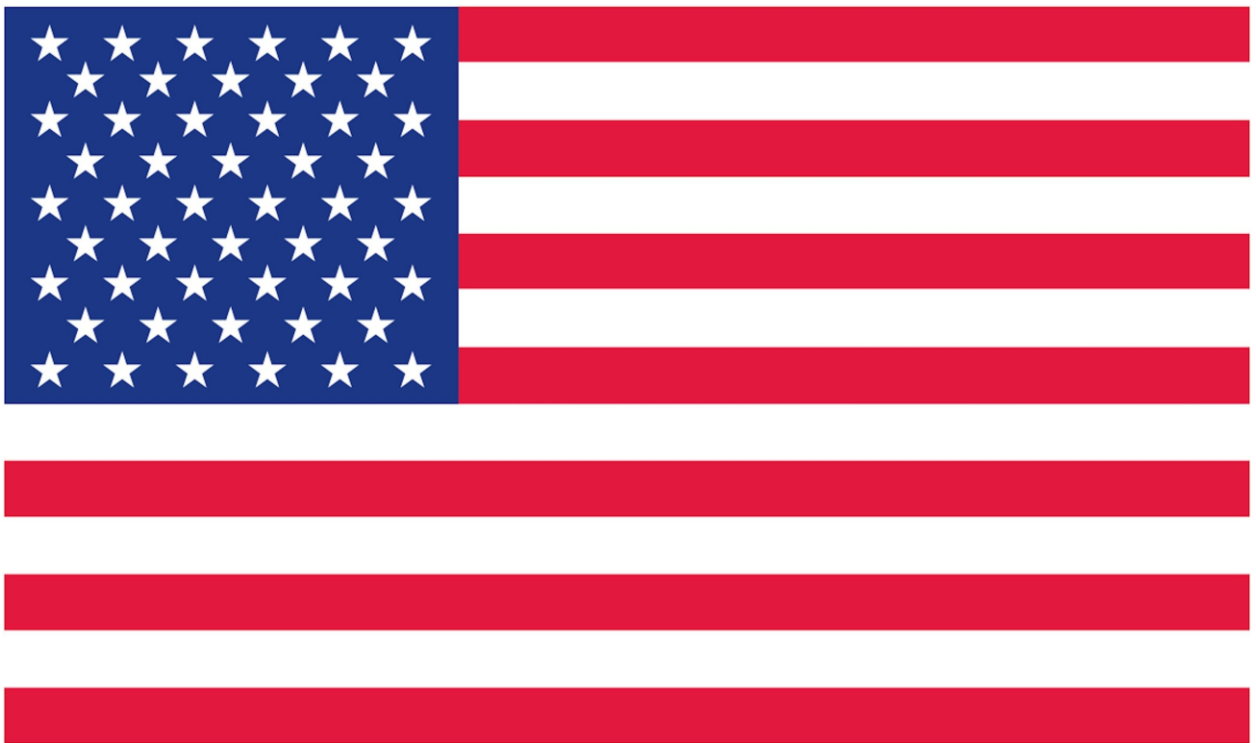


Feature Writing on Veterans



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The names of veterans have been redacted for Internet publication.

B.C. and Captain, “We Saved Each Other”

by Rachel Duong

When you think of a dog, you think “man’s best friend,” but to B.C. his dog Captain means so much more. Their story of finding each other truly expresses a sentiment that B.C. has lived his life by: “Everything happens for a reason.”

At 64 years old, B.C. recalls his upbringing in a small town in southeast Missouri that was in the hills and at a time where “you could bring your gun on the bus.” At 18 years old, he only had two options after high school: go to college with the money he did not have or log in the mountains, in which he had no interest. Instead, he decided to serve this nation and signed up for six years in the Navy.

During his first four years, B.C. served on a small ship with 70 other men. That time and setting allowed him to grow up rapidly, at a very impressionable age, while learning important lessons about camaraderie. Given the workload and nature of work on that ship, the men built many strong relationships and had to learn how to count on each other for mutual success with regard to their nautical missions. While an overall positive experience that he describes as “extremely rewarding years,” B.C.’s time in the Navy was not without some unfortunate occurrences that have had long-lasting effects on his mental health. One story in particular describes just how stressful and dangerous life on a Navy ship could be.

While navigating the Bermuda Triangle in shark-infested waters, the ship B.C. was on unexpectedly caught on fire due to a malfunction among the engines that resulted in a big

explosion, which risked the lives of all the men on the ship. On a diesel-electric ship, there are four engines side-by-side that are connected to a fuel line and a tank, which someone is assigned the task of opening the valve in order to release pressure within the circulation of fuel. The day of the accident, someone had forgotten to open the valve, therefore, building up pressure that caused the fuel to spray across the engines and burst into massive flames that seemed never-ending. B.C. recalls all the men working in a panic for three hours to try and dispel the flames, to no avail, and eventually ran out of equipment. While many were face-first with the flames, B.C. was assigned with running to the bridge to alert those in charge of navigation. On his way there, he banged his head onto a steel horn he did not see coming, knocking him out for an undefined amount of time. Upon waking up, he was quickly told to evacuate to the back with a bloody head, under the assumption that they would be abandoning ship. For thirteen hours, he sat at the back of the ship with everyone else, as he worried about how he would survive being faced with brain trauma and not knowing how to swim. In what seemed like a miracle, B.C. claims that “God took care of us” as the fire ran out of fuel and died out as another ship came to evacuate all the men. After hearing this story, it is no wonder that B.C. now suffers from severe anxiety, depression, late-onset PTSD, and a brain trauma about which he was open to sharing.

B.C. faced a lack of proper and extensive medical care while also encountering worsened mental health issues that came with age. Admittedly, he says that the delay in proper medical care came from his reluctance to exercise the rights that were granted to him as a veteran. Little did he know that the people and resources he would later encounter in his life would lead him to his closest companion.

To treat his anxiety, B.C. had been prescribed medication that only made him feel worse. In response, his doctors kept increasing the dosage of the medication, assuming that it was merely a lack of effect. About three to four years ago, he got so sick that he lost his job and was not able to work; this only added to his worries given he and his wife now faced an economic trauma from this loss of income. Thankfully, his wife directed him to use his benefits and turn to the VA in Lebanon (United States Department of Veterans Affairs) in order to get comprehensive medical care. After undergoing genetic testing, they found that B.C. was actually allergic to his anxiety medication, which was having adverse effects on his physical health. Now left without any functioning medication to treat his mental health, a VA worker named Ida referred him to a non-profit organization called “Dog T.A.G.S.” (Train. Assist. Guide. Serve.), which is “a service dog owner training program for veterans suffering from service connected PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), and/or TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury).”

Through Dog T.A.G.S., B.C. found Captain Crunch, a yellow lab with the calmest demeanor. Captain was a rescue from a farm, where he was not being taken care of at all. He was 4 years old when they found him and has been with B.C. for the past year, having turned 5 this past February. B.C. adopted Captain and took him out of a bad situation, but Captain also made B.C. more comfortable with getting out of the house. B.C. has expressed his deep gratitude for Captain, stating that he now has great camaraderie when he is upset because he “can focus on him instead of myself and my woes.” Things that Captain can do for B.C. are turning on the lights when he is startled during the night, unlocking the door if 911 needs to be called, giving him attention during anxiety-triggering moments, and filling the void of anxiety medication. In response to how Captain is special to him, B.C. says: “I’ve had dogs my whole life and he’s

not just a dog but a true helper.” Most adorably, B.C. describes their relationship as having “saved each other,” and he is grateful for all the events in his life that have led him to Captain.

Radars, Rubrics, and Rocks: J.W.'s impact in his professions

by Tyler Perhac

The small town of Lebanon is host to two hidden gems: one of those is the Lebanon Veterans Affairs Medical Center; the other is veteran J.W. However, J.W. wishes to keep one of those gems a secret.

J.W. has been going to the Lebanon VA for five years and is a regular. Most days, J.W. takes a bus to the activity center for coffee, snacks, food and to socialize with other veterans. In fact, he moved to the area because of the praise the VA has received.

“It’s unbelievable. I’m glad more people don’t know about it, because it’d be so crowded I couldn’t get a seat.”

As great as the VA is, the real gem is J.W.

Unsure of what to do next, towards the end of high school in 1955, J.W. entered the Air Force and found himself stationed outside Atlantic City serving in Palermo, New Jersey. At the front line of America during the Cold War, he monitored radar for incoming and outgoing planes and ships.

Luckily for J.W., he said he, “was never shot at and I never shot at anyone. But it was scary. I was only 18 and I was waiting all day for the Russians to come.”

Even though J.W. didn't fight in battle, there was still death around. "In 1956, I watched one of our outgoing planes take off on the radar. Their dot on the radar went further and further, but then it stopped," explained J.W. "So I waited. Nothing. Then it popped up as a distress call and I yelled for my sergeant. That plane crashed and killed nearly 100 people."

J.W. says his time in the Air Force was a positive experience, for the most part, but really it just gave him something to do while he figured out life. But he wouldn't do it again and hasn't kept in contact with those he served with.

J.W. served in the Air Force until 1959, when he decided to attend Pennsylvania Military College (now Widener University) where he studied political science and played football. From there, J.W. found a job working for a helicopter company, but it wasn't enough. John needed more and wanted to have an impact on people.

"I couldn't tell you what I did at that job. I did nothing. And I was getting paid! But I hated it. So I immersed myself. I read every book I could get my hands on."

Looking for a new job, J.W. spoke with a close friend about a teaching position that opened up at a high school nearby. He met with the principal on a golf course that day and got the job. For the next ten years, J.W. made a positive impact on his students.

In fact, J.W. left such an impact that he is still in contact with some of his students. P.R., one of J.W.'s former students, still keeps in touch with J.W. When they get the chance, they will get together and fish at P.R.'s cabin. J.W. loves to fish as much as he can, and P.R. loves to see his favorite high school teacher.

J.W. wanted to pursue a new interest of his in archaeology. He loves to read and learn, and wanted to immerse himself in this field. Even though J.W. says he enjoyed it more than teaching, he still found his way back into schools. On some Mondays, J.W. speaks with a small class at Lebanon Valley College.

I spoke with P.R., a student of J.W.'s at Milford High School in Delaware. "Well, J.W. was the best teacher I ever had. He had a lot of patience with us. Everyone knew how much he cared about his students," P.R. claimed. "He helped his students, but he helped that school too. He started an archaeology class at Milford High, and it's still being taught today. He loved that class. He loved it so much he left teaching and started working in archaeology. That school lost their best teacher when he left."

Not everyone gets to follow all of their passions in life. While J.W. took many different paths throughout his life, he followed what he enjoyed, did it successfully and left a lasting impact in his fields and those around him. Even today, J.W. continues to leave his mark as a great friend to many at the VA and continues to impress students of his past.

M.R.

by Meridyth Sanders

M.R. was born in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. He expressed interest in joining the military early on, based on a genuine interest in protecting and serving his country as well as in furthering a line of generational veterans. His grandfather was a bricklayer in Scotland and served in the Royal Navy. His father, born and raised in Scotland, moved to the United States and eventually joined the U.S. Navy.

M.R. followed suit, participating in ROTC while in college before joining the U.S. Navy in January 1993. He pursued flight school and graduated, earning his wings in October of 1995.

M.R. served in the military for 15 years; he spent 10 of those years on active duty and five years in the reserves. During his time in the Navy, M.R. piloted helicopters, assisting in rescue missions and delivering food and supplies to nations in unrest. He was fueled by his strong passion for helping others as well as the excitement of traveling and seeing things other people rarely had the chance to experience.

M.R. documented many of his experiences through photography, allowing him to relive some of his most poignant memories to this day. One of those memories includes the successful rescue of 95 orphaned children from Sierra Leone.

M.R. loved flying, and when given the ultimatum of either continuing to rise in rank (which would include trading his piloting days for a desk job) or returning to civilian life, he chose to exit the military in hopes of pursuing a career flying commercially. He spent six years focusing on his work as a stay-at-home dad before an opportunity arose for him to become a medevac pilot. This career combined his passion for flying as well as his dedication to rescuing others and saving lives.

Now, M.R. spends much of his time volunteering at the Lebanon VA Medical Center. He first came to the VA as a patient and now actively participates in various programs while volunteering as a “pusher,” someone who pushes patients in wheelchairs from place to place within the building. While at the VA, M.R. rediscovered the strong bond that exists among veterans and found comfort in the supportive camaraderie provided by fellow veterans. He also found a deep appreciation for working with other veterans and making every effort to serve them and make their experience at the VA a comfortable one.

P.W.

by Janessa Cruz

“I feel like people tend to focus on the negative aspects of serving in the military, when there’s so much positive,” P.W. said.

P.W., a Broomfield, Colorado, native, served in the US military in its intelligence unit. She has been in the crossfire of catching criminals in South America. In her years of service she was also a part of the boots on the ground order after 9/11.

“I was one of the lucky ones,” P.W. said. P.W.’s enlistment ended six months after 9/11.

P.W. knew she wanted to join the military when she was a junior in high school. Both her father and grandfather served and she added, “I have always had pride in the United States.”

After graduation, P.W. was off to basic training in California. Studying at her base’s linguistic institute, she became fluent in Spanish, which ultimately aided her job role in the intelligence unit as she patrolled South American borders.

While P.W. couldn’t speak about the specifics of the operations she participated in, she discussed the various cultures she was able to witness abroad. “South America was quite different.” said P.W. “They greet you with chocolate covered cockroaches, and we did not want to deny them because we did not want to be rude.”

P.W. appreciated the welcoming culture in Colombia, South America, and it has left an impact on her. Following her time in South America, P.W. was off to Madrid, Spain, where she studied and received her master's degree in Spanish, art, and literature, and where she also completed correspondence courses. Her time in Spain consisted of balancing her studies with her duty to monitor the influx of drug trafficking by patrolling undisclosed locations.

In addition to P.W.'s being a participant in incredibly impactful work in military intelligence, she mentioned how she enjoys physical fitness, although the basic training regimen was brutal. A skilled distance swimmer, P.W. loves the thrill of triathlons. In fact, she wishes that there could be a marathon dedicated to just swimming the distance.

Although P.W. is grateful to have served the country she has such pride in, she knew she wanted a family, and chose not to re-enlist once her time was done. Now a mother to two boys, P.W. is excited to see what their future holds. Her oldest son is interested in electrical engineering.

“I hope he pursues that,” P.W. said. “As much as the military is a great thing, it would worry me if that is what he would choose to do.”

Besides having a top-secret job, P.W. has also enjoyed teaching the second-grade level after she completed her master's degree in education at the University of Colorado. P.W. is a woman of many skills and experiences, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity in learning about her life.

A Story Worth Telling

by Huntre Keip

First impressions can be intimidating, especially when meeting a veteran.

Meeting a veteran resembles reading a classic novel for an English class: you know it's important, but you don't know the meaning behind it yet.

Like every story, you don't know what to expect when you begin to learn a veteran's life. There will be moments of success, frustration and grief, but the overall meaning comes together.

Some people are fast readers, and others not so much. It depends on the individual how long it will take them to fully understand the moral of the story.

It took approximately 60 minutes to understand the story of R.A. Not because he was closed-off or boring, but because the moral of his story is service.

R.A. grew up in the Annville area with his four siblings and his parents. From an early age, R.A. understood the military because his father served in the Marines.

R.A.s' own life of service began by delivering more than 100 newspapers a day. During high school, he attended Lebanon Valley College as part of his vocational-technical program in computer programming.

Upon reaching the age of 18, R.A. enlisted in the Air Force and was sent to San Antonio, TX, for boot camp. He felt prepared and ready for it.

Since R.A. served during the Vietnam War, he was sent to El Paso, TX, to learn Northern Vietnamese, but he could not get a clearance. R.A. never fought on Vietnamese soil.

Instead, he was stationed in Germany where he was part of the motor pool. His hours were 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. every day, but no weekends. Some work days were grueling, but R.A. did his work diligently because he saved time to do something he loved – travel.

Traveling was one of his favorite parts of serving in the Air Force. R.A. traveled all over Europe while he was stationed in Germany.

“I visited the Alps where I learned how to ski,” R.A. said. “One time some British pilots came over, and we took them to different wineries for wine tasting.”

After Germany, he was transferred to North Carolina where he continued his services in the motor pool. His duties included driving majors and colonels to different places. He drove everything from a taxi to a 40-ft. trailer.

R.A. served in the Air Force from 1972-1976.

After his military career, he returned to work, serving in manufacturing, warehousing, and sales and machinery for 30 years. R.A. never stuck to one particular job because he was determined to take whatever became available.

Military men are strong, but they are not invincible. Battling some personal issues, R.A. turned to the VA in Lebanon where he completed a rehab program. Despite his challenges, he found himself serving others again through volunteerism.

As part of the program, R.A. currently volunteers in the activities center by organizing the room and interacting with fellow veterans. He works Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.

“It’s enough for me,” R.A. said. “I’m thankful for it.”

R.A. credits the brotherhood the military gave him. He has encountered many different people, and he tries to help anyone he can.

Not only does he volunteer at the VA, but he is looking to expand his services with other local organizations. In the past, R.A. volunteered with Christian Life Ministries at its food bank.

In his free time, R.A. tries to check off items from his bucket list to fulfill his life of adventure.

“I haven’t been to the Grand Canyon yet,” R.A. said.

He has, however, been to 40 states. He was in Canada when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. He watched one of the Ali v. Frazier fights on television when he was stationed in Germany.

When R.A. is not traveling, he enjoys reading and listening to symphony music. His favorite genres are mystery and suspense. In fact, during the interview, R.A. had a novel right by his side.

R.A. claims not to be the most interesting person, but every good reader knows every person has a story. And his is worth telling.

Thank you for your service.

C.S.

by Spencer Paterick

Recently, I had the privilege of speaking with a former member of the US military at the VA in Lebanon, PA. I spoke with C.S., who served in the US Army for eight years. While in the Army, C.S. was stationed at Fort Jackson in Florida, Fort Lewis in Washington, Fort Gordon in Georgia, and Fort Katterbach in Germany. While in the Army, she served as a Tactical Wire Specialist as well as a driver for her General. Her usual jobs would often include running telephone wires and driving the General wherever he needed to go. She often drove vehicles such as a sedan, Jeep, two and a half-ton truck, five-ton truck, and wrecker, but never anything like a “big-rig.” Her job as a driver meant that she would often know about things before they would happen. C.S. said that she would often notify fellow soldiers on upcoming events: “I would warn them if the General was coming to check, and they didn’t always listen to me, but hey, I warned them.”

C.S. was one of the first women in the military to serve as a telephone pole climber but had to leave the service as a result of breaking her back after she fell from a telephone pole. If this had never happened, she is certain that she would have served in the military for longer. Despite knowing what she knows after serving, she is confident that she would have made the same decision to serve her country in the Army. “I would have liked to stay, just to see how technology changed, especially things like satellites,” said C.S.

While she was stationed in Germany, she said that she and other members of her regiment took orphans on a weekend camping trip, which turned out to be one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences of not only her time in the Army, but also her life. C.S. also said

that she would love to go back to Germany to see how much it has changed since she was stationed there. She was stationed there toward the end of the Cold War Era, which meant that the Berlin Wall was still in place while she was there.

The reason she chose to go into the military, despite being female, was because it was what the rest of her family had done before her. Her mother did not want her to go into the service, but her father was okay with it. She said that she was scared to go into the military at first, but she knew that her older brother would always be there to support her and answer any questions that she had. Family is an important thing for C.S., as she still gets together with her family members at least once a month to ensure that they stay close. She also mentioned that one of the things in her life that she is most proud of is raising two Marines.

One of the biggest problems that C.S. observed while in the military was that drinking is a major problem. Drinking is one of the easiest ways for new soldiers to fit in. C.S. experienced this first-hand as she was the only woman in her regiment, so she felt that drinking was one of the best ways for her to fit in easily. She said that she dealt with alcoholism since she left the military until 2002, but she has been sober ever since. Sometimes, at family gatherings she will get up and leave if she feels that they are getting too out-of-hand due to alcohol.

In her spare time, C.S. enjoys reading books, but not just standalone books; they have to be part of a series, usually mysteries. In addition to reading, she loves woodworking. Some of her past projects include anything from coffee tables to entertainment centers, but she usually makes whatever comes to mind.

One of the most important things that she wants people to know about veterans is that they are normal people too but have different experiences than those who were not in the military.

“Not all veterans are bad, and not all are good, but most of them are good,” she said.

The VA has helped C.S. to realize that what she has gone through is okay, because there are people who have gone through the same kinds of things that she has, and they are dealing with the same issues.

J.I.

by Teddy Denver

J.I. is a man with a long history and storied past. He is a man who loves his family, his country and the Philadelphia Eagles, and not necessarily in that order. J.I. is a man who has been all around the world, protecting the country and its people. Now, J.I. resides in the Harrisburg area and spends most of his time at the VA in Lebanon, Pa.

J.I. was born and raised in Philly and is proud of where he came from. Being from South Philly in the 1960s, he has pride in that city's forming the man he became. He has always loved the Eagles and got the chance to see one of their World Championships when he was 8 years old. As a kid, J.I. went to school and sold pretzels while also having a job delivering papers. In high school, J.I. got into a fight with some bigger kids, but he didn't back down. That's not who J.I. was; he was always smaller, but he never backed down from anything. After this fight, his parents made him enlist in the Army at the age of 17.

Being shipped to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was a culture shock. J.I. had never really been out of Philadelphia, let alone Pennsylvania. After getting through a grueling basic training at Fort Bragg, he was transferred to a station in Missouri before being shipped over to Germany. While in Germany walking through the woods, J.I. was once face-to-face with a Russian tank. He said it was scary at first, but the tank was broken and he ended up bonding with the Russians. After being in Germany for eight and a half months, he heard the news of a war in Vietnam and shortly after he was sent there to fight.

Being in Germany for eight months, J.I. heard much about the US involvement in Vietnam, so he wasn't sure why everyone was going. However, J.I.'s mindset was still the same as when he was a kid; never back down to anyone no matter the size. As a smaller guy, J.I. was forced to be what he called a "tunnel rat." His real title was a demolition specialist for the tunnels throughout Vietnam. Stuck in Vietnam longer than what was expected of him, J.I.'s time there was extended twice. In total, J.I. was in Vietnam serving his country for 1 year 9 months and 23 days before he was able to come home.

Reflecting on his time over in Vietnam, J.I. says besides the war, Vietnam was a beautiful place. He was in central Vietnam in the mountains, and he said the mountain ranges were like nothing he has ever seen. When it didn't rain for days at a time, J.I. enjoyed going into town and seeing the people and food. Toward the end of his time in Vietnam, the scariest thing happened to J.I. One day, he felt a mist coming down from the sky and saw planes spraying something. He didn't know what was happening at the time; all he knew was they had to shower every hour for three days straight. J.I. would later find out that the mist coming from the planes was Agent Orange, and it was very deadly. Thankfully, J.I. is still with us today and is still very passionate about the Eagles.

After leaving Vietnam, J.I. became an electrician and moved to Indiana. There, he got married and helped raise four children. Before moving and starting a family, J.I. was able to visit a few different military bases. He went to West Point to teach the students about demolition and got to learn about West Point's history. He then went to the base in Hawaii and got to see Elvis perform for the troops. These days, J.I. lives in the Harrisburg area and is a frequent visitor of the Lebanon VA. He loves the VA and everyone who works there. If he isn't at the VA, you can

find J.I. lecturing and telling his story at local high schools or cheering on whatever Philadelphia sports team is in season.

G.C.

by Kurt Harnish

I would like to begin this story by mentioning how much of a pleasure it was for me to interview G.C. because he is truly one extraordinary man. I am beyond humbled that I can tell you part of his story. He is more than an amazing military man; he is a father, a husband, a brother, a son, and a grandfather. As a young man he grew up in upstate New York and to this day is a Yankees fan.

“I love the Yankees, always have,” G.C. said.

G.C. now lives in Lebanon and spends most of his days going to the Lebanon VA. While he is at the VA, he spends the days socializing and building small model cars. These small models include anything from classic Chevys to other American muscle cars. Then, every day he goes home to his loving family. He has three children, two of whom are grown up and pursuing careers of their own. His last child is close to graduating from high school and hopes to pursue a college education. G.C. has a very special relationship with his daughter; as he feels she always keeps him focused on what is important in life.

“My daughter is a great mediator and listener,” G.C. said. “She helps keep my wife and me grounded during the hard times.”

Before joining the military at the age of 20, G.C. was pursuing a college education in Puerto Rico. There he met with Army recruiters. He would often go in and talk to them, and eventually, they offered him a military package which consisted of many benefits, some of

which included paying for part of his education. He enlisted in 1984 to become a military nurse, but soon found himself serving as a combat medic. He got his first assignment in Panama during the Reagan presidency, during which Panama saw an influx of many drugs and substances that the United States Army wanted to prevent from entering the country.

“I was first stationed in Panama after I passed my medical training, and we were sent to fight the war on drugs; while there, I usually worked out of an airport or military hospital because we didn’t have many firefights in Panama,” G.C. said. “We were mostly there for intelligence.”

G.C. served in various military missions, such as Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Reagan’s Anti-Drug Program and others. He was also part of the 18th Airborne and had over 28 jumps throughout his career.

“The feeling is incredible; the first time I did it I was scared, but after you first jump and see how amazing the views are, you forget about the bad stuff for a while,” G.C. said.

Throughout his years of service, G.C. was awarded various medals/awards, such as Department of Disabled American Veterans, Purple Heart (In Process), Humanitarian Medal, Iraqi Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Airborne Patch, Combat-Medical Badge and the Anti-Drug Medal.

“I am proud of all the medals and patches I have, and I hope that I am awarded a Purple Heart for my service,” G.C. said.

He is waiting for the Congressman of his district to check with the United States Army to ensure he can receive a Purple Heart.

G.C. served his country faithfully for 32 years, making a career out of his military service. He concluded his service at the rank of E-7, which in the Army is Sergeant First Class. He saw many things while serving as a combat medic and has been all over the world, ranging from Panama to Afghanistan and Iraq. G.C. mentioned that as a medic he often saw very graphic things; he commented that seeing these things is often hard to forget. "It is hard to forget sights like these because they can really stick with you," G.C. said. "Coming and talking with my friends who survived is a help."

However, he does say that there were happy moments during his service as he still keeps in contact with lifelong friends he made during his service. They keep in contact via Facebook and he mentioned how happy he is that they all can still talk. G.C. has also mentioned how important the VA is to him.

"Without this place we'd be going crazy," G.C. said.

His friends and he find relief through the model cars, talking, and playing billiards against each other. While overseas they did other things to entertain themselves.

"While we were in Panama, we would all often go to the beach and have fun that way," G.C. said. "When we were overseas, we would hang out with the special forces guys in between missions."

G.C. is hoping to return back home near Puerto Rico where his parents and most of his siblings reside. He visited last year after a ferocious hurricane that devastated his home, but he said they rebuilt better than expected. Ideally, he hopes to move down to either Puerto Rico or Florida where it is warm, and he can be closer to his 5 brothers and 3 sisters.

I hope G.C. gets to make that dream come true, I have never met a more deserving man. G.C. wanted me to close with this:

“I hope you all continue with this class and interview veterans because a lot of veterans want to get things off their chest, especially the ones from Afghanistan and Iraq,” G.C. said.

“Sometimes we just need to talk.”

J.S.

by Ryan Gilroy

Being my first time at the VA, I didn't really know what to expect. I was the first person to arrive, and waited a while for my classmates to come along. After our entire class arrived, we were escorted by Amy; we walked down a very long hall and found ourselves in the entertainment room, where a bunch of veterans were waiting for us.

All of them seemed very humble and happy to see us. What I didn't expect were the stories that these men and women were going to tell us, let alone the story from the person I interviewed, J.S.

J.S. was born in August of 1934 in Schuylkill County and grew up living on his family's farm in Pittman, Pa. Growing up as one of the strongest guys in his high school, J.S. was a member of the football team, the basketball team, and the bowling team. Although he's 85 years old now, he had an ambition to take charge and, according to him, he "didn't take shit from anyone."

Fresh out of high school, J.S. enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served from 1955 to 1959 and was stationed on the *USS Albemarle*, where he ranked as a Seaman. Eventually, he went to flight school, where he received his wings and flew seaplanes around the world as a pilot, and flew for a minimum of 70 hours a month in order to receive his flight pay. He also attended sniper school, where he became a marksman for his ability for sniping from long ranges. At times, he called himself a "hot head" because of his physical capacity, a big reason why he was so successful in the Navy.

Although J.S. described himself as a hot head, he suffered numerous injuries during his life, and one that didn't happen in the Navy. At one point during his life, he suffered a broken jaw and couldn't breathe through his nose and required a tracheotomy in order to fix it.

Thankfully, his surgery was successful, but his injury limited him and his body to what he could do in the future. His career in the Navy lasted as long as a presidential term, but through his experience, he gained skills that would propel him for the rest of his life.

After being discharged, J.S. found work back in Pennsylvania as a mechanic and continued to live on the farm where he grew up; there, he worked on cars big and small. While at home, he was fond of hunting deer, raccoons, bear, turkey, and moose, and owned close to a dozen different guns and bows.

In the mid-1970s, J.S. married his longtime girlfriend, Marie, and they had three kids together, one daughter and two boys, and settled on the farm. J.S. and his wife continued to work until their mid-60s, when he retired at 65 as a mechanic, and Marie retired from the Schuylkill County School District, where she served as a lunch lady and oversaw the district's entire operations for 45 years.

After retiring at 65 as a mechanic from Pep Boys, he spent most of his time with his family, living off the money he accumulated throughout his lifetime. In order to settle down and focus on his family, he sacrificed his personal collection, hobbies, and time for his loved ones, saying, "I gave it all up. I gave it up for my family." He came in contact with the VA within the last decade, and has said that is one of the best places to be taken care of. According to J.S., the VA in Lebanon "takes care of everything, mentally and physically." He described it as one

of the best places he's lived and would recommend it to anyone in need, as an individual or for your family. Even when his family visits, they feel safe at the VA.

With experience at the VA now under my belt, it was clear to me that everyone in that building takes care of each other, just like the military. The unity between the staff, the patients and their families can only be described as selfless. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the VA, and I'm hoping I can go back sometime soon in the future.

D.S.

by Shilesky L. Montalvo-Cruz

D.S. grew up in Schaefferstown, Pa. While he was in his senior year of high school, he knew he did not want to go to college. He had a military family (well, the S. family with an *a* was military). In D.S.'s family, there are the S-a-----s and the S-o-----s. The S-o-----s did not join the military.

D.S. joined the Army in 1981 and went to Fort Dix for boot camp. While in boot camp, the military officials gave an array of battery tests, which were hypothetical fill-in-the-dots or open-ended questions. D.S. received the results of his tests, and he was able to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. This academy is a prestigious college, and only a few are selected to attend. Before he could go to West Point, he would have to go to a prep school for six months because his grades were not as high as they should have been. If he went to West Point, he would have had to complete a six-year commitment to the Army.

“I was scared to ask questions, and I decided not to attend,” D.S. said.

Upon completing boot camp, D.S. was stationed in Maryland for Advanced Individual Training (AIT) school. He also attended the Ordnance School of Weapons. D.S. was an aircraft mechanic and excelled at it. Once he graduated from AIT school, D.S. was stationed in Fort Carson, Colorado.

“Colorado was beautiful,” D.S. said.

D.S.’s uncle was a colonel in the army. But his uncle had higher expectations for D.S. While in Colorado, D.S. would spend hours ironing and studying Army questions. When the higher-ups would do room checks, they would randomly ask Army questions. If you got all the questions correct, you would get a letter of recommendation and the day off. Also, everything had to be perfect (shirt, jacket, pants, sheets, boots). D.S. was fortunate enough to receive 18 letters of recommendations from the Colonel; he wanted to be the best.

Once D.S. completed his time in Colorado, he was deployed to southeast Germany during peacetime. While in Germany, D.S. had a close friend named Vito. D.S. went to Vito’s uncle’s house to pick him up. When he arrived, their home was like something in Beverly Hills. It had a long driveway and was a huge mansion. The last time he was in contact with Vito was five years ago.

“Germany is beautiful. Instead of crops, they had yellow flowers.” D.S. said. “It reminded me of Schaefferstown.”

D.S. was later stationed in Oklahoma. He went to aircraft school and enjoyed it very much. D.S. served a total of 9 years in the Army; 3 active years, and six reserved. Due to working right next to the artillery and not having ear coverage, D.S. now has trouble hearing. Looking back, he wishes he would have stayed longer in the Army, and he also wishes he had attended West Point College when he had had the opportunity to do so.

D.S. loves working at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Lebanon County. He came back to Pennsylvania despite loving Colorado because this was where he grew up and loved it.

“Working at the VA is great,” D.S. said. “Everyone knows everyone, and we care about what we do and who we are helping. A lot of people from the area have pride in their work.”

I am very grateful to have been able to interview D.S. All his hard work and experiences are ones to admire. I have always looked up to veterans since both my uncles and my grandfather served in the Army. With my husband serving in the Marines, I truly understand how hard they work and how much support they need from their families. D.S.’s uplifting spirit truly showed how much he enjoyed serving his country.