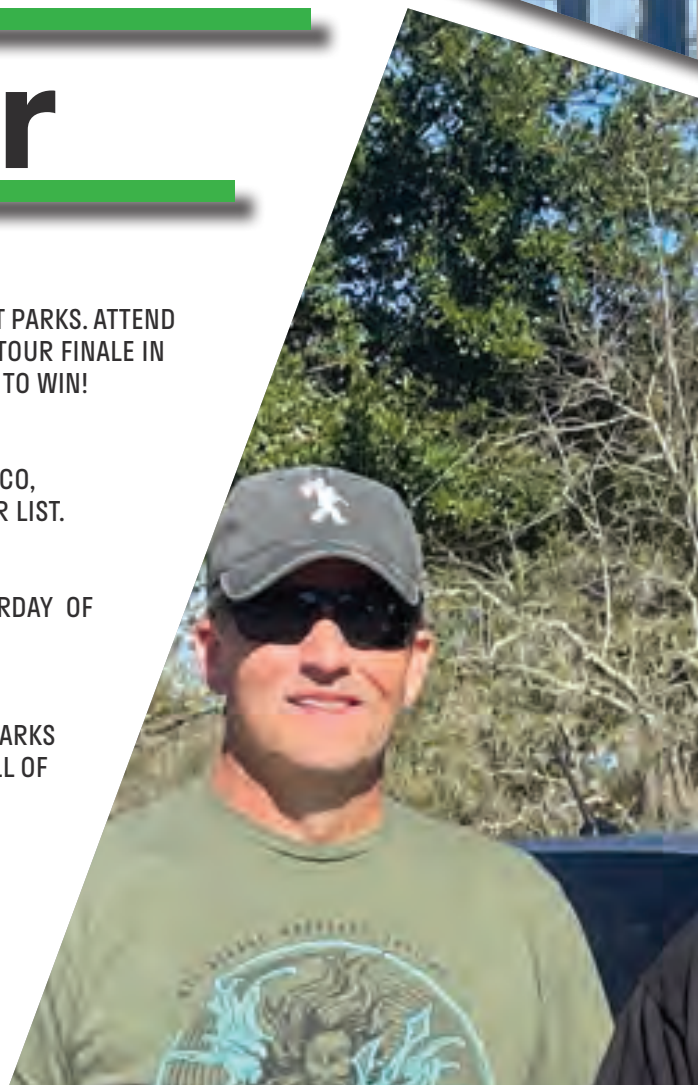
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Training Exercise GONE BAD

**Tell VAN
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VANeditor@VanStationMagazine.com

I was part of a Chase Team, the first to go out of the aircraft as we jumped into Honduras. We had a full-size bulldozer on the back of a brand new C-141. We are pushing this thing out, and as soon as it exits the aircraft, the aircraft jumps about 30-feet.

We all get knocked to our knees, bottoms, and faces. We stagger up and attempt to crawl out and follow this thing out - we are the 'Chae Team' and we are supposed to "Chase the Bundle". The bird makes another loop and below is this great big open field. Another 100 or so jump out behind us. Well, it didn't work. Once we get to the ground, the giant bulldozer looks like a giant piece of modern art. The only thing sticking up out of the earth is this twisted blade. We begin our journey to the "Target" which is a tiny village meant to simulate a national capital. We walk through giant blades of sawgrass, and after a mile or two, our uniforms are just rags, and everyone is all sliced up. The tall sawgrass opens up to regular grass and we all begin hopping over a 3 or 4 foot wide stream, easy to hop over. I'm watching everyone hop, but this one guy, you can tell he is just too tired; he steps into the stream, and disappears. It took about 4 or 5 seconds for my brain to figure out, "Oh Shit! Prez just..." I ditch my rucksack, ditch my LBE, and start running. I'm going to go down the hole and get Prez. As I get near, Prez, his name was Adrian Perez, a great guy, manages to push off the bottom of what turns out to be an eight or ten foot hole and get out. When I get to him, he has this hundred-pound backpack on, his LBE, and is still holding on to his weapon screaming, "It's -----Deep!, It's-----Deep!, It's -----Deep!"



The Presidential Pardon AT WEST POINT

When I was a freshman, my best friend from high school came to the Academy to visit because we weren't allowed to leave. It was late fall and he had brought some booze with him. He & I plus another Cadet went out to one of the soccer fields and got drunk, which was against the rules obviously. My classmate and

I stumbled back to the barracks and were caught by an upperclassman, big mistake! The punishment for being drunk was what they called a 25-66-3. This consisted of 25 demerits (you were only allowed around 35 I think for the entire year), 66-hours of walking punishment tours in full uniform with your weapon marching back and forth every weekend until you completed the 66-hours, and 3-months of weekend confinement to your room. About a week later, President Nixon came to visit the Academy and anytime any Head of State came to the Academy they had the ability to grant amnesty. So, there we are, 4000 cadets in the mess hall with the President and his people. The Cadet Adjutant gets up, introduces the President, and he gives his speech. Now, typically, at the end of the speech is when the President grants amnesty. Instead, the President finishes his speech and sits down. All you heard was a 4000 person collective groan. The mic was still on and we heard the Adjutant say, "Mr. President, did you forget something?", the President says, "Oh, Oh yeah....Publish the Order!". The place erupted. I jumped up, everyone is cheering and yelling, and I run up to the President as he was leaving and grab his hand saying, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!". His Secret Service Agents ushered me away. But I was so happy! The President said, "Your welcome"



Photo Credit Richard Nixon Foundation

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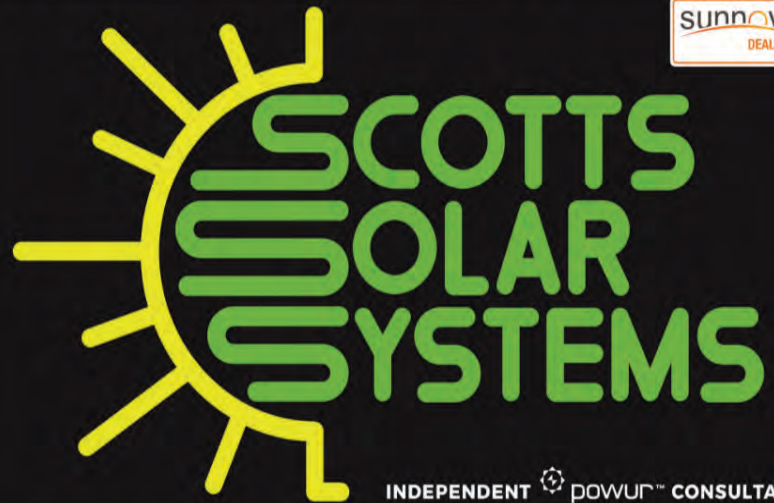
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The Wrong Stuff AT THE RIGHT TIME

When I went to join the military in 1968, I was going to join the Army and be a Green Beret. The Army recruiter squashed my childhood dream, stomped it like I was a bug under his boot. Turns out, I was too young and didn't meet the requirements to be a Green Beret. As I was leaving the recruitment center, an Air Force Recruiter approached me and said, "The Air Force has something even better than a Green Beret." I said, "Oh yeah, what's that?"

"Air Commandos," he says. I asked him how old do you have to be for that and he said, "you're old enough now." I took the test and signed up, and after basic training at

Lackland AFB, I was told to pick three 'wishlist' places to go. I reminded them

that I wanted to be an Air Commando, but they said I had to put three on the list. I reluctantly added weapons and munitions to the list. When

basic training was over, they called us all in to a room. I hear, "Okay Smits, you're going to munition school." I said, "wait a minute, what happened

to Air Commandos?" He says, "they don't have any openings." Great. That was the only reason I had joined the Air Force. When I got to Vietnam I was

doing some training with the Security Police when a guy comes around trying to recruit for the Air Commandos. I quickly volunteered along with

a couple of my buddies. About six-months in, our team was shot up pretty bad and most of the team was gone. The Colonel pulled me aside and

asked what I wanted to do. He said I had two choices; I could get another team or go back to munitions. I knew I didn't want to do that. He says,

"Oh, there is this other thing called SOG, Special Observation Group. It's the elites of the elites." In the end, what should have taken years of time and training

to qualify for, I simply walked in to. I beat the system.



by Ken Smits **Without Glory**

I watch the lone shadowy figure clad in black garments cross the third fence. He's less than thirty-five feet from our position. He has now entered our kill zone according to the guidelines from Control. "Waste him," Sergeant Adams whispers. "What?" I flinch, turning towards him. "Why me?" I freeze, my mind suddenly blank. Sergeant Adam's sarcastic whisper rings in my ears, "Cause it's your turn, Newbee."

Looking down through the aiming sights of my M16 assault rifle at a target is nothing new. I've spent countless hours on the firing range. I must have 'blown away' a thousand or more targets, but this is different. This is a living, breathing human being with dreams the same as mine. I try to think of the steps to take when firing. All I can remember is: 'Sight on dead-center mass, breathe, and squeeze.' Or is it 'squeeze, and breathe?' It's all jumbled up in my head. This target is not simulated.

It is flesh and blood. I continue to track him through my rifle sight, attentively following every move the man makes. He's being cautious-stopping; standing still for what seems to be an eternity. Then he moves again. After a few steps, he stands motionless again. Only his eyes move, scanning left, right and then forward. The VC never looks up towards us. What's he thinking? Doesn't he see the tower silhouetted in the moonlight? Or its dark black shadow cast on the gray damp ground at his feet? Does he not know someone is sighting him in, like a lamb led to slaughter?

Someone intends to end his life tonight. What does he think he's going to do before this night is over? Does he know he'll die tonight? Does he have a wife, kids, or family? He must have a mother. Everyone has a mother. Is he thinking of her?

My heart pounds uncontrollably. It feels as if it's going to jump right through my chest! I know Sergeant Adams and the VC can hear my heart pounding. It sounds like a drum in my ears. Why doesn't he look up?

Why doesn't he run away? I can always kill someone else, later. I don't need to kill tonight. Not tonight!

'Run you son of a bitch! Please run away, pl-ee-ase, do it now,'


Am I sweating because of fear or has it started raining again? Can Sergeant Adams see that I'm unsteady? Or, perhaps afraid? Am I being still? Has the breeze picked up or am I shaking? 'Please run away, little yellow man! Go to your family, now before it's too late for both of us. God, please....oh please make him run away!'

The VC is now less than twenty-five feet from the tower. I'm practically looking straight down on him. I have to lean over the edge of the rail to see him. I tell myself, 'think, think, think, damn-it! Think! Come on, asshole, see the legs of the tower?? Your enemy is up here with guns!'

My hands tremble, by body shudders, my mouth is dry like I've been sucking on cotton balls. Yet, it is filled with the coppery taste of panic.

I hear voices—my voice—inside my head. 'God, please, steady me and give me the courage to pull the trigger.' I hope I'm thinking and not mumbling out loud. I can't think logically; twisted thoughts jumble together. I'm asking God to help me kill. Somehow that doesn't make sense to me. However,





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The Tower

God does love his soldiers. Someone told me that once. "C'mon, shoot the bastard, Smits!" Sergeant Adams voice rings in my ear. It sounds like he is screaming at me, but the VC on the ground STILL does not look up.

"Pull the damn trigger and waste him before he sees us," Sergeant Adams urges me on.

"Now, Newbee! Do it now!"

Suddenly fear strikes again. It's a different feeling like an angry outburst in my head. What if he has a friend watching me? A VC Sniper prepared to put a round between my eyes if it appears I'm ready to fire on his friend? That could be why the VC hasn't looked up at us. While Sergeant Adams and I have been watching him, someone else could've been sneaking into place right under our noses.

The other enemy soldier could have me in his sights right this second. I could be the dead one in the flicker of an eye. I hope Sergeant Adams has been searching the area for the other VC. I cannot take my eyes off my target, my living, breathing target for fear he'll look up at that very second, and kill me. Too many things going on in my mind at the same time and none of them make sense. Damn!

The front blade of my M16 is centered on his chest. I take up the slack on the trigger, 'Whack!'. A single explosion from my rifle breaks the silence, startling me. The yellow-white fireball that has erupted from the recoiling barrel immediately in front of my intently focused eyes has temporarily destroyed my night vision. The slight kick in my shoulder jars me back to reality, or ushers me deeper towards insanity. My mind cannot distinguish the difference. "Breathe-damnit, breathe, breathe, breathe!" I command myself.

Sergeant Adams' voice splinters the haze yelling, "Yes, damn good shot, newbee! What took you so long? He almost crawled up our ass." He slaps me on the back. "Go check the body, Deadeye. I'll notify Control. Hot damn, KIA!" His voice is filled with cheerfulness as if I just hit the ball over the fence in the bottom of the ninth with two outs.

The descent down the staircase feels like five hundred feet instead of fifty. The twenty-five feet to the corpse feels like a mile. I point my rifle at the figure of a man. Standing above the body, I realize it no longer resembles a man, because, it's not. It's death....real death...not play death like in the movies.

I kneel on one knee next to the lifeless VC. The stillness is frightening. Thick, red liquid saturates his clothing and the ground around him.

I flop down just inches from him, the damp ground penetrating my pants soaking my bottom as I stare helplessly at the corpse. A short time ago, this was a living,, breathing person, no one special to the world. He was just a man, like me.



VETERAN SUICIDE: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Article by Toni Hedstrom

REALITY.

A 20-passenger minibus full of local veterans crashed today, killing all – Imagine hearing that on the news every day. The public would demand to know why the buses have crashed, who is at fault, and how we fix it. When it comes to veteran suicide, we lack a definitive answer to these questions, so we continue to explore, question, and wonder what the hell is going on.

PROGRAMMING.

Military and civilians are wired differently, and the U.S. Government accomplished this purposefully. It takes a mindset most of us cannot even imagine doing the things expected of our service members, especially in war-time. Joining the military involves an indoctrination process. Marine Adam Gornall explains in his article, How I Deprogrammed From The Military, that to take a person and transform them into someone who will be “fit and ready to engage with the enemy,” they must “undergo a systematic reprogramming of the mind.”

Once a person enters the military, they attend basic training, essentially collective programming of the mind and body. In a study published in the *European Journal of Psychology*, researcher Phillippa Lally found on average, it takes more than two months before a new behavior becomes automatic – 66 days, to be exact. Basic training across service branches ranges from 8 weeks to 13 weeks. Coincidence?

If you are someone, a civilian someone, and you have a veteran in your life, whether it be a friend, family member, or spouse, you have likely heard the canned response to any military-related inquiry, “You wouldn’t understand.” The truth is, civilians won’t understand; they could never understand. Civilians lack the programming to understand. In author Kayt Sukel’s article for the

Dana Foundation, How Military Service Changes the Brain, Sukel references findings from the 2017 Neuroscience press conference chaired by Colonel Deborah Whitmer, commander at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, where studies are focused on military service affects on brain health. Kayt writes, “Soldiers may experience a variety of different blast exposures during their service, both in combat and during training.” In addition, Alaa Kamnakhsh, a researcher at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Denes Agoston’s laboratory, says that most soldiers are exposed to five to twenty blasts on average – just during training.

Service members have been programmed and exposed to potential brain injury when they have completed basic training. In an article titled, Psychological Effects of Military Training, Banyan Treatment Centers argues, “...the psychological effects of military training alter the personality, emotional stability, and social function of the individual”. Banyan says, “The military can either change your perspective and morality in a positive way, granting you the opportunities to handle a situation in numerous

efforts, or negatively impact your mentality, which may alter your personality to display vulnerability, aggression, and paranoia.”

Do these opinions argue that civilians are okay and military folks are all screwed up? No, civilians have their issues to overcome. However, there is no denying the military experience is unique, challenging, and difficult to detach from.

Research led by Washington University in St. Louis suggests that military service, even without combat, has a subtle lingering effect on a person’s (sic) personality. Joshua J. Jackson, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology in Arts & Sciences, shares, “it’s (military service) one of the few situations in life where an individual’s daily actions and expectations are completely controlled by someone else. From the moment you wake up in the morning until you go to bed at night, someone is actively working to break down anything individual about you and build something in its place.”

1172244

PTSD

TRANSITIONING.

Now imagine it is over. Everything you have been programmed to do, think, and feel is gone. The incredible mind shock of reintegration into civilian society is exacerbated by the loss of community and social support of like-minded people. I've spoken recently to three veterans and asked them the same question, "How did you feel when you left the military?". Two of these veterans were officers with a rank of LTC or higher, and one was an enlisted soldier. All three of these veterans had served over 20 years in the military. The two officers described the transition to civilian life as "easy" and "uneventful" because they retired in the same town they lived and took contractor or GS (Government Employee) jobs which allowed them to remain in the same military environment. One described the transition as "going to the same job in different clothes." In contrast, the enlisted soldier left the military, moved to a new state lacking a support structure, entered a new marriage, and found out the career he had planned for would not work out. "This," he says, "took a toll and left me in a dark place where I found myself contemplating suicide." Having been isolated with no sense of identity, purpose, or community, he found himself in a real battle for his life. These feelings of isolation and disassociation are core issues related to veteran suicide.

THE NUMBERS.

The Veteran Administration has made preventing suicide among all veterans a top priority. The 2022 National Veterans Suicide Prevention Annual Report shows a decrease in veteran suicide in 2020 for the second year in a row and that fewer veterans died by suicide in 2020 than in any year since 2006. Is there a correlation to the COVID pandemic of 2020, when everything from colds and flu to back pain was blamed on the pandemic? I say this because in a contradictory story published that very same month and just days before the Veterans Administration report, Leo Shane III's article in Military Times reports veterans' suicide rate may be double federal estimates. The article points out the discrepancy exists because of undercounting related to drug overdose deaths and service record errors. Does anybody know the actual number of veterans we lose to suicide? Shane states, "...officials from America's Warrior Partnership, in a joint study with the University of Alabama and Duke University, reviewed census death data from 2014 to 2018 for eight states and found thousands of cases of suspected or confirmed suicides not included in federal calculations." He goes on to point out, "if those figures were to be repeated across the other states, it would push the veteran's suicide rate from 17 individuals a day (the official estimate released by the Department of Veterans Affairs last year) to 44 veterans per day.

Most of us have heard "22 a Day," which represents the loss of 22 veterans per day to suicide. According to Wes O'Donnell, managing editor at InMilitary.com and a veteran, "The problem is that the number 22 is built on a false narrative." He explains, "...this number is based on a Veteran Affairs report in 2012 using numbers reported from only 21 States from 1999 through 2011, representing only 40% of the U.S. Population." Wes states, "The other states, including those with massive veteran communities, like California and Texas, don't report suicides to the VA." Wes says,

"...we should be using the number '22' as a starting point or bare minimum."



CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



VETERAN SUICIDE WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

This article does not contain a solution to veteran suicide. It does, however, propose a new kind of community involvement that allows us to **come together (civilian and military) to save the lives of our neighbors**. Mission Daybreak, a program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, is searching for grassroots involvement and problem-solving.

The VA has created a \$20 Million grand challenge through Mission Daybreak to reduce Veteran Suicide. The VA called on innovators to develop suicide prevention solutions that could meet the diverse needs of veterans. The Goal: **transform how our nation addresses suicide by engaging veterans, community-based organizations, health tech companies, startups, and universities that are not traditionally engaged in suicide prevention**.

The community (not clinical) involvement of the actual service members who are struggling with suicide is a crucial component in identifying the problems that lead to suicide. Mission Daybreak awarded **\$250,000 to 30 finalists** and **\$100,000 to 10 'Promise Award' recipients** for a total of 8.5 million in funding in the challenge's Phase 1. Phase 2 will award **3 million dollars to two first-place winners**, with **three second-place winners receiving 1 million** and **five third-place winners receiving \$500,000 each**.

Identity, purpose, and camaraderie are significant influences on veteran suicide. With good intentions, some popular veteran and civilian groups create segregation. We need to grow Community Connectedness which can foster interactions with friends, family, neighbors, peer

groups, and community organizations, suggest the Rural Health Information Hub.

The RHlhub lists initiatives to reach connectedness as **support groups, community-wide events, mentoring, and buddy programs**. Initiatives can include expanding volunteer opportunities to increase social interaction and instill a sense of purpose, worth, and accomplishment while giving back to the community. **For veteran identity and purpose, a community must provide opportunity and inclusion**. Employers must learn to align military experience with their job requirements (see our story on Oplign & Vetlign).

For camaraderie, no matter how much community we give veterans, they still need a place they call their own. VFWs and American Legions have historically been that place, but with post-9/11 veterans, there may be a need for a more modern and inclusive place for families.

No matter what, it is a process to build collaboration and a sense of community for our veterans. We can start by joining forces with all the incredible organizations working toward these goals. VAN has found you can name a veteran need, and there is likely an organization out there that can help. What's best is these organizations offer alternatives to clinics and hospitals. They provide a real opportunity for friendship, support, and the camaraderie needed to battle feelings of isolation and disassociation. Our mission at VAN is to bring together a network of these organizations that can work together, support each other, and reach a larger population of veterans with different interests, hobbies, and ideals.

The Rabbi, Priest & Two Preachers



Photo Credit Army.mil

There's a Rabbi, Priest and two Preachers that changed the lives of 230 young men along with an untold number of their family members in less time than it takes to drink a cup of coffee.

No joke, once you complete this article, you'll feel a responsibility to share the story, teach our children and youth about these events and sacrifices. They will understand what selfless service on behalf of others can accomplish.

Imagine traveling on an older cruise ship designed for 314 passengers, converted to a 751-passenger troop transport, with 902 on board. Add in rough seas in cramped quarters with a large percentage of seasick passengers. All that is bad enough. Now add traveling in the North Atlantic during a brutal season with icy winds and freezing temperatures. Massive ice is weighing the ship down to 10 knots. Plus, it's

WWII. Imagine, Feb. 3, 1943, on The USAT Dorchester traveling in the sea lanes known for German U-boat attacks on any ship in their sight.

There had been an earlier sighting of an enemy periscope. The order was given to sleep in your clothes with a life jacket on. Some of the men sleeping below deck in the hot noisy engine room disregarded that order.

There were four Chaplains on board. The oldest **Chaplain Fox**, Methodist Minister married with 2 children, and a veteran of WWI. **Chaplin Goode**, who served as Rabbi in York, PA Synagogue and was an outstanding scholar and athlete. **Chaplin Poling**, the youngest chaplain and the seventh generation of Dutch Reform Ministers in his family.

Chaplin Washington, one of nine children born to an Irish immigrant family, with a beautiful voice and who loved music. He grew up as a member of the 12th Street Gang in Newark, NJ. when called into the priesthood. He served the boys he grew up with and went with his boys into the Army.

The chaplains moved throughout the ship talking, praying and joking while consoling the troops, with only 150 miles from their destination.

On Feb. 3rd, at 12:55am a periscope broke the Atlantic waters. Through the cross hair, an officer aboard the German U-boat 233 spotted the Dorchester. The order was given to fire a fan of three torpedoes at the Dorchester. The one that hit was decisive and deadly, striking the starboard side, amidship, far below the water line. Tragically, the hit had knocked out power and radio contact with the three escort ships.

Captain Danielsen ordered abandon ship, in fewer than 20 minutes the Dorchester would slip beneath the icy waters of the Atlantic.

Aboard Dorchester, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men, and many more were seriously wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion, were groping in darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside, where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then the knowledge that death awaited. Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, overcrowding them to the point of capsizing, according to eyewitnesses. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get into them.

In the midst of the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army

chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness. They tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded, and guide the disoriented toward safety.

"Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live," said Wyatt Fox, son of Reverend Fox. One witness, Pvt. William Bednar, found himself floating in oil-smeared water surrounded by dead bodies and debris.

"I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," Bednar recalled. "I could also hear the chaplain's preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

A sailor, Petty Officer John Mahoney, tried to re-enter his cabin but was stopped by Rabbi Goode. Concerned about the cold Arctic air, Mahoney explained that he'd forgotten his gloves. **"Never mind,"** Goode responded. **"I have two pairs."** The rabbi then gave the petty officer his own gloves. Later, Mahoney realized that Goode hadn't been carrying two pairs of gloves, and that the chaplain had decided not to leave Dorchester.

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. It was then that engineer Grady Clark witnessed an astonishing sight.

When there were no more life jackets to hand out, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men.

Rabbi Goode did not call out for a Jew, and Father Washington did not call out for a Catholic. Nor did Rev. Fox and Rev.

See Four Chaplains Page 42

Richard Corson Forever Green Beret



In the military they say, if you aren't early you're late. So, we were not surprised to find Rich Corson settled in his seat, waiting for us to arrive for his interview. His ability to look half his actual years has motivated us to dig deep and find out what drives Corson, what keeps him healthy, happy, and motivated.

WEST POINT EXPERIENCE

Through laughter, Corson states, "West Point is not a 'college experience'. You were "locked in" the entire first year. You couldn't leave the Academy, not even on the weekends, except for school-related activities. I believe this has loosened up some since I attended. You go to class five and a half days per week, and when classes are over, you must participate in either intramural or intercollegiate sports. There are controlled times when you get up, when you go to bed, it is an extremely disciplined, and academically and physically challenging system.

WEST POINT GRADUATE DIFFERENCE

What makes West Point Graduates different from others who enter the military is primarily the discipline and work ethic ingrained in you over 4 years. West Point graduates are neither better nor worse than any other source of commissioning, we are just different. Our experiences are different. We did not have the freedom of socializing weeknights or on the weekends in the way a regular college does. The flipside to that is we were absolute social zeroes. We didn't really know how to interact socially in a relaxed atmosphere. We know how to act formally and in formal situations. The Academy emphasizes posture constantly, which results in us carrying ourselves erect, with a head up look them in the eye attitude. These factors can come across to some as arrogant in a regular social situation. Getting out into a regular college atmosphere felt uncomfortable at times because it was so foreign to you. The difference really comes to light when out in the civilian workspace.

OVERCOMING

The only way to overcome all of that is through trial, error, and life experience. You have to get out and experience life, which can be more challenging for some. You realize quickly that the civilian and military worlds are quite different. Each one does not understand the other, and you try fit in the best you can. Even in the military itself, coming out of West Point and into my first day reporting to duty in the Army, my Company Commander says, "I hate West Pointers." Obviously, I had to overcome that and show him my capabilities.

AROUND THE WORLD

After Airborne and Ranger Schools, I began my career at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, then went to the Infantry Advanced Course at Fort Benning. Following that I headed to Ft. Bragg, attended the Special Forces Qualification Course, and became Green Beret qualified. I then went to language school in Monterey, California for six months, followed by five years in Panama. I was deployed throughout Central and South America conducting various Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), and assisting the Hondurans in stemming the flow of weapons from Nicaragua thru Honduras to El Salvador. This resulted in my Team being ambushed by terrorists, SEP 1981. Although not allowed to carry weapons, we fortunately all survived (2 x WIA). That is a whole other story. I was then assigned to Fort Lewis, Washington in 1984 with the 1st Special Forces Group, followed by Norfolk, Virginia for the Armed Forces Staff College. Following that I ended up at Langley AFB, at the Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict (A-AF CLIC), where I worked with the DEA for three years. This was followed by going to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for the Battle Command Training Program (BCTP), which conducts computer simulated war games to exercise Division and Corp Commanders and their staff. My job there was to integrate Special Operations into the exercises. While at BCTP, we literally traveled around the country and world conducting these war games with each Army Division and Corps HQ. I had to incorporate Green Beret, Psyop, and Civil Affairs representatives into their staffs and show them how to best utilize those assets.





WAR GAMES

The War Games were all computer generated, so I was sent to Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, to work with designers of the computer simulation to build and replicate the special operations forces in the simulation. During the War Games, the staff would be in the field conducting operations. They were fed information on the battles' progress, which was all done in the simulation. Whatever actions they took would replicate a response. We would insert civilian displaced personnel to block roads and create havoc, giving us the opportunity to teach the Commander and staff how to use civil affairs and psyops to deal with those situations. We also taught them how the Green Berets could conduct special reconnaissance, etc. for them.

MACDILL AFB

I was at Fort Leavenworth from 1990-1993 and had worked under General Downing off and on over the years. The General knew he was headed to MacDill as the four star Commander of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), so he brought me to MacDill with him in 1993. That is when I started getting involved with Operation Center design, function, and operation.

OPERATION CENTERS

USSOCOM had an operation center prior to 9/11, but we only stood it up when something was going on in the world that we had to react to. After September 11, all of that changed. The Operation Center went 24/7 and we never looked back. When the order came down from the Commander on 9/11 to stand up the Operations Center, I worked for three straight days to get it going and pulling in other people to operate. We quickly realized we needed more capability and were given a warehouse room over by the runway, and the General said, "Okay, design a temporary Operations Center here." I drew up a design and it was built in three months. We operated out of that center for just over three years. Meanwhile, I designed a more extensive space over in the main compound. I subsequently ran each of the Operations Centers (sequentially) as the Operations Center Chief. I was always looking for better ways to do things and visited multiple civil agencies like the State Department, CIA, NSA, DIA, and Secret Service, and private companies like Fidelity Investments and AT & T, to share lessons learned and gain insights on new technologies. I quickly earned the reputation as a subject matter expert in Operation Center design and operation.

LESSONS LEARNED

Whenever I design an Operations Center, I think, "I got it right this time!" Only to find things I could have done differently. I learned very quickly that you had to have everyone involved in the project in the same room during design meetings; the technical engineers, the furniture engineers, audio-visual guys, and so on, to ensure all aspects were coordinated.

One hard lesson was learned when the furniture guys brought in the furniture, only to find the holes for the wires and plugs did not match up with where the outlets etc. were in the wall. Later, I would always require a mock-up desk to be delivered and inspected before full production. You have to maximize your space and technologies to create something that works logically. I never designed for the Generals. I designed for the requirements and the personnel working in the Ops Center to provide what the generals needed. There is always a big difference between what a General wants and needs. I would sometimes have to tell a General, "I don't want to know what you want." I was a government civilian (GS-13) at the time, but they knew my military background and expertise. They also knew I could be blunt, as any general or colonel I worked for, that is reading this, can attest to. I would tell the General, "Sir, we can deal with your wants later. What we need to deal with now is what you need. You need information for one of two things; to answer a question, or to make a decision. So, what questions do you have to answer on a regular basis to your boss?" "What decisions do you have to make?" He would provide the answer and that would frame the requirements for the operations center, and we were off and running.

PREDATOR

A good example is a General at a 4-star level who wants to see a Predator feed on display. I said, "Why? Are you making decisions based on that?" We used to call it Predator Porn. You could watch predator feeds from all over the world and see what was going on, however, I had to point out to the General that Predator Porn was not a need, it was a want. I would usually be told to shut up and provide the display. Generals are no different than the rest of us. They miss being in the thick of it and want to know/see what the Teams are up to.

MOVING ON

In 1997 I was due for rotation. Because I had spent 5 years in Panama and throughout Central and South America, and spoke Spanish, the military planned to send me down to Bolivia or Peru for three years. I was going through a divorce and my kids were becoming teenagers and I did not want to be away from them for three years. If I wasn't going back to work with troops and I wasn't getting promoted, or being made the Green Beret Liaison to the Swedish Bikini Team, I figured I was good, and I'm out. I retired at that point with 23 years active duty.

AFTER THE ARMY

After leaving the in 1997 I felt lost because I did not have a job lined up. Dumb move! I knew about a Government Civilian (GS) job that was in the wind, but it wasn't a sure thing. I was sweating it for about six months. An old Company Commander of mine was now the Theater Special Operations Commander in Korea, where I had run the BCTP simulations I spoke of earlier for multiple years. He called me up and said, "Rich, you've been running this for the past five years; I need you to get your ass over here and run it now." So, a Contractor hired me to go over there and do that. I also did some High School teaching for a while. I quickly noticed the difference between working in the military and the civilian world. For me it was night and day.

I worked at USSOCOM from 1993 until 2018 when I decided it was time to fully retire. I spent 23 years on active duty and another 25 years (counting Academy time) as a government civilian in the special operations community, giving me forty-eight total years' service to this great nation! Some friends asked why not stay two more to make it an even 50 and I told them, "Nope...I was done!"

TRANSITION

The job I ultimately ended up with was as a GS as chief of the operations center at USSOCOM. That made my transition easy because I was right back where I had been. My experience had no comparison to those who leave the military and enter the civilian world; I can't even imagine. My first real interactions with the civilian world happened when my wife and I started dating (after I had retired). She was not exposed to the military world, nor were her friends and peers. I remember one time, one of her friends invited us over for dinner. They said to be there at 5 o'clock. So, we showed up at 4:59 and 59 seconds. I knock on the door and they're running around just getting out of the shower and everything. They said, "Most people don't show up until 5:30 or 6:00." and I said, "well, I'm military. If you tell me 5 o'clock, then I'll be there at 5 o'clock." It became a standing joke called, "Rich Time." They would tell us 6pm and everyone else 5pm. That experience showed me that many civilians don't have the same understanding of punctuality and understanding that being late is discourteous. If someone tells us to come at 5'ish... I tell them, I don't do "ish".

HOW WE ARE TAUGHT IN THE MILITARY

"YOU BETTER BE RIGHT HERE AT THIS TIME BECAUSE WE ARE DROPPING BOMBS RIGHT HERE (POINTING AT THE MAP); IF YOU ARE STILL MOVING THROUGH THERE, YOU'RE A DEAD MAN"

TAMPA GREEN BERET ASSOCIATION BEGINNINGS

We had the Special Forces Association (SFA) Chapter 60 here locally, and had been raising money for the 'Team House' for many years. When it finally came time to buy land with the money, we realized SFA Chapter 60 was not a legal entity, it is a subset of the national chapter up at Fort Bragg, which meant the land would have to be purchased in their name, which we weren't about to do. Since we couldn't own the land as SFA Chapter 60, we had to form a separate legal entity, which resulted in the establishment of the Tampa Green Beret Association (TGBA). As I mentioned, we had been raising money for a long time for the Team House, over 20 years. We would get \$50 here or \$100 there in donations. Sometimes money would come from a corporate donation or funds from a Golf Tournament or something. We ultimately raised 400k, which enabled us to buy land.

THE TEAM HOUSE

We looked everywhere for the land and finally found a spot right outside of MacDill AFB. The Team House concept has evolved over the years. It will always be 'Our House' but we want to be more inclusive and be able to invite other organizations to hold meetings, rent space, etc. We want the Team House (Veteran Civic Center) to be a place where all veterans can better understand what is out there for them. There is so much out there, yet the average veteran has no idea what is available. We started the Veteran Benefit Socials (VBS), which are free quarterly events hosted by TGBA that bring veteran assistance organizations together with active duty/retired veterans and their families. TGBA, in conjunction with the Shriners, provide a relaxed atmosphere for all veterans to meet with and learn about the vast range of assistance available to them, while enjoying camaraderie, sharing their own experiences with one another, and a beer on TGBA. I look at the Tampa Green Beret Association as a concierge, acting as the central point a veteran can reach out to when they need something. We get calls from someone needing a



service dog or an attorney, etc., and we can give them the correct contact information. Whatever it is, we have a contact for them. The Team House is meant to be a one-stop shop where veterans. I envision a kiosk in the building where veterans can come in, press a button, and find contact information for what they need. I also want the Team House to be a place where the smaller mom-and-pop veteran assistance organizations can come in and have a meeting or hold a seminar. I envision someone like Microsoft providing the technology allowing veterans the opportunity to come in for training and receive help with the transition process, all while promulgating Microsoft's Software. It is a win-win. We could bring in other organizations regularly to offer seminars on resume writing, financial planning, or whatever. We could also rent out space for promotions, hail & farewells, parties, etc. allowing the building to become self-sufficient. None of us get paid anything, we are simply running a facility where veterans can get all of that.



WORKING TOGETHER

For the Tampa Bay area, it is all about telling the veteran community about VAN and other organizations, but it isn't easy to reach them. Now, organizations like the Tampa Green Beret Association and VAN can work together to improve on each other since we both want the same thing for veterans. We lean on each other as a conduit to get the word out and to facilitate each other because one may have contacts the other does not have. This is one of the reasons I have offered to contribute to VAN Station Magazine as the Health & Wellness writer, in order to introduce programs and services to our veteran community while offering honest commentary and observation.



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VETERAN HEALTH & WELLNESS

RICH CORSON - VETERAN HEALTH & WELLNESS CONTRIBUTOR

THERE IS A GUY OUT THERE TRYING WELLNESS PROGRAMS OFFERED TO VETERANS AND HIS NAME IS RICH. HIS JOB, TO FIND THE GOOD AND EXPOSE THE NOT SO GOOD.

I recently started (17 SEP) the Warrior Health & Fitness program at Tampa General Hospital (TGH) offered by Home Base. It is a three month program that is free to Veterans and their spouses and includes exercise and nutritional support.

I decided to participate for my own self-improvement, but also to better understand what the program entails and offers to the military/vets so that I am better able to advise others.

The overall goal of Warrior Health and Fitness is to empower Warriors to take control of their physical well-being by utilizing trainers, registered dietitians, and yoga instructors.

Included in the Program

- Custom Fitness Evaluation and Regimen Designs
- Nutritional Consultations and Registered Dietitians
- Group Exercise Classes including Spin and Yoga
- 2 Pilates Sessions and 1 - 25-minute massage
- Health Education and a 3-Month Followup
- Free TRX upon Graduation or Completing the Program

The staff are very knowledgeable, friendly, and helpful. They quickly adjust any exercise should you have an issue doing a particular one, like I did with the bent over flys because of my back.

I had been working out regularly prior to COVID, but with the shutdown of the Base Gym, that went out the window. Therefore, I was basically starting over again. While I wasn't dying by the end of the first workout, I had that good tight (slightly achy) feeling you get afterwards.

I have chosen to take advantage of the 2x week personal training sessions, and workout on my own the other three days of the week using the app, either at home or the gym. That's really the beauty of this program.

I definitely feel that I am firming up, and slowly losing some weight.

BOTTOM LINE

So far, I would HIGHLY recommend taking advantage of this unique opportunity!

-Rich Corson

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2023 VAN EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

J

ANUARY

7 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

19 MIXER STUMPY'S

A

pril

1 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

23 GOLF TOURNAMENT

J

uly

1 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

15 FREEDOM FEST

O

ctober

7 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

21 TRAIL RIDE & PUMPKIN PATCH

F

ebruary

4 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

11 REMEMBRANCE LOVE WALK

M

ay

6 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

20 RUN AND SHOOT EVENT

A

ugust

5 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

26 RUN AND SHOOT EVENT

N

ovember

4 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

11 VETERANS DAY RUN

M

arch

4 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

25 HEALING WITH HORSES

J

une

3 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

24 DEFENDER 5K RUCK WALK

S

eptember

2 VAN 12-PARK TOUR

9 9/11 HEROES RUN

D

ecember

2 VAN 12-PARK TOUR AWARDS

16 MIXER HOLIDAY HOUSE





DR. DAMON FRIEDMAN

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CONSUMED

I served 20 years in the military, predominantly in special operations. I was a part of the invasion into Iraq 2003 and had not been able to sleep since. By 2010, I was suffering the repercussions of intense deployments and continuous traumatic experiences. It was all building; sleep deprivation, chronic stress, mild traumatic brain injury, and of course Post Traumatic Stress. The symptoms were overwhelming. There is brain inflammation from all the concussions, along with nausea, headaches, and blurry vision. It doesn't matter how strong of a man or woman you are; you eventually crack.

My chassis was fractured, and I found myself in a really dark place in 2010. We all hear about the loss of 20+ veterans a day to suicide. Well, I understand why. Everyone has a reason to take too many pills, hang themselves, or use their firearm. For me, the pain was just overwhelming. I wasn't angry at the world or having moral conflicts. I was just consumed by the physical, mental, and emotional pain and wanted it all to go away.

Yet, through the darkest, deepest depths of my pain I heard an inner voice that said, I have great plans for you, plans to win, to persevere, and not to lose. I heard that I am destined to do something great, but what does that mean? What does it mean to do something great? I made the decision not to kill myself on that night. There were other reasons; I didn't want my wife or son to walk downstairs and see that mess. It was just a lot. It was physical, and it was psychological, social, and spiritual. I had a lot of trauma and didn't know how to process it.

JOURNEY

I went to a doctor, Dr. David LeMay, who specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation, and functional medicine. He works as a consultant for dozens of professional sports teams. He is a man of faith, and helped me to begin my journey of being fit. Not just physically fit, psychologically fit, or socially fit, but spiritually fit. When you experience trauma, it's processed through different domains: the psychological domain, the physical domain, and the spiritual domain. Throughout my journey, I went through a lot of therapy. I saw psychologists, social workers, physical therapists, acupuncturists, and chiropractors. I saw conditioning coaches, nutritionists, and internal medicine physicians and slowly began to feel better. After a year and a half, I woke up one day and was no longer in the dark. I was in a light, and I felt good again.

WARRIOR

Humans are not made to kill; however, it is part of war. When you have extreme terrorist networks putting bombs in schools, killing children, and targeting oppressed people, it has to be stopped. Someone has to do it, and I was called, but there was a cost. There are implications to war. Millions of men and women have deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq and experienced some sort of trauma. If you join the military, I would argue that you've experienced trauma going through boot camp. It doesn't matter if you are the tip of the spear on a mission or the support element providing the equipment and supplies; they are both important. In victory, they are part of the process all the way until the mission is complete. It is all a chain, and everyone processes the experience differently, especially the trauma that is involved.

MAINTENANCE

I had deployed again, and while in Afghanistan in 2011, I shared with Dayna, my wife, that I was feeling better. I had found hope, and now, suddenly, I have faith, and it's restored, strong, and sound. I have cognitive clarity and am sharper physically and socially reintegrated. Dayna and I started our non-profit then, right there in Bagram, Afghanistan. With everything I have been through and learned, we now apply and provide for all of our warriors at SOF Missions.

Stress is absorbed. It is processed differently by different people. I've had a lot of stress, and I've had a lot of trauma throughout my whole life. And so, for me, I'm doing maintenance. In our program, not everyone walks away without suicidal ideation. Do I still think about suicide? The answer is every once in a while because this life is filled with trauma, and I am human. Every year I am reminded at least a dozen times throughout the year somebody I love, somebody that I trust has passed away. They have killed themselves, been blown up, or something bad has happened. It's a constant reminder. It reminds me of why I'm here. This is my calling.



SOF

1. Recognize you need help

2. Admit you need help

3. Get the help

MISSIONS

ONGOING BATTLE

When I was a young boy, I was called to be a freedom fighter. I began fighting for my freedom in downtown Los Angeles in the projects in an extremely abusive environment. As a young man, I was called to be a freedom fighter for my nation and to fight extreme terrorism. That's what I've been doing for 20 years. I have fought the worst people in the world, evil and vile. And now, today, I have a new enemy and a new mission. I'm still a freedom fighter. My calling is the same, but now I am fighting against one of the greatest evils of all time, suicide. Suicide is an evil that nobody can see.

Today at SOF Missions, we have this incredible clinic where we spend \$50,000, if not more, for ten warriors to spend 5-days with more than 20 healthcare professionals. We take care of these men and women for a year. There is no bureaucracy, politics, or capitalism, just efficiency and efficacy. All of our work is research-based and renowned. We currently have a two-year grant with Dr. Koenig studying our methodology. We also model our clinics alongside Dr. Kelly, the founder of the Intrepid Center, whom we met at the University of Colorado Brain Health Institute conference. We continue to gather data on how effective our program is psychologically, physically, socially, and spiritually. We plan to present our results at conferences and submit our research to peer review journals.

WHY SOF MISSIONS?

There are a lot of programs out there that say they help veterans. Research shows there is a reason pragmatism works, and there's a reason why objective data is crucial. We need to be analytical about this. There's a difference between a program that makes you feel better for a moment. It could be a day, it could be a weekend, it could be a week, but that's not enough. We need to have long-term solutions because veterans will continue to struggle if we don't. At SOF Missions, we have the answer.

We work to find the core issue. Our program is not a feel-good program. Our warriors are here to work. You come into our program and train from seven in the morning to the evening. You're seeing all sorts of healthcare professionals. We provide our treatment in a resort-like atmosphere because warriors don't want to go to a hospital. We can do this in a place that is not an institution. We are here to bridge the gap – speed is key. The VA has its advantages. We appreciate the partnership with the VA has fill gaps to help the warrior, especially during time crunches. Our advantage is that we can serve people at Mock-1 speed. Assessing and caring for polytrauma is what we do very well.

One of our secrets at SOF Missions is that we take a holistic approach to the five major components, including social and spiritual dilemmas. During my own treatment, I had a great psychologist at the VA who really helped me solve a major problem and opened Pandora's Box. But I had a profound question, "Why did this happen?". I asked a spiritual question to a provider who wasn't a subject matter expert in this field. I needed an answer, and she couldn't provide one. While there, we also took care of my concussions which are cognitive in nature, and psychologists don't know much about that either. That is why you need a team of experts from all five domains;

you need a tribe. That is how we solve problems quickly. The ratio of those that find tremendous hope and become fully productive members of society through our program is extremely high because we address all of the domains; psychological, physical, social, spiritual, and cognitive.

THE DEMAND

The demand for quality veteran care is high, and it's going to take a village to put a dent in it. From a national standpoint, the veteran population decreased 23.1% from 25.7 million in 2001 to 19.8 million in 2019. The suicide rate among veterans rose 35.9% from 2001 to 2019, from 23.3 per 100,000 in 2001 to 31.6 per 100,000 in 2019. So, while the veteran population continues to decrease, the rate of suicides is increasing. (2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report)

There is no one singular cause for increased military suicides. There are too many variables that may contribute to rising rates. Moreover, the different roles of service members in the various branches and components (active or reserve) all present unique risk factors. High suicide rates mark a failure of the U.S. government and the U.S. society to manage the whole health approach that is needed to tackle this significant problem.

HELP

There are a variety of ways to help. Advocating on behalf of our men and women who are suffering and sharing our mission with those you know who can benefit from our program and resources. We offer signature fundraising events that are hosted throughout the year including a new launch, Operation Red Belt. By joining as a monthly member, you will receive an SOF Missions Red Belt. Monthly donations provide

the resources and tools needed to bring hope and healing to our nations' heroes who are in great distress.

I would challenge everyone to look at the programs they currently give to. Many programs raise hundreds of millions of dollars, but only a small percentage goes into veteran care. As a donor, why would you want to fund a program that does not strive to make every cent count toward the needs of our warriors? These discrepancies in resource allocation keep me up at night because I know how many more lives can be saved when monies are used properly.

REALITIES

I recently retired after 20 years of service. I'm here to tell you that the implications of war can be invisible wounds, and we are just now starting to realize this. History is repeating itself the same way it happened with our Vietnam-era warriors. It took about 10-15 years after that conflict, and then BOOM, the suicide rate was through the roof. Government programs are available; however, their resources are limited, and timeliness has proven difficult. Whether it is politics or business, it does not matter to me. I am in the business of saving lives, and my hope is that one day our program will be part of that process.

SOLUTIONS

The Department of Defense cannot do it all despite the appropriate resources and services to help men and women in uniform. To put a dent in the suicide epidemic, you must put politics aside. You have to be a good commander, and you need to provide every viable option. You must put the warrior first, not the mission. With the notion that mission is always first, this is not the solution. Every leader will say without the mission; then you don't have a force. Well, you know what? Without people, you don't have a force; without a force, you don't have a mission. As a squadron commander in special operations, I told my leadership people first, mission always. I was raised mission first, people always. But it's my belief that if you take care of the person and their family, they'll always accomplish the mission.

The DOD is not accomplishing its mission, and they need help. Many of the programs they support use mental health therapists as the solution. One modality as a catch-all is not how you solve problems. I struggle with the DOD because many troops do not trust the leadership. I had to hide my injuries until 2017, when I woke up in the ER with no choice but to admit my struggles. Fear of using sick leave or being stationed at a desk job are only a few examples of why servicemembers do not report medical issues until it's too late.

THE LENSE

In April 2019, the U.S. had a homeless population of over 630,000, with 67,000 being veterans of the armed forces. Obviously, there is an issue, homelessness and suicide. Political parties do not matter here. The color of your skin does not matter, either. What matters is character and work ethic. When I came out of the institution, I saw how America was making color an issue. I saw the movement for equality as a Hispanic, and I understand the struggle. My mom is from San Juan, Puerto Rico. I



**THERE ARE GOOD PEOPLE OUT THERE THAT HAVE MONEY
AND WANT TO HELP SAVE AMERICAN HEROES.
WITH MUCH POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY.**

was a minority, and while being raised in the projects, there were Koreans, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and a plethora of other nationalities. When I was raised, I didn't see anybody's skin color; I just saw a person. As a non-profit leader, I hire based on skill, character, and work ethic. I think that is the lens America should look through.

TRANSITION

In the military, somebody is always telling you where to go, what to do, and when to do it. That is a hard adjustment. Being away from your family on holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays is not easy. When I left the military, I was anxious to get away from the system, but I had no idea how much I depended on it. Once you get out, it feels like nobody cares.

One of the things we offer at our clinics is camaraderie. I used to complain about half the guys at work, and those are the guys I miss because they were my family. I didn't realize how important they were to my daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly regimens. When I left, I was sad because I didn't have them anymore, and now I feel lonely. I'm not around my brothers and sisters, and that is a loss that settles deep. In our program, we bring them together not just during the clinic but for life. They are all from different walks of life, and it doesn't matter what they did in the military; we all have something in

common. We are all in pain, so we go through this pain together. In any special operations team, you have a weapons expert, a medic, an engineer, an intel person, and a communication expert. We all have our gifts, and then we all come together and help each other get through the ambushes of life. When they leave, they are friends for life.

“If you raise your hand and say, “I need help.” We will help you.

THE RESILIENCY PROGRAM

If you raise your hand and say, “I need help.” We will help you at zero cost. It does not matter how much help you need; we will help you as much as we can. Even though we cannot solve every problem, we will solve most, and if we cannot find a solution, we will find someone who can. Whether veterans are flying or driving to our program, we cover all the costs. Many come in broken and leave different people. But, when they go back home, that is when the war begins. The whiskey is there, the gun is there, and the angry spouse is there. The kids and bad memories are there. We’ve all made mistakes, and I’ve made my fair share as well, believe me, but what I have learned is that you must man up and patch things up. There is power in forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. Those pieces lead to redemption.

Accountability is also paramount to our program. We must look at ourselves, and we have to be honest. Humans are really good at lying to themselves and believing the lie, and they try to convince others that the lie is the truth. Healing requires you to look at yourself and at the things you did and admit that you had other options. We tell people when they return home, even those who have been abusive verbally, physically, and/or psychologically for years, you have a choice. If you have had years of poor behavior, you can’t assume the people you hurt suddenly want to journey with you. There is a trail from your past you have left behind. But we do tell our warriors to let go of the irreparable past and focus on the invincible future. Ask for forgiveness, repent, reconcile, and find redemption. It is not easy; it is really hard. Years of abuse, destruction, and hurting yourself and others it is going to take time to fix.

LEGACY

I am very passionate about this topic because I am grateful. I was blessed with another chance, and this is what I have been called to do. I am a professional speaker; I do that to fulfill my purpose. I have one shot in this world to make an impact. Do you know what I want people to say about me when I’m gone? I don’t want them to talk about my military decorations or my positions in leadership. I want them to talk about how many lives we saved. I want to be known as a vessel on this earth that made an atomic impact that resonated throughout all communities, not just the veteran community. Suicide is an American issue and is the second leading cause of death for adolescents between 11 and 33 years old. How is it pos-

sible that our young men and women are taking their lives at such an alarming rate? We are not on this earth for ourselves but for others. I still experience pain. The pain, the agony, the disappointment, the anxiety, and the frustration I now use as fuel. There is nothing more powerful than turning pain into a strength. That is how I can be an unstoppable force for good,

I will not stop until I’m done, and only God will be the one to extract me out.



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THE HELM TEAM
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MEMBER Spotlight



Tiki Tavern Nautica provides a Tiki boat experience like no other. Our newest vessel, the Tiki Bahama Mama, designed and built in Holiday, Florida, is now available for charter at the Sponge Docks in Tarpon Springs.

We have tremendous pride in the building process. We have focused on attention to detail and exceptional amenities for our customers. Our goal, to create a memorable experience for passengers of all ages.

We stand as proud supporters and members of VAN of Tampa and want to thank all those veterans who have fought and sacrificed to help keep our nation free.

To show our gratitude we are extending an exclusive offer to all VAN Members! When VAN Members book a charter of up to 12 passengers, members will receive a 15% discount on our 4-hour tour packages.

Sincerely, Captain Sean

www.TikiTavernNautica.com
100 Dodecanese Blvd.
Tarpon Springs, FL 34689

727.205.4554

Call Friendly Pest Solutions 813.773.1854



Juan (JD) Jaramillo began his journey in the pest control industry in the 1990's. He has managed large public and privately owned businesses throughout the Tampa Bay area. His passion for helping customers resolve tough pest problems inspired him to open up his own company.

In 2016, Friendly Pest Solutions went from a dream to a reality. As any small business owner can tell you, many sacrifices end up being made. The important thing is to keep your eye on the end goal and persevere through the many obstacles that will inevitably enter your path.

As a local family-owned and operated business serving the Tampa Bay area, Friendly Pest Solutions specializes in the control and prevention of general household pests, termites, mosquitos, bed bugs, bees/wasps, rodents and more!

residential | commercial | termite control

Our **Eco-Friendly products** and services are prescribed for your specific situation. We are in the business of solving problems and restoring our customers' peace of mind so they can enjoy the important things in life.

Why the name Friendly Pest Solutions?

Our company name is inspired by offering an environmentally-FRIENDLY service, performed by our FRIENDLY, professional technicians at FRIENDLY, affordable prices.

Why do we partner with the Veteran Approved Network?

We are so thankful for the sacrifices our veterans and their families have made and without their service, we would not be able to enjoy the freedoms we enjoy every day. We just want to give back to them after all they have given for us.

VAN is a very supportive organization to our veterans providing them with resources and monthly events and we are so excited to be a part of such a great team!

Four Chaplains

Poling call out for a Protestant. They simply gave their life jackets to those next in line in so doing, gave up their only means of survival.

At 12:55 A.M. on February 3, 1943, the bell on the troopship U.S.A.T. DORCHESTER rang twice and never sounded again.

The ship sank in less than 30 minutes.

Of the 902 young men on board, 672 young men paid the supreme sacrifice. Included in the 672 were Four Men of God -- a rabbi~ a Roman Catholic priest, a Methodist minister, and a Dutch Reformed minister -- all Army Chaplains.

They were last seen on the deck of the ship with their arms linked together and their heads bowed in prayer as they went to their watery graves in the North Atlantic off the coast of Greenland.

"Valor is a gift," Carl Sandburg once said. "Those having it never know for sure whether they have it until the test comes."

In 1944, The Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart were awarded posthumously to the chaplain's next of kin, and in 1961, President Eisenhower awarded a Special; Medal of Heroism, a one-of-a-kind award authorized by Congress and intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

Only 230 survived. Many of those survivors owe their lives to the courage and leadership exhibited by the heroic Four Chaplains, who, in sacrificing their lives, created a unique legacy of brotherhood.

It's been 80 years since these four chaplains from different faiths served together. Their action, and selfless service is still fresh and alive in our memory and shared globally. Do you feel the responsibility to share the story? Teach your children and youth about these events and sacrifices of our history. Then they will feel and understand what selfless service on behalf of others can accomplish.



Keep the legacy alive of the veterans in your family history.

Chaplain Don Hinst,
American Legion 15th Dist. FL

chaplain@americanlegionpost108.org





The American Legion Post 108 Family Serving Lutz - Land O'Lakes - Wesley Chapel, FL

The American Legion was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization devoted to mutual helpfulness.

If you have served at least one day of active military duty since December 7, 1941 and were honorably discharged or you are still serving active military duty honorably, you are eligible for membership with The American Legion.

The Auxillary and The Sons provide an opportunity for Children, grandchildren, and spouse of veterans to honor their family members that served our country, and keep their legacy alive for years to come.

**Join Veterans and our families
4th Monday of Each Month
5pm Auxillary - 6pm Sons - 7pm Legion
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www.americanlegionpost108.org**

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- NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND
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Watch the entire
Four Chaplains Interfaith
Memorial Service Here

skip forward to 20 minute mark to start of ceremony

MEMBER *Insight* FROM THE BUSINESSES YOU TRUST

PHISHING WHAT IS IT? HOW DOES IT WORK?

Phishing is defined as the act of sending email that falsely claims to be from a legitimate organization. This is usually combined with a threat or request for information: for example, that an account will close, a balance is due, or information is missing from an account. The email will ask the recipient to supply confidential information, such as bank account details, PINs or passwords; these details are then used by the owners of the website to conduct fraud.



1. Too Good To Be True - Lucrative offers and eye-catching or attention-grabbing statements are designed to attract people's attention immediately. For instance, many claim that you have won an iPhone, a lottery, or some other lavish prize. Just don't click on any suspicious emails. Remember that if it seems too good to be true, it probably is!

2. Sense of Urgency - A favorite tactic amongst cybercriminals is to ask you to act fast because the super deals are only for a limited time. Some of them will even tell you that you have only a few minutes to respond. When you come across these kinds of emails, it's best to just ignore them. Sometimes, they will tell you that your account will be suspended unless you update your personal details

immediately. Most reliable organizations give ample time before they terminate an account and they never ask patrons to update personal details over the Internet. When in doubt, visit the source directly rather than clicking a link in an email.

3. Hyperlinks - A link may not be all it appears to be. Hovering over a link shows you the actual URL where you will be directed upon clicking on it. It could be completely different or it could be a popular website with a misspelling, for instance www.bankofarnerica.com - the 'm' is actually an 'r' and an 'n', so look carefully.

4. Attachments - If you see an attachment in an email you weren't expecting or that doesn't make sense, don't open it! They often contain payloads like ransomware or other viruses. The only file type that is always safe to click on is a .txt file.

5. Unusual Sender - Whether it looks like it's from someone you don't know or someone you do know, if anything seems out of the ordinary, unexpected, out of character or just suspicious in general don't click on it!

HOW DO YOU PREVENT BEING TAKEN IN BY PHISHING EMAILS?

Talk to the person who sent the email. Yes it is that simple. Call them and ask them to verify they did in fact send the email in question. This is particularly important if the email is asking for specific information that could potentially be damaging to your organization or asking for money.

www.MartinSecurityServices.com
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VAN works to honor and support veterans daily. We do this by aligning ourselves with the very best businesses and organizations in Tampa Bay.

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Vets, Join Here

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A NETWORK BUILT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

VAN is always looking out for you by seeking the very best businesses and organizations in Tampa Bay. The resources you will find at VAN have been Vetted and have committed to VAN's Code of Ethics.



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FOR BUSINESSES

A NETWORK BUILT TO GIVE BACK TO THE VETERAN COMMUNITY

Looking for a way to support the Veteran community? VAN is your answer. Your annual membership dues fund veteran events, education opportunities, employment resources and more.



Aldian "Aldi" Isaacs, Financial Advisor
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813.992.8987



For over 50 years, our Westshore Financial Group has been a trusted advisor to generations of families in the community. Our experienced team of financial planners takes a personalized approach to each client's unique needs, helping them to achieve their financial goals through comprehensive planning and investment strategies. Our commitment to the highest ethical standards and transparent communication has earned us a reputation for excellence in the industry. Whether you are saving for retirement, paying for college, or planning your estate, we are dedicated to providing you with the professional guidance you need to secure your financial future.

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VAN Members have made a commitment to the Veteran Community to serve, honor, and support

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Education/Employment

Amazon Jobs
www.amazon.jobs>military

Oplign
www.0plign.com

National Aviation Academy
www.naa.edu

Elderly Services

Loving Hands Senior Care

Fish & Tackle

Rusty Bucket Baithouse
www.facebook.com/rustybucketbaithouse

Funeral Services

Veterans Funeral Care
www.veteransfuneralcare.com

Lodging/Conference

Springhill Suites by Marriott
www.marriott.com/brandon

Vehicle Sales & Service

Toyota of Tampa Bay
www.toyotaoftampabay.com

Pet Services

All American Dog Training Academy
www.allamericandog.net

Tours & Travel

Krisula's Walking Tours
www.krisula.com

Home Services

Scott's Solar Systems
www.powur.com/scott.becker

Family First Pool Service
www.familyfirstpool.com

Outdoor Kitchen Kings
www.kingofoutdoorkitchens.com

By His Hands Carpentry & Design
352-428-7094
facebook.com/byhishandscarpentrydesignllc

Allen's Maintenance & Service
www.allensmaintenance.com

HomeTeam Inspection Service
www.hometeam.com/tampabay

Friendly Pest Solutions
www.friendlypestsolutions.com

Roofing

Gale Force Roofing - Brandon
www.galeforceroofing.com

Veteran Owned Roofing - Pasco
www.veteranownedroofing.com

Electrician

K K & Daughter Electrical
813-505-3216
facebook.com/kkanddaughterelctricalco

Security Services

Martin Security Services
www.martinsecurityservices.com

Insurance

Progressive Insurance
www.progressive.com

Guns/Armory/Ranges

2nd Amendment Armory
www.2ndamendmentarmory.com

Legal/Finance

ProVet Legal
www.provetlegal.com

Kamish Accounting Firm
www.kamishcpa.com

Northwestern Mutual
Christopher Deale
www.northwesternmutual.com/financial/advisor/christopher-deale

Westshore Financial "Aldi"
www.westshorefinancialgroup.com

Printing Services

United Warrior
www.unitedwarriorapparel.com

Marketing

KEM Media Group
www.wesleychapelmagazine.com/kem

Photography/Videography

Edgar's Images
www.edgarsimages.com

Airhawk Media
www.airhawkmedia.com

Medical Services

Discount Medical Superstore
www.dmssnpr.com

Real Estate Services

RE/MAX Bayside - Team Prebich
facebook.com/michelleprebich45

Compass Florida - DreamStyle Team
www.DreamStyle360.com

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A Network built on a foundation of trust through ethical service and fair pricing

Mortgage Services

Goodwin Mortgage Group
Joshua Goodwin
www.goodwinmg.com

Caliber Home Loans
Frank Gemma
www.caliberhomeloans.com/loan-consultant/florida/tampa/frank-gemma

Guaranteed Rate
John Lann
www.people.net/john-lann-176147

Thrive Mortgage
Bryan Snyder
www.thrivemortgage.com/loan-officer/bryan-snyder

Cross Country Mortgage
The Helm Team
www.crosscountrymortgage/st-petersburg-FL-8266/Maureen-Helm

i3 Lending
Golf Phuphanich
www.golfhomelending.com

Fifth Third Bank
Julio Gerena
www.mortgageadvisors.53.com

Butcher/Grocer

Southern Steer Butcher
www.southernsteer.com

Food/Restaurants

Sarge's BBQ
www.sargessmokehousebbq.com

Spa/Beauty

Pink Pineapple Day Spa
www.thepinkpineappledayspa.com

Peeping Mom's Ultrasound Boutique
www.peepingmomsultrasoundboutique.com

Veteran Services

SOF Missions
www.sofmissions.org
Warrior Wellness Program
www.warriorwellnessprogram.org

Tampa Green Beret Association
www.tampagreenberets.com
Vetcoin Foundation
www.vetcoinhq.com

My Warrior's Place
www.mywarriorsplace.org

Stop Soldier Suicide
www.stopsoldiersuicide.org
CryoEEZE 22
www.cyroeeze22.org

American Legion Post 108
www.americanlegion108.org

Equine Centers/Clinics

Peaceful Pastures Ranch
www.peacefulpasturesranch.org

Inspire Equine Assisted Center
www.inspireequinetherapyprogram.org

Management/Consultant

Public Value, LLC
www.publicvalue.space

Coffee Shops

Just Love Coffee - Brandon
www.justlovecoffeecafe.com/brandon

Veteran Lodging

Burton 1 Properties
718-415-7218

Health & Wellness

Physique Physical Therapy
www.physiquetherapy.com

CryoEEZE Springhill
www.cryo-eeze.com

Active Solutions
Rehab & Wellness
www.activesolutionsrehab.com

Tampa Bay Physical Therapy
www.tampabaypt.health

Sports & Fitness

Pride Strength Training
www.pridestrengthtraining.net

NeoEndurance
facebook.com/neoenduranceraces

iGolf4Vets
www.igolf4vets.org

Breweries/Bars

5 Branches Brewing
www.5branchesbrewing.com

Bad Monkey - Ybor
www.badmonkeyybor.com

Entertainment

Stumpy's Hatchet House - Tampa
www.stumpyshh.com/tampafl

Tiki Tavern Nautica
www.tarponspringsboattours.com

Patriot Stogies
www.patriotstogies.com

A Different DJ
adifferentdj4u@gmail.com

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