# VETERANS BREAKFAST CLUB

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF LISTENING FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER • VOLUME 10, ISSUE 3

Join the Veterans Breakfast Club for a two-week guided tour of Vietnam! Details inside pp. 6-7

Travel with the VBC on our National WWII Museum & History Tour in New Orleans! Details p.8

## A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Those who attended our events this past summer heard powerful stories vividly told. On May 31, 100-year-old Mary Lou Chapman shared her memories of WWII in Europe with the Red Cross. A week later, at one of the largest VBC events ever, three D-Day veterans spoke on stage at the Heinz History Center. In Beaver, Gold Star Family member Ron Bogolea remembered his grandson, SSG Dylan Elchin, who was killed in action last November in Afghanistan. At our first breakfast in Chautauqua, Gold Star Father Dr. Bill Follansbee told us about his son, Major Ben Follansbee, who died in 2012. In Mars, Iraq War veteran Patti Gerhauser talked about serving aboard the USS Gettysburg fighting pirates off the coast of Somalia in 2009. In Penn Hills, Navy WAVE Julia Parsons recalled her work helping to crack the Enigma code during WWII. Along the way, we learned much about P-38 can openers, MREs, and C-rations, including the much disliked Ham & Lima Bean combat meal.

There's more to come this fall! Take a look inside at our upcoming schedule. Everyone is welcome, and you don't have to be a veteran to attend. Join us to connect, learn, heal, and be inspired.

*Todd DePastino*
Executive Director

## ALL ARE WELCOME!

Breakfasts begin at 8:30 A.M. $12 for breakfast at all locations unless otherwise noted. Just to attend is free.
RSVP to 412-623-9029 or ellie@veteransbreakfastclub.com.

**EVENT SCHEDULE**
**PP. 2-3**

**2-WEEK GUIDED TOUR OF VIETNAM!**
**PP. 6-8**

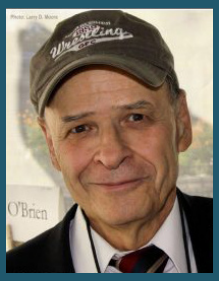
**LAST CALL: TRAVEL TO NEW ORLEANS WITH THE VBC!**
**PP. 14-15**

# UPCOMING

## A NOTE ABOUT RSVPs

Please make sure to RSVP for events at least two days in advance. This helps our venues plan food preparation and setup, and helps us prepare our program. Of course, we understand that your schedule can change quickly, and we always plan for walk-ins and no-shows, but advance notice of attendance always helps.

**THANK YOU!**




**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18**
**7:00PM**

The VBC is sponsoring an evening at the Heinz History Center featuring Vietnam veteran and best-selling author Tim O'Brien, known best for his seminal work, "The Things They Carried." O'Brien will speak about his own service and how he translates stories of combat from experience to the written word. Following the program, O'Brien will sign copies of his books, including "The Things They Carried." Tickets $20 for general admission and $10 for veterans, active duty service members, students, and History Center members (ID required at check-in to receive the discounted rate). Tickets to pre-program reception also available. More info and tickets at History Center website: heinzhistorycenter.org/events/evening-with-tim-obrien.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Breakfast at the 911th Airlift Wing on September 11 MWR Club, 911th Airlift Wing (2475 Defense Avenue, Coraopolis, PA 15108). COST: $16. RSVP REQUIRED. MUST PRE-PAY BY SEPTEMBER 6. Send names and birthdates of all attendees with check for $16/per person, payable to "Veterans Breakfast Club," 200 Magnolia Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15228. All attendees MUST present valid photo ID with birthdate to enter base. Retired military may enter without sending birthdate ahead of time.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Treesdale Community Center (1 Treesdale Commons, Gibsonia, PA 15044)

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21**
**3:00-9:00PM**
Mercer Evening Event (222 Line Road, Mercer, PA 16137) FREE Food, Premium Wine & Beer. Oven fired Pizzas served from 3:00-5:00, BBQ begins serving at 6:00 followed by veterans storytelling.

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24**
**5:30-7:30PM**
"Living with TBI: A Conversation on Working, Socializing & Thriving," Africa Room in the Student Union, Duquesne University (1000 Locust St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219). Light refreshments followed by program. The term "Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)" was largely unknown until recently, when veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan began returning home with head injuries that disrupted brain function. This community conversation will focus on those who've experienced TBI. Join us for an inspirational evening of stories. Discounted $6 parking @Forbes Parking Garage. RSVP to ellie@veteransbreakfastclub.com or 412-623-9029

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**
**11:00AM-1:00PM**
FREE BRUNCH! Pittsburgh Public Theater (621 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15222). Limited to 100 people. RSVP by Sept. 23. Brunch and storytelling program. Free street parking. Also, Theater Square Parking Garage (7th Avenue - $20), Penn Ave Parking Garage ($15), 6th Avenue Parking Garage ($8), Oliver Garage (Oliver Ave - $4). After brunch, optional 2pm matinee performance of *A Few Good Men* featuring Rocky Bleier. Veterans can purchase tickets to *A Few Good Men* with code PPTVBC to receive 50% off up to four (4) tickets. Order at PPT.ORG.

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2**
**8:30AM-10:30AM**
Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)

**RSVP FOR ALL EVENTS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED TO 412-623-9029 OR ellie@veteransbreakfastclub.com**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3**
**7:00PM**
VBC Panel Discussion "Veterans Speak Out: Were the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Worth Fighting?" Peters Township Public Library (616 E McMurray Rd, McMurray, PA 15317). According to a recent Pew Research Center poll, two-thirds of our nation's veterans think the wars we've fought since September 11, 2001 weren't worth the cost of fighting them. We'll convene a panel of young post-9/11 veterans to hear what they have to say, pro and con. The event is open to the public and all are welcome to attend. Register online at ptlibrary.org or call 724-941-9430.

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8**
**8:30-10:30AM**
FREE BREAKFAST! J.E. Harrison Middle School-Baldwin-Whitehall School District (129 Windvale Dr, Pittsburgh, PA 15236) Open to the public event with middle school students asking questions, and veterans sharing their stories. Baptist Rd to Windvale Dr or Curry Rd to Delma Dr to Willow Dr. Signs and students will direct you to Entrance 1.

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10**
**8:30-10:30AM**
FREE BREAKFAST! Chartiers Township Community Center (2013 Community Center Drive, Houston, PA 15342)

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17**
**11:30AM-1:30PM**
FREE LIGHT LUNCH! CCAC South Campus: 1750 Clairton Road (Route 885) West Mifflin, PA 15122-3029. Route 51 to Lewis Run Road. At traffic signal, turn right and you will see the entrance to South Campus on your left.

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Penn Hills, PA 15235)

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Christ Church at Grove Farm (in the Event Barn to the right of the church) (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25**
**5:30-8:00pm**
FREE EVENT! University of Pittsburgh, University Club Ballroom A (123 University Pl, Pittsburgh, PA 15260) To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the GI Bill, Pitt's Office of Veterans Services is hosting a VBC storytelling event with appetizers and beverages. Space limited to 100. RSVP to ellie@veteransbreakfastclub.com or 412-623-9029.

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26**
**6:30-9:00PM**
FREE EVENT! SNPJ Lodge Club 106 (255 W Allegheny Rd, Imperial, PA 15126–2 mi from McClaren Rd. exit Parkway West). Free food, cash bar, and veteran storytelling generously sponsored by the SNPJ Lodge 106 and Blue Star Mothers of Pittsburgh.

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Salvatore's Banquets (5001 Curry Rd Pittsburgh, PA 15236)

# VBC EVENTS

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6**
**6:00-9:00PM**
FREE EVENT! The Pittsburgh Chapter of Pets for Vets at Animal Friends, (562 Camp Horne Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15237). Light refreshments and a panel discussion focusing on the benefits of the human/animal bond and the special role of Pets for Vets. Call 412.847.7030 to RSVP

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Memorial Park Presbyterian Church (8800 Peebles Rd, Allison Park 15101)

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11**
**8:00-11:00AM**
21st Annual VETERANS DAY BREAKFAST Duquesne University Student Union Ballroom (1000 Locust St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219). The VBC is grateful to VLP, Shepherd's Heart, and Friends of Danang for donating tables to us for this special event. Those attending with the VBC attend for free. Todd DePastino will moderate a program focusing on the 20th anniversary of the Friends of Danang. Breakfast to 9:30am. Veterans' storytelling program from 9:30-11:00am. **There will be no shuttle bus transportation this year.** Attendees can park in the Forbes Ave Garage (1180 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15219). **RSVPs REQUIRED BY Nov. 6** to ellie@veteransbreakfastclub.com or 412-623-9029.

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13**
**7:00PM**
FREE EVENT "A Conversation with WWII 45th Infantry Division veteran, Guy Prestia" University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg, Mary Lou Campana Chapel and Lecture Center (150 Finoli Dr. Greensburg, PA 15601). Todd DePastino will introduce and talk with WWII veteran Guy Prestia about his service in WWII, including North African, Sicily, the Italian Campaign, and liberating Dachau Concentration Camp.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16**
**8:30-10:30AM**
FREE BREAKFAST! American Legion Post 527 (401 Draper St, East Pittsburgh, PA 15112)

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Penn Hills, PA 15235)

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3**
**8:30-10:30AM**
FREE BREAKFAST! W.R. Paynter Elementary School-Baldwin-Whitehall School District (3454 Pleasantvue Dr, Pittsburgh, PA 15227) Open to the public event with elementary school students asking questions, and veterans sharing their stories. Churchview Ave to Mary Ann Dr to Pleasantvue Dr. Signs and students will direct you to entrance.

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Christ Church at Grove Farm (in the Event Barn to the right of the church) (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21**
**8:30-10:30AM**
Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)


"POWERFUL, PASSIONATE, and PURELY FASCINATING."
—*Broadway World*

A FEW GOOD MEN

PNC

SEPT 12 – OCT 13

TICKETS ON SALE NOW
Veterans save 50% with code PPTVBC
PPT.ORG 412.316.1600
Groups of 10+ call 412.316.8221

PITTSBURGH PUBLIC THEATER
O'REILLY THEATER


**The VBC will hold a panel discussion ("Veterans Speak Out: Were the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Worth Fighting?") between performances of *A Few Good Men* on Saturday, October 5, 5pm-6pm. This discussion is for ticket holders for the 2pm or 8pm performances on October 5, and tickets must be presented to attend. Veterans receive 50% off up to four (4) tickets with code PPTVBC at PPT.ORG**

**Brian Pitell at Luttner Financial Group is launching the 1st Annual Veterans Appreciation Shoot and will donate the proceeds to the Veterans Breakfast Club. Please consider participating in this special event!**

# THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2019

# THE NEMACOLIN FIELD CLUB

## BENEFITING
## THE VETERANS BREAKFAST CLUB

## ABOUT THE 1ST ANNUAL VAS

On September 26, 2019, The Veteran Appreciation Shoot will host its inaugural Sporting Clays Charity Classic to support The Veterans Breakfast Club. The day begins with registration and continental breakfast (5-stand will be open), followed by a quick safety briefing. Then, following the cannon blast, it's off to the golf carts for a round on the course.

Once the round is over, a relaxing lunch back at the Lodge will take place, along with raffles. Following lunch will be a Trick Show Exhibition. *Sponsored shooting lessons available - First Come, First Serve*

### 2019 VAS COMMITTEE

Brian Pitell, Chairman
Luttner Financial Group

Rick Orienza
Nemacolin Woodlands Resort

Dan Steighner
Luttner Financial Group

John Hatcher
The Nemacolin Field Club

Gerald Pitell
Vietnam 1969-1970

Yohana Williams
Cleanstate

### 2019 VAS SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:30 am | Registration & Continental Breakfast. 5-stand opens. |
| 9:40 am | Safety Briefing |
| 9:55 am | Shoot begins |
| 11:45 am | Lunch & Raffles |
| After lunch | Trick Shooting Exhibition |

## TEAM & INDIVIDUAL REGISTRATIONS

**INDIVIDUAL** $165

**TEAM** $660

All participants will receive:

- 100 Clays targets plus ammo
- Continental Breakfast and Lunch
- Eye/Ear safety wear
- Raffle Ticket
- Sponsored shooting lessons available - First Come, First Serve
  ADD ON: 5-Stand $25

**We look forward to you joining us on September 26, 2019!**

THE NEMACOLIN FIELD CLUB

321 Pike School Road | Markleysburg, PA 15459 | www.nemacolin.com

**Questions? Please call Brian Pitell at (412) 325-8878 or email brian_pitell@lfgco.com**

# SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

## 10 GAUGE - PREMIER SPONSOR $10,000

- 2 foursomes
- 8 rounds at the 5-stand
- 2 full page, full-color advertisement on inside front and inside back covers of program book
- Prominent placement of company-provided banner at event
- Recognition on all event signage as "Premier Sponsor" during lunch
- Podium recognition at lunch as "Premier Sponsor"
- Opportunity to distribute items/samples bearing corporate logo

## 12 GAUGE - GOLD SPONSOR $5,000

- 1 foursome
- 4 rounds at the 5-stand
- 1 full page, full-color advertisement in program book
- Recognition on all event signage as "Gold Sponsor" during Breakfast and Registration
- Podium recognition at lunch

## 20 GAUGE SPONSOR $2,500

- 1 foursome
- 1 half page, B&W advertisement in program book
- Company logo on station sign

## VETERAN TEAM SPONSOR $800

- Recognition as a Veteran Team Sponsor. You can select up to four (4) Veterans to shoot, or you can ask the Veterans Breakfast Club to invite four veterans for the team

## 28 GAUGE SPONSOR $1,250

- 2 shooters
- 1 half page, B&W advertisement in program book
- Company logo on station sign

## 16 GAUGE SPONSOR $750

- 1 shooter
- 1 half page, B&W advertisement in program book
- Company logo on ststion sign

## .410 SPONSOR $250

- 1 half page, B&W advertisement in program book

# PLEASE SELECT YOUR SPONSORSHIP LEVEL

**DATELINE: AUGUST 30, 2019**

- ☐ 10 GAUGE - PREMIER SPONSOR $10,000
- ☐ 12 GAUGE - GOLD SPONSOR $5,000
- ☐ 20 GAUGE SPONSOR $2,500
- ☐ 28 GAUGE SPONSOR $1,250
- ☐ VETERAN TEAM SPONSOR $800
- ☐ 16 GAUGE SPONSOR $750
- ☐ .410 SPONSOR $250

Company Name:_____

Contact Name & Title: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Sponsor must submit high res company logo or art work to ywilliams@lfgco.com

Questions? Please call Yohana Williams at 304-376-5744

*CHECKS MADE PAYABLE TO "VETERANS APPRECIATION SHOOT"*

Please complete this form and return to:

Attention: Brian Pitell / LFG

244 Blvd of the Allies | Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Email: brian_pitell@lfgco.com | Phone: (412) 325-8878

# TEAM REGISTRATION

NAME / PHONE NUMBER

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

# INDIVIDUAL REGISTRATION

NAME / PHONE NUMBER

_____

*ALL PROCEEDS FROM THIS EVENT BENEFIT THE VETERANS BREAKFAST CLUB*

# VBC VIETNAM TOUR

## FEBRUARY 5-19, 2020 • $4,090 price with air from Houston!

Join the Veterans Breakfast Club for a two-week guided tour of Vietnam, highlighting the battle zones of the war while also exploring Vietnam's history and natural beauty. We welcome veterans, their families, and anyone to join us. Todd DePastino will serve as Historian on the trip, providing the broader history and background of the places we'll see. We'll also learn from the Vietnam Veterans who will be traveling with us, stay in wonderful hotels, and have fabulous meals together. **Please contact Todd DePastino with questions: 412-623-9029 or todd@veteransbreakfastclub.com**

**Price includes roundtrip airfare from Houston to Vietnam, hotels, transportation, tours, and included meals. Optional Group Air from Pittsburgh to Houston with overnight in Houston is $550. We've designed this trip based on the Vietnam tour we took in 2018 with veterans and non-veteran travelers.**

**Day 1 Wednesday, Feb. 5: Depart USA. Cross International Date Line.**

**Day 2 Friday, Feb. 7 Welcome and "Good Morning, Vietnam"**
Arrive Hanoi. Meet local guide. Refuel with lunch. Keep moving until hotel check in is available.
Hop on for an afternoon "cyclo" tour of the Old Quarter of Hanoi. Lunch at local restaurant. Short break at the hotel - nap, catch up to social media back home, or wander through the area around the hotel. Evening Group dinner at hotel. **Overnight Hanoi. Meals: Lunch, Dinner**

**Day 3 Saturday, Feb. 8 Fifty-four ethnicities - Two thousand years of history - Five decades of civil war**
Morning visit to the Museum of Ethnology reveals a culture shaped by centuries of kingdoms and conquerors, including the one hundred years of French Colonial rule beginning in the 1800's and early 20th century emergence of Communism and conflict under revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh. Visit to the Museum of Ho Chi Minh Trail. Its imperative to understand the vital link provided by this rugged web of rail, roads, footpaths and waterways, over 9,000 miles, utilized by the North Vietnamese military, through Cambodia and Laos, to transport supplies, troops and equipment from North Vietnam to South Vietnam in support of the Vietcong. Attend the Water Puppet Show.
Dinner on own. **Overnight: Hanoi. Meals: Breakfast**

**Day 4 Sunday, Feb. 9 The Imperial City and the "Hanoi Hilton"**
Touring begins at the Ho Chi Minh House and the Imperial Citadel, dating back to the ruins of a Chinese fortress from the 7th century, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2010. Visit the Hoa Lo Prison, which translates to "fiery furnace" or "Hell's hole." US service-men imprisoned there sarcastically nicknamed it "the Hanoi Hilton." Drive to Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Evening Group Dinner at hotel. **Overnight: Halong Bay. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**Day 5 Monday, Feb. 10 Cruising Halong Bay**
Board a traditional Vietnamese "junk boat" to sail across the emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin among rock islands and pillars and caves where an abundance of marine life thrives. Lunch aboard the cruise offers time to fully enjoy the views, hear the legends of mountain dragons and sea serpents, and learn of the geographical history of the "Karst" landscape. Return to Hanoi for evening flight Hanoi to Hue, duration is one hour.
Dinner on own. **Overnight: Hue. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch**

**Day 6 Tuesday, Feb. 11 The Tet Offensive - 1968**
From January to March 1968, the longest and deadliest battle of the Vietnam War waged in and around Hue. Although commu-nist-backed forces were eventually repelled by American and South Vietnamese troops, the Siege of Hue became a turning point in the war on several levels. Explore the locations of combat, where ancient temples and pagodas were reduced to rubble, and Medals of Honor were earned. Tour Hue Imperial City, a UNESCO World Heritage site, a massive complex known as much for its rich architectural heritage as for its impressive landscaping. Marvel at the Forbidden Purple City and Thien Mu Pagoda, the tallest religious structure in Vietnam. Group dinner. **Overnight: Hue. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**Day 7 Wednesday, Feb. 12 Toil and Tenacity in the Tunnels to Survive**
Heading North to Quang Tri Province, stop at battle sites to see La Vang Church, Quang Tri Citadel, Ben Hai River, Hien Luong Bridge and the Seventeenth Parallel, the former borderline between North and South Vietnam. After lunch, continue along the coast, to Vinh Moc. As armies fought, and bombs fell, villagers across the beleaguered nation sought shelter underground, constructing intricate tunnel systems where young people fell in love, married, started families… children were educated, wounded were treated, and gods were worshiped. The remnants of the Vinh Moc tunnels gives a glimpse of how Vietnamese villagers lived for up to six years during the height of the US involvement. Other tunnel systems were used by the Vietcong, to shelter guerrilla fighters; we'll visit the Cu Chi tunnels near Saigon, later in the tour. Group dinner. **Overnight: Dong Ha. Meals. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**Day 8 Thursday, Feb. 13 The Multiple Enemies along the DMZ**
Moving west from Dong Ha, visit a place where the Ho Chi Minh Trail can be viewed from a bridge. Then "conduct a recon" in the shadow of "the Rockpile," a 700' monolith protruding up from the floor of a narrow valley pass. The surrounding mountains, with jagged ridges and thick vegetation, proved advantageous to "Charlie," using guerrilla like tactics, while the Marines' ground movement was impeded, and helicopter landings so perilous that the valley, littered with choppers that had crashed, was nicknamed "Helicopter Valley." While Hue was deadly, the Battle at Khe Sanh was savage, a horrid mix of Napalm, rice paddies, artillery, and hand-to-hand combat. Dinner on own. **Overnight: Dong Ha. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch**

**Day 9 Friday, Feb. 14 Da Nang – Airbase and American Combat Troops**
Enjoy the lovely coastal countryside, views of the East Vietnam Sea and the Bach Ma National Park on our southbound drive to Da Nang. After lunch, notice the sagging shapes of decaying Quonset huts (access is prohibited) near the former site of the Da Nang US Airbase, visible from the road during the drive to Marble Mountains. In Da Nang, the Fifth Military Zone Museum offers a collection of vehicles, and artifacts left behind by the US divisions based in Da Nang during the war. After check in, wander the few blocks from the hotel to My Khe Beach, the 30 KM stretch of white sugary sand, called "China Beach" by the G.I.'s and used for "R&R" during the war. Group dinner. **Overnight: Danang. Meals: Breakfast, Dinner**

**Day 10 Saturday, Feb. 15 Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) – Seat of South Vietnam's Government**
Morning flight to Ho Chi Minh City. After lunch, visit the Unification Palace, where the beauty of architecture and gardens shine while the wartime communication center and basement "bunker" are often overlooked. Nearby, the War Remnants Museum tells the history of the Vietnam War from the perspective of the Vietnamese, who endured nearly five decades of civil war. Group dinner. **Overnight:Ho Chi Minh City. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**Day 11 – Sunday, Feb. 16 The Mekong Delta – River Patrols and Amphibious Operations**
A river cruise on the Mekong River provides a view of the tangled underbrush, dense aquatic grasses and rice paddies that challenged the patrolling US "Brown Water Navy." Today's Mekong region is a densely populated area (17 million) where house-boats, jet boats and small cruise ships share the waterways with local fisherman and floating markets. Enjoy the local flavor of Coconut Island, with its intriguing history as home to a monastery. The guide will spare you from the tourist "traps." Dinner on own. **Overnight: Ho Chi Minh City. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch**

**Day 12 – Monday, Feb. 17 Guerrilla Warfare in the Tunnels – Cu Chi Tunnels**
During the war, soldiers with smaller frames were asked to be "tunnel rats" and a pay raise came with the "position." Many declined. For those willing, a ruthless adversary awaited. Crawling through the narrow passages of the Cu Chi Tunnels, imagine their fear, wary of booby traps and trip wires, blindly hunting an enemy that knew the twists and turns of the elaborate tunnels. After lunch, stop at the Lacquerware Museum to admire a cultural tradition and craft; consult the guide before purchasing. Dinner on own.
**Overnight: Ho Chi Minh City. Meals: Breakfast, Lunch**

**Day 13 Tuesday, Feb. 18 – (B, D) FREE day to Explore Ho Chi Minh City**
Take in a cultural experience, shop, visit other Vietnam-era locations or relax and reflect. Join the group for a Final Farewell dinner. **Overnight: Ho Chi Minh City. Meals: Breakfast, Dinner**

**Day 14 –Wednesday, Feb. 19 Goodbye, Vietnam.** Morning – Transfer to Airport. **Meals: Breakfast**

**Cross the international dateline, bound for USA.**

**This VBC Tour will be booked through Gate 1 Travel. You can book through https://www.gate1travel.com/customgroups/SAS1736479 or if you'd prefer to book over the phone through a Gate 1 representative, you can do so by calling 800-682-3333 and press #3. Give the agent your GROUP # 1736479 and advise that you are ready to book with this group tour!**

**Travel Protection: We highly recommend purchasing Travel Protection in case medical problems arise before or during travel. You may purchase Travel Protection through Gate 1 at good rates: https://www.gate1travel.com/insurance/arch/**

**Please contact Todd DePastino with questions: 412-623-9029 or todd@veteransbreakfastclub.com**

# VBC NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM & HISTORY TOUR IN NEW ORLEANS!

**December 4-8, 2019 Cost: $995 double occupancy**
**Plus $275 roundtrip air from Pittsburgh!**

We'll enjoy guided tours of the National WWII Museum Holiday, USO Style Entertainment, Lodging at the Brand-New Higgins Hotel, and tour the sights and sounds of historic New Orleans. Designated by Congress as the official WWII museum of the United States, The National WWII Museum sits on a six-acre campus, where five soaring pavilions house historical exhibits, on-site restoration work, a period dinner theater, and restaurants.

**What's Included:** Price includes 2-day admission to museum, four nights at the luxury Higgins Hotel (on the site of the museum), one lunch, two dinners, airport transfers.

**Wed. Dec. 4 (Day 1):** Arrival Louis Armstrong International Airport. Transfer to Higgins Hotel. Afternoon on your own. Welcome Buffet Dinner at Higgins Hotel.

**Thurs. Dec. 5 (Day 2):** Full day guided tour of the National WWII Museum including exhibit areas, Beyond All Boundaries documentary, Final Mission submarine experience, lunch. Dinner on own.

**Fri. Dec. 6 (Day 3):** Several optional tours/excursions for morning and afternoon: Gray Line hop on/off tour of city, Steamboat Natchez Harbor Cruise & Lunch, Garden District Tour, French Quarter walking tour, Laura Planation Tour, Cajun Bayeux Tour. USO style dinner and entertainment at museum.

**Sat. Dec. 7 (Day 4):** Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance and activities at the Museum. Possible optional PT-305 cruise on Lake Ponchartrain. Farewell reception in bar.

**Sun. Dec. 8 (Day 5):** Morning is free. Early afternoon departure for airport.

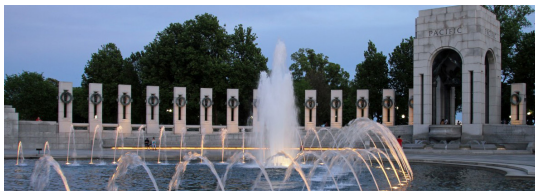
Deposit information: Deposits due to Laura Passuello, Dog Tag Tours, 717-417-8721 or info@dogtagtours.com by the following:

**OCT 15:** $450pp deposit due ($75 non-refundable)
**OCT 15:** $200pp Group Air Deposit due
These due dates will allow us to plan the optional tours and excursions.

**Please contact Todd DePastino with questions: 412-623-9029 or todd@veteransbreakfastclub.com**

## FOR ALL WWII AND KOREAN WAR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

VBC volunteer Jim Jamieson assists veterans in registering the names and service information of WWII and Korean War veterans with the National WWII and Korean War Memorials' Registries. If you would like help registering yourself or a loved one, contact jim@veteransbreakfastclub.com 800 Linda Lane, Pittsburgh, PA 15243 or call 412-623-9029. You may also register yourself or loved ones online at wwiimemorial.com and koreanwarvetsmemorial.org



## A PET-WORTHY PLACE TO WORSHIP

Last year, Becky Nyren held her annual fundraiser in memory of her husband, Staff Sgt. Nathaniel J. Nyren, killed in action. Proceeds from the fundraiser were donated to Pets-For-Vets, operating out of Animal Friends.

Becky's Pastor, Scott Olbert of Christ Lutheran Church (CLC), Millvale, attended the fundraiser. It led him to wonder whether Vets and their Pets had any safe place to worship in Pittsburgh.

Pastor Scott carries some symptoms of PTSD, so he felt that CLC's sanctuary was a safe place for Vets and their Pets. The sanctuary has a wide, open aisle space on each side where veterans and their pets can stand, walk around, or sit without being confined by a church pew. Right outside the front doors of the church is a spacious grassy area complete with a doggy poop bag dispenser! The Congregational Council of CLC unanimously supported the idea when it was brought to their attention, so CLC wants veterans and their pets to know they are welcome any time!

Beginning on Saturday, September 7th, CLC kicks off its contemporary service, Higher Ground, at 5:00. An upbeat traditional service happens on Sundays at 9:30.For more information, contact Pastor Scott at 309-838-7355 or Becky Nyren at 412-720-4599.

## BUDDY BASKETS

Beaver Fall American Legion Post #261 offers "Buddy Baskets" containing clothing, cleaning and other household products for any veteran going into new housing. Contact Janice at 724-601-6431 or jj-boyer@comcast.net

# STORIES FROM OUR VETS

*This story came to us from WWII veteran George Russell, a resident at the VA Community Living Center. We're grateful to Heather Steele of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System for helping to get George's story to us.*

The Three Miracles
By George Russell

IN THE BEGINNING of 1945, I was assigned to a Consolidated B-24 Liberator that we were to fly to New Guinea. In all, there were two dozen bomber crews scheduled to depart from Sacramento for the Pacific theater. The plane had no trouble making it to Hawaii. However, on the second leg, it started to lag: we were losing time and burning through too much gas. There had to be a problem with one of the engines, but when we landed on Canton Island and had the plane checked, we were declared OK for the next leg of our journey, and we set off to Tarawa. There, we again claimed to the Navy, which ran the airstrip we were using, that there had to be a problem with one of the engines, but they cleared us for flight and told us to take off for the Russell Islands. About one hour out, we lost one engine. We knew the bomber could fly on two engines, and possibly even one, if the engines had been well-tuned. With our heavy gasload, we started to lose altitude and headed back for Tarawa. We sank lower and lower and threw everything out the doors that wasn't bolted down. We even dumped gas, but the plane kept sinking. We made it back to Tarawa, barely, and the Navy agreed to order a new engine.

We waited for a transport with the new engine to arrive. The first transport crashed into the ocean, so we had to keep waiting. Twenty-five days later, it arrived, and we departed for the Russell Islands again. The flight was uneventful. But while we were still on the landing strip, we watched another plan come in for a landing, miss the runway, and tumble nose-first into the water.

After refueling at the Russell Islands, we finally arrived in New Guinea. Only 13 of the 24 flight crews had made it so far. We checked in with the Command Center only to be told that we weren't supposed to be in New Guinea. Command was expecting us in Washington D.C., for radar bombing training. We prepared to fly half-way around the world back to the United States until General Douglas MacArthur personally intervened and reassigned us to the Philippines. We joined the 13th Air Force, 64th Group, 23rd Bombing Squadron, stationed at Guiuan Airfield on the southern tip of Samar Island.

On the day before our thirteenth mission, I went swimming in the bay on the Pacific side of the island. I watched as the natives caught octopus near the shore. They put bait around long poles, and when the octopus latched on they raised it out of the water. Some of them were pretty big. I decided it'd be better if I didn't swim in the bay anymore.

The next day, June 18th, 1945, while assembled in the flight room to receive our mission. The squadron commander informed us that five planes had been lost during takeoff, gone into the drink, in the past five days. Nobody had survived. The staff somehow decided that the pilots had been taking their landing gear up too soon. We were told no pilot should take up his landing gear until the navigator informed him that the plane had reached 200 feet above sea level. Staff also briefed us about our new radar bombing gear, which would make our planes extra heavy. Instead of flying with nine men, we'd only take eight on a mission. One of us would get to stay behind. We chose to ground the only married man on our crew.

We boarded the bomber and took up our positions for a westward takeoff. One of the differences about our B-24 was that I, as the navigator, sat directly behind the pilot, rather than in the nose of the plane, where the radar gear was located. It was a tight spot, and as a result, I couldn't wear the backpack parachute as I normally would, but instead had to fly with the clip-on chest chute that made it easier to sit behind the tiny desk. The flight engineer, bombardier, and radio operator all had to stand right next to my desk—Stitler, Orsini, and Breathweight, respectively. As we were taxiing, the wind changed, and we were ordered to take off to the east. The three men around me remained standing as our pilot took the bomber off the ground. I kept my eyes on the altitude and pushed the button to tell the pilot that we had reached 200 feet. That was the last thing I remember.

I woke up in flaming water. How the plane had gone down and how I had gotten out, I didn't know and never would remember. So complete is my memory gap that I sometimes wonder if I ever really experienced these things at all.

I swam out of the flames and tried inflate my Mae West life vest, but my CO2 capsules were missing—someone had likely taken them out to cool beer. When I tried to blow up the life preserver manually I couldn't hold my lips around the nozzle. That's when I realized my jaw was broken. I could hold the tube in place with my hands, but then I couldn't keep myself afloat. Every time I tried, I felt myself sinking. I felt the weight of my harness more and more, and hoped that by removing it I could stay up long enough to inflate the Mae West. But I still sank. Then, I felt something grab me by the leg. All I could think of were the octopi I'd seen the day before. I was sure one was taking me under. I pushed my body up out of the water and ran 20 or more steps on the surface of the water before falling back in the sea. The first miracle.

Next to me was a canvas water bucket, which I turned upside down and put between my legs. I could float on it, and this freed my hands to hold the life preserver up to my mouth long enough to inflate it. It was only then, after having escaped the most immediate dangers, that I became aware of my wider surroundings.

I heard the bombardier, Mike Orsini from New Jersey, calling for help. On my way to him, I found a partially inflated raft. It was enough to keep Orsini and me afloat. Carlson, the belly gunner, who was in the back of the plane, found us, and grabbed hold of the raft. We clung there together in the vast Pacific for nearly three hours.

I remember seeing a rescue boat and being taken to a tent hospital, and then loaded onto a transport ship, the USS General Mure, but it's all vague. Someone told me Orsini and Carlson had been flown back to the States, their injuries more severe than mine. In addition to my jaw, my knee had been scrapped open. Doctors performed a skin graft by freezing my rear end and slicing off a piece big enough to cover my knee. After the skin graft held for a couple of days, they declared it successful and allowed me to go up on deck and sit in the sun.

The ship chugged slowly for San Francisco. Like many things built in the rush of war, our ship had defects. The generators were located right up against the smokestack and burned out coils every other day. So, I passed the time on the deck watching people walk by. I noticed "Steiner" stenciled on the back of one man's shirt. I recalled a boy I knew from childhood. Sure enough, it was Carl Steiner, a Coast Guardsman on the ship's crew. We reminisced about home and talked about all the things we were going to do when we got back.

When we stopped in Hawaii to get some replacement parts for the faulty generators, the Captain received orders that instead of California, we were to head to New York Harbor, via the Panama Canal. We entered New on V-J Day. Before debarking, Carl came up to say goodbye and suggested we go on a double date when we got back to Alton, Illinois. I told Carl I hadn't been home in three years and didn't know anyone there anymore.

***STORY CONTINUED P. 10***

## STORIES FROM OUR VETS (CONTINUED FROM P. 9)

"I'll get you a date with my cousin," he assured me.

Carl went on home, and I went to a hospital in Creston, Iowa. After two weeks, I got a 30-day leave, headed to Alton and called up Carl. His cousin had turned me down, so we went fishing instead. His cousin's family had a fishing camp on the Mississippi River. Near the end of our trip, his aunt drove to the camp because she didn't trust us to close it up properly. The aunt's daughter, Marjorie, the girl I was supposed to go on a date with, had come along for the ride.

She took one quick look at me and changed her mind about that date. I found out later that Marjorie always imagined she'd marry a tall, dark handsome man who smoked a pipe. I was heavily tanned after my 45 days on the USS General Mure's deck, was smoking a pipe when she saw me, and, while I was never tall, I happened to be standing on a boulder when she caught her first glimpse. I gave a call during the Christmas holidays, and she said yes. The second miracle.

Less than a month later, on January 22, 1946, Marjorie and I were married. The officiating priest declared it wouldn't last. In 2016, we marked our 70th anniversary. The third miracle.

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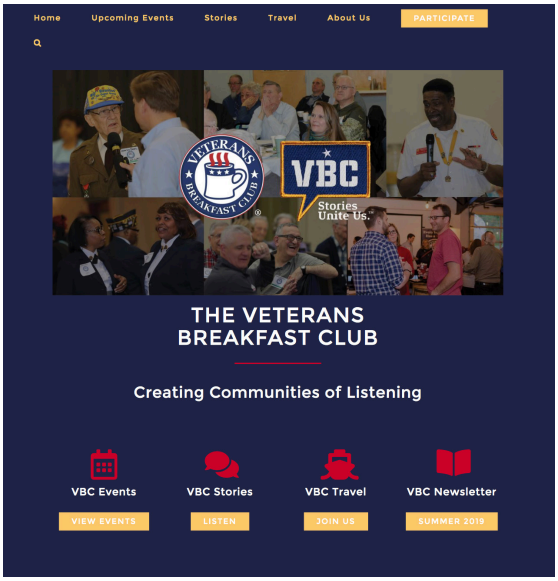
Head to our website, **vbcpgh.org**, to view our event schedules, upcoming travel opportunities, e-newsletters, and ways to get involved with the VBC. Check out our "VBC Stories" page to listen to live event recordings, browse our archive of veteran stories and interviews, and watch short storytelling videos (like those below). And don't forget to follow us on Facebook, where we often livestream VBC events as they happen in real time!



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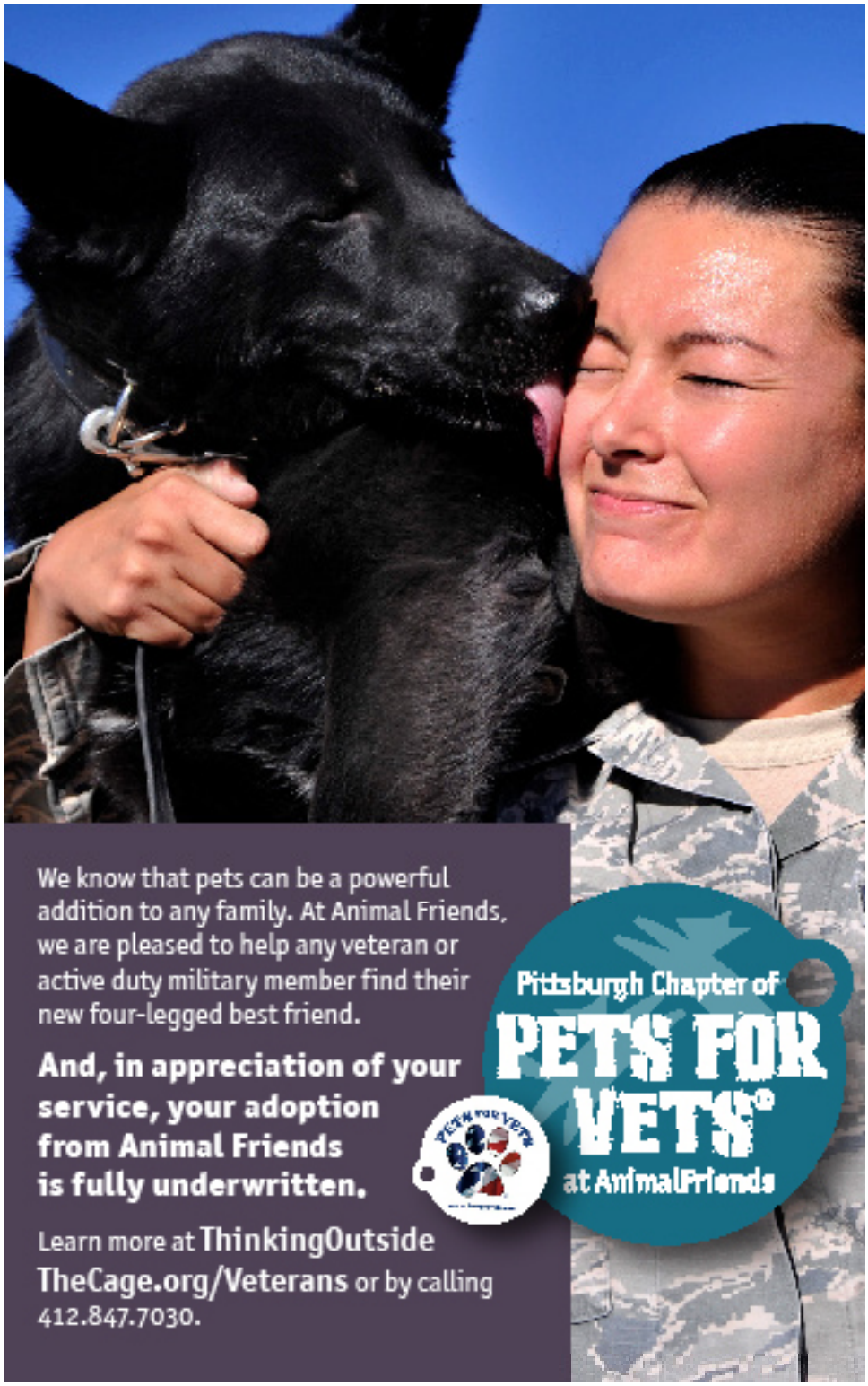

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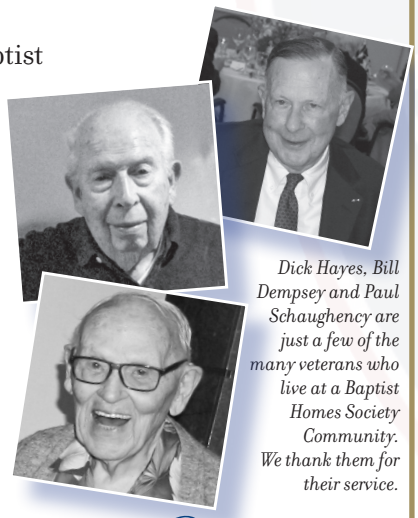

*Dick Hayes, Bill Dempsey and Paul Schaughency are just a few of the many veterans who live at a Baptist Homes Society Community. We thank them for their service.*

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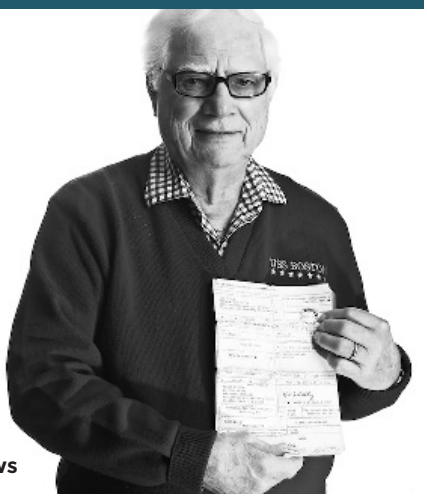

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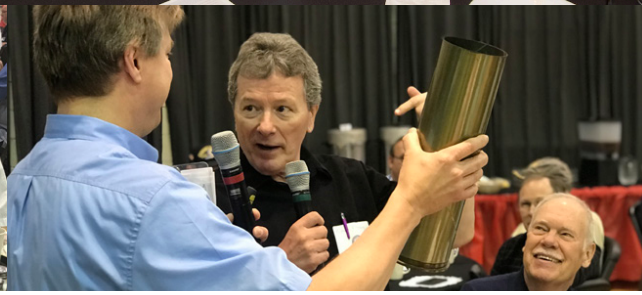

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