



# Officers' Call

Newsletter of the Lake & Sumter Counties Chapter  
Military Officers Association of America  
February 2026



## Presidents Message

LTC Don Hansen, USA (Ret), Chapter President

Welcome to February, the month of: Groundhog Day (2nd)(my favorite movie); the Yalta Conference meeting of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt (4th of 1945)(the USS Chemung, the fleet oiler my father served on, fueled the Presidential Convoy returning from that conference on February 22nd. The President was on the USS Quincy, a Baltimore-class heavy cruiser.); Lincoln's Birthday (10th); Valentine's Day (14); President's Day (16th); Mardi Gras (17th); Ash Wednesday (18th); Marines land on Iwo Jima (19th of 1945); and Washington's Birthday (22nd).



January was an auspicious beginning of the year as our newly elected officers were sworn in by chapter member Major General John McWaters, USA (Ret). Our officers for the next two years, as listed in last month's newsletter, are myself as President; Bruce Hacker, First Vice-President; Dan Cagle, Second Vice-President; and Dennis Storey, Treasurer. As no one ran for Secretary, I swore in Rhonda Storey, Dennis' wife, to continue her great work over the last year or more. I have also appointed Pam Fillmon Sherrill, who had served as our Second VP, as our chapter's Historian.

(Continues on next Page)



Check out the Florida Department of Veteran Affairs for Florida Veteran Legislation.

### OUR NEXT MEETING

**Wednesday  
February 11th  
11:30 a.m.**

Location  
Eisenhower Recreation Center  
3560 Buena Vista Blvd  
Wildwood, FL 34785



### OUR MEAL

Our caterer will be Tierra Del Sol Bar & Grill and they will be serving their House Salad with dressings, Macaroni Salad, Mixed Diced Fruits, Half pound sirloin patties with brioche buns, Warm Sauerkraut, Sautéed Mushrooms and Onions, and Assorted condiments. Ice tea is also included.

### COST

Meals are **\$20.00/person** if you **register and pay** online. Meals are **\$20/person** following the deadline and **\$20/person** if you pay at the door.

### RSVP

**No Later Than, 10:30 a.m. on Friday  
February 6th**

[Click Here](#)

or contact Marv Sherrill at [msherrill45@gmail.com](mailto:msherrill45@gmail.com) or 352-728-2945.

## President's Message Continued

Our speaker last month was Jim Press who has given so many great presentations over the last few years to us, the WWII History Club, the Civil War History Club, the Early American History Club, the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), the Learning Center, and many other organizations and clubs. His presentation on Winston Churchill and His Generals was another hit which everyone enjoyed. Although, it's just possible that Jim will enjoy his speaker's gift from us just as much as we enjoyed hearing him.

Jim wasn't the only one to get an "explosive" gift (Glass Grenade with US Army emblem filled with Jack Daniels), as our long time Treasurer, Pete Rector, also received a "thank you" Grenade but it was with the US Navy emblem and he will have to fill it himself as I didn't have his favorite brand of Scotch to put in it.



This month's presentation also promises to be an interesting one as E. Alex Copher will give his talk on "Can we wait until tomorrow morning?" Alex has had an interesting life but his talk will deal mainly about his service as a Department of State Foreign Service Officer and what life is like serving in eleven American Embassy hardship assignments and two Washington DC assignments over 30 years of service. Immediately (2 days) after he graduated from high school he reported to the US Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, SC, at age 18. He was initially trained as a Mortarman but then was trained as an American Embassy Marine Security Guard. His four years as a Marine took him to Okinawa, South Korea, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan and service at American Embassies in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Bogota, Colombia. He was honorably discharged as a Sergeant (E-5) when his four years was up and he promptly started college at George Mason Univ. and then Ohio University where he received an Army ROTC scholarship, earned Distinguished Military Student status, and where he married his wife, Margarita. Upon graduation, he was commissioned as a 2nd LT in the USA Reserves after turning down a Regular Army commission. His two years assigned to the USAR 11th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in the S-2 office prepared him well when he joined the US Department of State/US Foreign Service in 1989. As I mentioned above, his and Margarita's service over the next 30 years took them to eleven US Embassy hardship assignments in: Ac-

## Presidents Message Continued

cra, Ghana; Asuncion, Paraguay; Almaty, Kazakhstan; Bogota, Colombia; Lilongwe, Malawi; Kathmandu, Nepal; Rangoon, Burma; Yerevan, Armenia; Georgetown, Guyana; Lome, Togo; and the American Consulate in Yekaterinburg, Russia. They did have two assignments in Washington DC. Margarita also served in various embassy assignments as a Diplomatic Courier, Cleared American Escort, Consular Section document fraud expert, International School bus escort, and the General Services Office where she served as an Interior Decorator and assisted in the redesign of two American Ambassador residences and in the artistic enhancement of the American Consulate in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Their son, Victor, accompanied his parents to six out of the eleven embassy assignments. In 2019 Alex retired from the Foreign Service and in November of that year Alex and Margarita retired in The Villages along with their Maltese dog, Bubba. We are trying out a new caterer this month. Chef Amador Hernandez and the Tierra Del Sol Bar & Grill will be serving their Great American Buffet with Signature House Salad with ranch & Italian vinaigrette dressings, Macaroni Salad, Mixed Diced Fruits, Half pound sirloin patties with brioche buns, Warm Sauerkraut, Sautéed Mushrooms, Sautéed Onions, Lettuce, Tomato, Onion, Pickles, and Assorted condiments. Ice tea is also included. I look forward to seeing you at our chapter meeting on the 11th (don't forget to call Marc to let him know you are coming) and I will give you a very short update on the FCOC Combined 2026 Leadership Training Seminar & 49th Annual Convention some of us attended this weekend in Orlando. Also - don't forget to bring a bottle of wine/ booze for the silent auction baskets. That's about all for now. See you on the 11th and always remember: **NEVER STOP SERVING!**



# Membership and Recruiting

COL Al Arnold, USA (Ret), Membership Chairman

A **hearty welcome** to the following member who recently joined our Chapter:

Mark Moeller, LTC, USA, retired



We currently have 300 Chapter members. All Chapter members are also members of National MOAA!!

Thanks to all of you that have renewed your 2026 Chapter membership. Your continued support is really appreciated!!! At the beginning of January, we had 95 folks who had not renewed.

As of this writing, we still have over 70 members who have not renewed their membership for 2026. I've been in contact (by phone or email) with all. Many that I have actually spoken with have indicated they will renew. I've left a voicemail for over 40 folks who have not returned my call yet. Please know that your (still) \$20/\$10 for regular/surviving spouse membership goes almost 100% to the 10 JROTC scholarships we provide.

**Please, please, please renew your membership.** If for some reason you are not planning to renew, we'd like to know why and how we can make our Chapter better and more responsive to your needs.

You can renew **by mail** by printing/using the application at the end of this newsletter, include a check payable to MOAA and mailing to: MOAA, PO Box 666, Lady Lake, FL 32158. Or you can do it **easily online** and pay via PayPal or by credit card at the following address: [http://www.lakesumtermoaa.org/member\\_registration.cfm](http://www.lakesumtermoaa.org/member_registration.cfm), then click "Renew Membership" and follow the subsequent prompts. If you are having issues with doing it online, just call me.

As always, if you have questions or need more information, call or email me.

Stay safe.

## Chapter Awards



2024



2024

## CHAPTER OFFICERS

### President

LTC Donald Hansen, USA (Ret)

### Past President

CAPT Paul Hauser, USN (Ret)

### First VP

Lt Col Bruce Hacker, USAF (Ret.)

### Second VP

Capt. Danny Cagle, USMC (Former)

### Historian

Pam Fillmon Sherrill

### Treasurer

CWO3 Dennis Storey, USA (Ret)

### Secretary

SMSgt Rhonda Storey, USAF (Ret)

### Chaplain

Maj Daryl DesJardin, USAF (Ret)

### Legislative Liaison

Lt Col Bob Bienvenue, USAF (Ret)

### State Legislative Liaison

Col William Wojciechowski, USAF (Ret)

### Membership

COL Al Arnold, USA (Ret)

### Personal Affairs

LtCol James O'Hagan, USMC (Ret)

### Community Affairs

Col Marcus Sherrill, USAF (Ret.)

### Surviving Spouse Liaison

Cathie Stevens

### Provost

COL Kevin Harvey, USA (Ret.)

### Recruiting

MAJ Thomas Lutes, USA (Ret.)

### Newsletter

LTC Luke Emerson, USA (Ret)

### Web Site:

[www.lakesumtermoaa.org](http://www.lakesumtermoaa.org)

### Information:

[info@lakesumtermoaa.org](mailto:info@lakesumtermoaa.org)

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Lady Lake, FL 32158-0666

## Chaplain's Corner

Maj Daryl DesJardin, USAF (Ret), Chaplain



February brings us Four Chaplains Day, commemorating one of the most powerful examples of selfless service in military history. On February 3, 1943, the USAT Dorchester was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Greenland. As the ship began its rapid descent into the icy waters, four Army chaplains—Methodist Rev. George Fox, Reformed Church in America Rev. Clark Poling, Roman Catholic priest Fr. John Washington, and Jewish Rabbi Alexander Goode—gave away their life jackets to frightened young soldiers and linked arms in prayer as the ship went down.

What strikes me most about this story isn't just the chaplains' final moments, though those are profoundly moving. It's what those moments revealed about how they had already been living. These men of different faiths had become close friends during their time together, praying with and for one another, sharing duties, and embodying unity in diversity. Their sacrifice wasn't a sudden decision—it was the natural culmination of lives already committed to putting others first.

For us as retired officers and military spouses, this anniversary offers more than historical remembrance. It reminds us that our service didn't end with retirement. The chaplains' example challenges us to ask: Where are we still called to give of ourselves? How can we continue to serve our fellow veterans, our communities, and each other?

Perhaps it's mentoring a young leader, supporting a Gold Star family, or simply being present for a chapter member going through a difficult time. Maybe it's advocating for veterans' benefits or volunteering in ways that use the leadership skills we spent careers developing.

The four chaplains came from different backgrounds but were united in purpose. Our MOAA chapter reflects that same diversity of experience—different branches, different eras, different roles—yet we're bound together by shared service and sacrifice. Let us honor the Four Chaplains not just by remembering them, but by embodying their spirit of selfless service in whatever time we have remaining.

As Rabbi Goode's father said of his son: "He did not give his life; he gave himself."

May we do the same.

Chaplain Daryl DesJardin, MAJ (ret), USAF

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Please Support our Golf Tournament Hole Sponsors

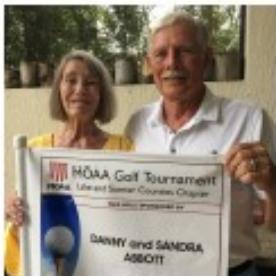


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**Dennis & Rhonda Storey  
Bruce & Nancy Hacker**

# Legislative Update

Bob Bienvenue, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), Legislative Liaison

## MOAA Legislative Update:

<http://www.moaa.org/takeaction/?tab=Legislative-Action-Center#Legislative-Action-Center>



## MOAA's Advocacy in Action Campaign— Status Update



Budget Deadline Draws Near:  
What's Funded, What Isn't, and What Happens Next  
By: Brenden McMahon January 27, 2026

While some agencies that support the uniformed services and veteran communities have full-year funding for FY 2026, **others remain dependent on temporary funding set to expire Jan. 30.**

What Congress does before that deadline will determine whether funding continues uninterrupted for some servicemembers, their families, and the civilian workforce that supports them.



### Enacted FY 2026 appropriations include funding for:

**Veterans and survivors**, through accounts supporting the VA.

**Military construction**, including facilities that support readiness and quality of life across military installations.

**The Department of Commerce**, which includes the NOAA Commissioned Corps.

### Communities Still Operating Under Temporary Funding

Other major parts of the uniformed services community **are still operating under a continuing resolution** (CR) because their FY 2026 appropriations bills have not been enacted.

**The Department of War**, which includes active duty military servicemembers, the National Guard and Reserve, and the civilian workforce responsible for supporting their readiness, training, and operations.

**The Coast Guard**, including pay, operations, and mission execution for Coast Guard personnel (operating under the Department of Homeland Security).

**The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS)**, whose commissioned officers support public health readiness and federal response missions (Operating under the Department of Health and Human Services).

**Until full-year appropriations are enacted, these service communities remain subject to temporary funding tied to the Jan. 30 deadline.**

### MOAA's Position and Mission

While continuing resolutions keep agencies operating in the short term, they do not provide the certainty or flexibility of full-year appropriations. Delays in completing the FY 2026 budget extend uncertainty for servicemembers, veterans, families, and the civilian workforce that supports the all-volunteer force — even as missions and commitments continue uninterrupted.

**MOAA will continue to engage with lawmakers, keeping members informed as Congress works toward avoiding another crippling shutdown and completing the remaining FY 2026 appropriations.**

# Legislative Update (Continued)

Bob Bienvenue, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), Legislative Liaison

**With the House not in session the week of January 26-30, the chance of getting even a CR, never mind passage of an omnibus appropriations bill, to end this funding fiasco is at risk.**

**Keep your eye on MOAA's Legislation Action Center [MOAA | Action Center](#) for the latest CALLS-TO-ACTION**

New Coalition Forms to End Unfair Pay Offset Facing  
Combat-Injured Veterans  
*By MOAA Staff January 21, 2026*

MOAA has joined with 14 other advocacy groups to form **The Star Act Alliance**, a coalition dedicated to ending the unfair pay offset – a “wounded veteran tax” – faced by tens of thousands of combat-injured military retirees.

*“This partnership alliance puts into perspective how important this legislation is to the total force,” said Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret), MOAA’s President and CEO. “It is foremost directly important to the 54,000 wounded warriors who would receive the benefits they’ve earned. But this legislation does even more and serves another important purpose: It also shows future generations that our nation will keep their contracts and honor the sacrifices they make for the nation by supporting them and their families when they need it most.”*

The House version of the bill (H.R. 2102) had 313 cosponsors as of Jan. 15; the Senate version (S. 1032) had 77 cosponsors. **Despite this level of support through multiple congressional sessions, the legislation has yet to receive a floor vote in either chamber**, and procedural rules have thwarted attempts to include the text of the bill as an amendment to other legislation, including the National Defense Authorization Act.

Charles Choi, deputy director of Government Affairs for WWP said *“The alliance, which represents millions of veterans and their families and caregivers, ensures that the veteran community speaks with one voice as we work together to see the Major Richard Star Act passed by Congress and signed into law ... I’m excited to work with all of the participating organizations and encourage other organizations who aren’t working with us to reach and get involved!”*

**The Star Act Alliance** looks to continue the momentum in Congress through wider public outreach and media engagement. See more here [major-richard-star-act-quick-reference-sheet.pdf](#)

**The Star Act Alliance** is also working with State Legislatures across the country to pass resolutions urging Congress to approve the Major Richard Star Act. These resolutions send a powerful message from the ground up: lawmakers at every level support ending the unfair “wounded veteran tax.”

Each state that joins this effort builds momentum in Washington and keeps the issue front and center for federal decision-makers.

**You will soon be receiving more info on the progress of this campaign in the Florida Legislature.**

# State Legislative Update

William Wojciechowski, Col, USAF (Ret), State Legislative Liaison



## FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE REPORT

- **Florida Veterans and Military Spouses Business Development Act (SB 1182 / HB 1041):** This legislation aims to waive specified business registration fees for veteran-owned and military spouse-owned businesses. It also proposes tax exemptions for these businesses for up to five years after they establish or relocate to Florida.
- **Charitable Bingo for Veteran Organizations (SB 1282 / HB 609):** These bills seek to clarify and codify the use of "instant-bingo dispensers" for veteran organizations like AMVETS. The goal is to provide legal certainty for these groups to use bingo proceeds for community health and mental health initiatives without the risk of criminal liability.
- **Veterans Dental Care Grant Program (SB 96 / HB 253):** This bill expands eligibility for the program to veterans with incomes of up to **400 percent** of the federal poverty level, an increase from the previous 300 percent cap. It includes a recurring appropriation of **\$500,000** starting in the 2026-2027 fiscal year.
- **Housing for Veterans (HB 1481):** Establishes the "Homes for Veterans Property Management Incentive Pilot Program". It provides funding to landlords from vacancy and risk mitigation trust funds to encourage housing availability for veterans.
- **Ad Valorem Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans (SB 450 / HB 393):** Revises property tax exemptions, specifically removing limitations on the value of a tax exemption that a surviving spouse can transfer to a new residence.
- **Sales Tax Exemption for Motor Vehicles (HB 665):** Proposes a sales and use tax exemption for new motor vehicles purchased by certain armed forces veterans.

## IMPORTANT MESSAGE

MOAA's status as a tax-exempt veterans organization precludes it from participating in political activities, which are defined as intervening directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. We all need to be particularly attentive to this *non-partisanship restriction* during this very active political campaign season, when we are wearing our MOAA hat either individually or on behalf of our Chapters.

MOAA is a registered **lobbyist** with Congress. This legal designation pertains to the nature of communications with elected officials and staff. Maybe a better term to describe their effort is **advocacy**:

the association does play an active role in the field of military personnel matters and especially proposed legislation affecting the career force, the retired community, and veterans of the uniformed services and advocates for a strong national defense it does not, as an association, become involved in matters pertaining to military strategy or individual weapons systems of the various services. The association believes that such decisions can be made only by those who have all of the facts available to them: today's actively serving military leadership.

MOAA has been recognized for the past 18 years by **The Hill News** as a TOP Lobbying Organization based on its effective advocacy on the issues defined in its governing documents and resolutions, presenting and supporting legislative proposals that provide for the fair and equitable treatment of members of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, military retirees, family members, survivors, and veterans as defined in its federal Charter in 36 USC, chapter 1404.

*The Editorial Policy of this Newsletter is consistent with the discussion above.*

## Surviving Spouses Corner

Cathie Stevens, Surviving Spouse Liaison



# Happy Valentine's Day

As Valentine's Day approaches, hearts everywhere begin to glow through memories cherished, moments shared, and hopes for the future. For many, this is a joyful time. For others, especially those who have lost a spouse, Valentine's Day can be bittersweet – a mix of tenderness, remembrance and sometimes quiet longing. Love doesn't end; it endures. The love you and your spouse shared was deep, real, and still matters. May you feel surrounded by peace and love on February 14<sup>th</sup>. Reflect on your happy times. On our last Valentine's Day before my husband passed away he bought me some felt heart wall art from the Dollar Tree – that was 6 years ago and I still have those hearts and hang them in my office every February. Memories.

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### Chapter Shirts & Name Tags

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The Villages, FL 32162  
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### Editorial Policy

MOAA is the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization. It is our Chapter responsibility to adhere to MOAA standards in all regards. Membership is open to anyone who has served as a commissioned or warrant officer in any of the eight military services, or is the surviving spouse of an individual who was a member or was eligible to be a member of MOAA.

This newsletter is a publication of the Lake and Sumter Counties Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America. It is intended for wide distribution to all MOAA members in Lake, Sumter and Marion Counties, Florida.

Input for **Officers' Call**, including text and pictures, can be emailed to the editor:



**The Council Communiqué**

Florida Council of Chapters  
Military Officers Association of America

Click above to see what's going on in the state!



# The Army Officer Candidate School Database: Preserving the Legacy of Commissioned Leaders



The Army Officer Candidate School (OCS) Database stands as a landmark resource for OCS graduates, their families, and historians. Built to honor more than eight decades of service and sacrifice, the database is dedicated to preserving the lineage and accomplishments of those who earned their commissions through the U.S. Army's OCS programs.

For over 80 years, Army Officer Candidate Schools have transformed prior-service enlisted Soldiers and qualified civilians into commissioned leaders. From the battlefields of World War II to modern operations around the globe, OCS-commissioned officers have played pivotal roles in shaping American military history. The creation and expansion of the Army OCS Database represents a major milestone in capturing that heritage with accuracy, dignity, and permanence.

For the first time, graduates, families, researchers, and veterans can explore a growing historical archive documenting the men and women who received their commissions through every Army branch school dating back to 1941. This living, continually expanding database currently includes more than **282,500 graduates**, with additional entries added as new records are discovered, digitized, and verified.

More than a directory, the Army OCS Database is a tribute—ensuring that the leadership, commitment, and stories of OCS-trained officers are never lost to time. It serves as a bridge between generations of Soldiers and a foundation for future historical research, education, and remembrance.

[www.armyocsdatabase.com](http://www.armyocsdatabase.com)

# Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) Society

Joe Finch, LTC, USA (Ret.)



DEAR DFCS members and wives

: Subject: **Happy New year !!**

We had a successful 2025! Our Guest speaker program (fourth Monday of each month) hosted 9 guest speakers at the trinity Springs theater.

We picked two winners for our scholarships. (These two just happened to be twins ) We have now helped eight young men and women get into college and begin their own roads to success;

Six of us attended the National DFC reunion in Charleston SC; We met with the new President Warren Eastman and several of the staff including the highly efficacious Mary Ellen Park

At the reunion, we met three young men who earned DFC's while saving the lives of some 27 young girls caught in the freak rainstorm & rapidly rising Santa Cruze river in East Texas 5-6 July;

We were recognized by the Florida Authors and Publishers Association (FAPA) for our 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of our Faces of the Distinguished Flying Cross of Central Florida books – Because of the success of our latest book, each of 29 authors who contributed a chapter are now “Award winning authors” a noteworthy title; So, congratulations!

We have joined hands with the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

We had a successful second annual Christmas party....

Our club remains financially solvent, and we have a table at the Writer's league of the Villages ( WLOV) Book EXPO on 25 January,

Our club has 36 DFC awardees. I am proud of all your accomplishments, and glad to call you “friends” ...

YES!! It was a successful year! I would like to enjoin you each to help us make next year a success as well.

// \_\_\_\_\_

We need to be more persistent in our fund raising. We need new ideas on how to bring in funds to help with scholarships. We need to reach out to the various schools and make them aware of our scholarships and ensure they are aware of Military academies as an alternative to paying for a university degree : “University degrees cost between **\$123,960 at an in-state public college, \$203,680 at an out-of-state public college, and \$261,880+ at private nonprofit colleges**” ( source: Wikipedia).

Military academies (West point NY, Annapolis MD, USAF academy Ft Carson, CO) pay for all education expenses and pay a regular stipend ~ \$1,200 /month. Additionally, when cadets graduate, they have a degree and a constellation of friends who will support them for the next 40 years; They step into a choice of several career paths with a well-defined ladder for success.

We need to continue to identify guest speakers who can talk on topics of interest to club members, the senior citizens who live in Trinity Springs Senior Living, and the general public. (We have had a sprinkling of public visitors from Staples, the office of Hon Congressman Daniel Webster, the Daily Sun newspaper, Central Florida Salute, and out-of-town guests)

In 2026 our DFCS leadership team will find a way to meet in an officially sanctioned Recreation center meeting room so we can be an official Villages club with unlimited access to recreation centers for our activities. We can still use the Trinity Springs senior living theater, but will also be able to meet in established Recreation centers in the Villages.

We need to identify ways in which we can involve our senior members who can no longer attend meetings, find ways to lift their spirits in a location they can access.

We can volunteer to be guest speakers at the Monthly MOAA meetings and we will be able to sell our books at their meetings.

I would like to encourage you all to make appointments to talk with kids in local schools (Wildwood for now and Leesburg for 2027?)

**Bottom line:** there is always room for improvement even if you are doing things right.

# Coast Guard News

## Rescue in Kerr county Texas

On July 4, 2025, destructive and deadly [flooding](#) took place in the [Hill Country region](#) of the U.S. state of [Texas](#). During the flooding, water levels along the [Guadalupe River](#) rose rapidly-- 40 feet in a few hours. As a result, at least 135 people were killed, 117 of them in [Kerr County](#). The flooding was caused by a [mesoscale convective vortex](#) with enhanced tropical moisture.

Coast Guard service members are trained to be America's first responders. On 4 July 2025 their training and their skill was sorely tested, when Air Station Corpus Christi received a call to assist the State of Texas near the town of Kerrville. Rising waters from the Guadalupe River had caused a catastrophic flash flood, and resources from across the state were mobilizing to respond. The request was 150 miles inland and not an area where the service normally operates, but four members from Air Station Corpus Christi, Rescue 6553, were ready.

They responded to a call for help when the Guadalupe river in Kerr County began flooding and taking with it a number of children at a campground. Over the next 4 hours hours, the crew battled, severe storms, and fierce headwinds which reduced their ground speed to 30 mph at times as they tried to get to the rescue point; the flooding was extensive. The pilots had to find a safe place to hover with some dry ground to allow their rescue men to get out of the aircraft, find a point where they could put rescuers on safe ground.



Over the next seven hours, the crew – pilot Lt. Ian Hopper, co-pilot Lt. Blair Ogujiofor, rescue swimmer Petty Officer 3rd Class Scott Ruskan, and flight mechanic Petty Officer 3rd Class Seth Reeves – tried to punch through weather that tested the operating limits of their MH-65E Dolphin helicopter. During three attempts to navigate the weather, the helicopter experienced inadvertent Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC), a situation where a pilot must suddenly rely on instruments for navigation – one of the most dangerous situations a flight crew can experience. After three aborted attempts, the crew punched through using their weather radar capabilities. Army helicopters followed close behind, relying on the Coast Guard's radar to plot a path through the storm.

After arriving on scene, Rescue 6553 assessed the increasingly complex airspace and proceeded to Camp Mystic along with several other aircraft in the area. After landing at the camp, the team left their rescue swimmer, Petty Officer 3rd Class Scott Ruskan, on scene. Over the next three hours, Rescue 6553 air-lifted campers and counselors from Camp Mystic to safety. While the MH-65E Dolphin was airlifting children to safety, Ruskan triaged campers on the ground, carefully counting the 165 people he loaded into helicopters

## Coast Guard News (Continued)

to ensure accuracy and accountability in the ongoing response.

Camp Mystic, in the town of Kerrville, was one of the hardest hit areas in the catastrophic flooding, which has tragically claimed at least 120 lives. In partnership with state and local authorities and first responders, Coast Guard crews have assisted and rescued 230 people. As we mourn with the families and local community, we also honor the heroic efforts of the Rescue 6553 team and all the state and local responders.

The Distinguished Flying Cross is awarded sparingly to men and women who display “heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight”.

Two Coast Guard petty officers risked their own lives to help rescue 165 people “One at a time, 2 at a time or 5 at a time along with Adults trying to help save the kids” There are several news videos of the rescue effort.

What would it be like walking up to the edge of that rapidly rising tide of waters containing trees, heavy branches and portions of houses rushing past at high speed? How would you go about rescuing somebody from those raging waters?

Two Coast Guard petty officers took on the task by reaching into the water rescuing one or two children at a time with some adults, getting them to higher ground where someone else could pick them up and take them to Safety. In September I was able to speak to two of the young men who risked their lives by literally reaching into the Hellish waters and pulling to Safety 29 little girls. Their only Safety line was a cable attached to a helicopter hovering above them. It was hoped that it could save the life, or at least retrieve the body of a crewman who was trying to help in the event he was pulled into the water. If He was overcome by debris eg, if a house or a tree branch, or a big tree hit the man there would be very little chance that pulling him out of the water would save his life. It would improve the chance they would be able to pull him to shore. With Overwhelming conditions with a high probability they would be injured. Those Coast Guard men went in and did it anyway, in spite of those odds, and whatever fear the raging rivers might've imposed. I am sure that being on the ground, out of their aircraft, was daunting, noisy and wet

Those of us who previously had earned a DFC were standing in front of those young men in awe of their humble modesty; We are proud of their effort and their skilled performance. Those “Coasties” did good, They earned their DFC’s and Air Medals

Readers: Would you have done that? – risk your own life as you plunged your hand into raging waters to try and rescue a little girl struggling to survive in turbulent water??

These Coasties were true to the Coast guard Motto: Semper Paratus **“Always Ready,”**

Credit : LT Cdr Rachel Ault original article published on line 12 Sep 2025

**FORT STEWART RETIRED SOLDIER  
APPRECIATION DAY**



**18 April 2026**

University of Central Florida – Student Union  
12715 Pegasus Drive, Orlando, FL 32816

**Mark your calendars now and plan  
to attend this Dynamic and  
Participatory event for Retired  
Military and Family Members**

**More information visit:**



**OR**

**[www.army.mil/stewart.retirement services](http://www.army.mil/stewart.retirement services)**

Note: Due to the earlier government shutdown, 2026 RAD information may not be reflected on the website. Ft. Stewart Retirement Services Office will have it updated in the near future.



LAKE & SUMTER COUNTIES CHAPTER  
MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION  
OF  
AMERICA  
P.O. BOX 666  
Lady Lake, FL 32158-0666

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Membership is open to those who have served duty as a commissioned or warrant officer in any of the eight uniformed services of the USA, and who are members of national MOAA. Chapter membership is separate from national membership and carries its own dues. Members age 90 and over become Chapter Life Members with no dues.

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Middle Initial: \_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Suffix: \_\_\_\_

Type Membership:  Regular  Surviving Spouse

I am a current MOAA Member. Member#: \_\_\_\_\_ Life Annual Basic

I wish to join National MOAA. Please contact me with information. (circle one)

Annual Dues Fee: Regular Member: \$20 Surviving Spouse Member: \$10

This is an application for:  a New  or  Renewal Chapter  membership.  
(circle one)

We are a 501(c)(19) tax deductible organization. We welcome voluntary donations to our Junior ROTC Scholarship Fund, which may be included with your dues.

Dues: \_\_\_\_\_ JROTC Donation: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_  
Make Check Payable to: MOAA Mail to: MOAA, PO Box 666, Lady Lake, FL 32158

*We are always looking for members to help out on various committees within the Chapter; if you would like more information about serving on a committee please check the box of the ones you might be interested in learning more about*

- MEMBERSHIP  FINANCE/TREASURER  GOLF TOURNAMENT  MEETING LOGISTICS
- AWARDS  LEGISLATIVE  SURVIVING SPOUSE SUPPORT  NEWSLETTER
- SOCIAL MEDIA/PUBLIC RELATIONS  WEB SITE MONITORING  OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Membership application may also be submitted at: <http://www.lakesumtermoaa.org/Join?showall=0>

Need more info? Contact COL Albert (Al) E. Arnold, III, USA (Ret), Membership Chairman, 703-470-3886

Rev 10-10-25