

The cover features a central graphic with a vertical beam of light separating a historical black and white scene on the left from a modern color scene on the right. The historical scene shows soldiers building a log bridge over a river. The modern scene shows a military engineer vehicle in a snowy environment. The background is a stylized American flag. At the top left is a red castle icon with the number '1'. At the top right is the battalion's crest, which includes a fleur-de-lis, a lion, and an anchor. The text is arranged in a hierarchical, centered layout.

US ARMY VETERANS OF THE  
**FIRST ENGINEER BATTALION**  
NEWSLETTER

**ALWAYS FIRST**  
THEN • NOW • FOREVER

**THEN** **NOW**

**FIRST TO BUILD • FIRST TO FIGHT**  
HONOR • SERVICE • SACRIFICE

BUILDING THE LEGACY • SUPPORTING THE MISSION

# US Department of War

Sept. 5, 2025 | By Matthew Olay, Pentagon News |

President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order today changing the Defense Department's name to the Department of War as a secondary title.

The order — the 200th signed by the president since taking office — authorizes Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and DOD subordinate officials to use secondary titles like "Department of War," "Secretary of War" and "Deputy Secretary of War" in public communications, official correspondence, ceremonial contexts and non-statutory documents within the executive branch, according to a [fact sheet released by the White House](#).

Additionally, the order directs all executive agencies and departments to "recognize and accommodate these secondary titles in internal and external communications," as well as instructing Hegseth to recommend actions — including executive and legislative actions — that would be required to permanently rename the department.

"The name 'Department of War' conveys a stronger message of readiness and resolve compared to 'Department of Defense,' which emphasizes only defensive capabilities," the fact sheet reads.

"Restoring the name 'Department of War' will sharpen the focus of this department on our national interests and signal to adversaries America's readiness to wage war to secure its interests," it continues.



# Meet our Chief of Staff of the Army

General Randy A. George is the 41st Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), having assumed office on September 21, 2023. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he is the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Army, focusing on modernization, troop readiness, and training. He previously served as the 38th Vice Chief of Staff.

Key Details About Gen. Randy George:



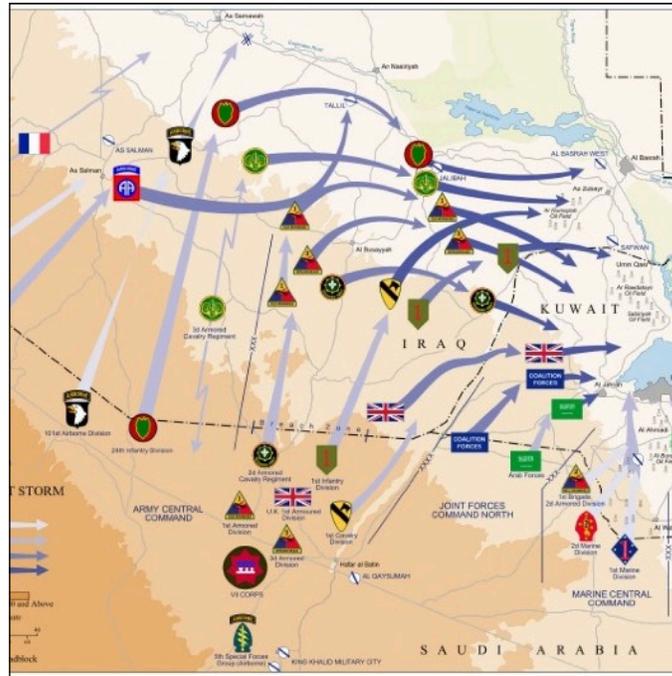
- **Role:** The CSA is a four-star general who presides over the Army Staff, serves as the principal military adviser to the Secretary of the Army, and assists in planning, advising, and executing Army duties.
- **Background:** Commissioned from the U.S. Military Academy in 1988, George has extensive leadership experience in infantry, including deployments in Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Afghanistan.
- **Priorities:** Under his leadership, the Army has focused on "transforming in contact," enhancing capabilities in the Arctic, and strengthening partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Key Focus Areas (2025-2026):** Emphasizing training, maintenance management, and ensuring units are combat-ready.

General George works closely with Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth and Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Weimer to lead the service.

Key elements of his "Letter to the Force" and recent messages include:

- **Transformation & Readiness:** The Army is shifting from industrial-age processes to become faster, leaner, and more lethal, including developing Multi-Domain Task Forces and converting brigades for better mobility.
- **People First:** A continued,1,41 emphasis on treating soldiers, families, and civilians with dignity and respect while building cohesive teams.
- **Warfighting Focus:** Prioritizing training and maintenance, ensuring soldiers can fight and win in any environment.

# 35th Anniversary of Desert Storm



At 0400hrs local time in Saudi Arabia (8PM on the east coast of the United States), Coalition Forces under the command of GEN Norman Schwarzkopf began large scale combat operations against the Iraqi Republican Guard and other Iraqi Forces occupying defensive positions in both Iraq and Kuwait – the ground phase of Operation DESERT STORM had begun. The 700,000 strong multinational forces across 35 countries would overwhelmingly defeat Iraq in a lightning fast 100-hour ground war, spearheaded by Infantry and Armored forces of the U.S. Army-  
**AND ENGINEERS!**



# Small World

By Larry Blair

When I signed into Charlie Company in Di An in July 1966, I was delightfully surprised that Charlie's First Sergeant was Bill Nadeau, with whom I had shared a platoon office in the 317<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion in 61 and 62. We served as CO and First Sergeant together for almost a year; the most rewarding experience of my life.

I asked Bill for a company roster; and as I scanned it, I spotted the name of Bruce Lebeau. I said to Top "That's not a common name; maybe I know him". Bill replied that Bruce was a demo man and was out with the infantry for a couple weeks.

Later, Bruce came back in and low and behold it was the Bruce Lebeau with whom I had gone to High School with at the Sioux Indian Boarding school in Fort Yates, SD. Bruce's dad also worked with my dad. We had a quick reunion before Bruce went back out again. He was later wounded and evacuated.

Small World.

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Fast forward to 2024. Kathleen and I sold our house and moved into a Senior Living Community. As I was picking up mail from the community mail boxes. A lady's voice called out "Are you by any chance Larry Blair who served in Vietnam?"

I replied "Yes; why do you ask?" She introduced herself as JoAnn Allen, and explained she had a manuscript with my name listed in the acknowledgments, along with Chad Covey, Chuck Humphrey, Kent Austin, Blair Smoulder, and Ed Hart, all Diehards. She also explained that her brother was Don Ott, who had just passed away.

She loaned me the single copy, entitled "B Co. 1st Engineer Combat Battalion, Deployment to Vietnam 50 Years Ago. Don was in B Company's advance party that went ahead of the battalion to set up a base camp, and he was initially at Qui Nhon, then moved south to Bearcat where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade and B Company ended up.

Small World!

# DIEHARD REUNION 2025



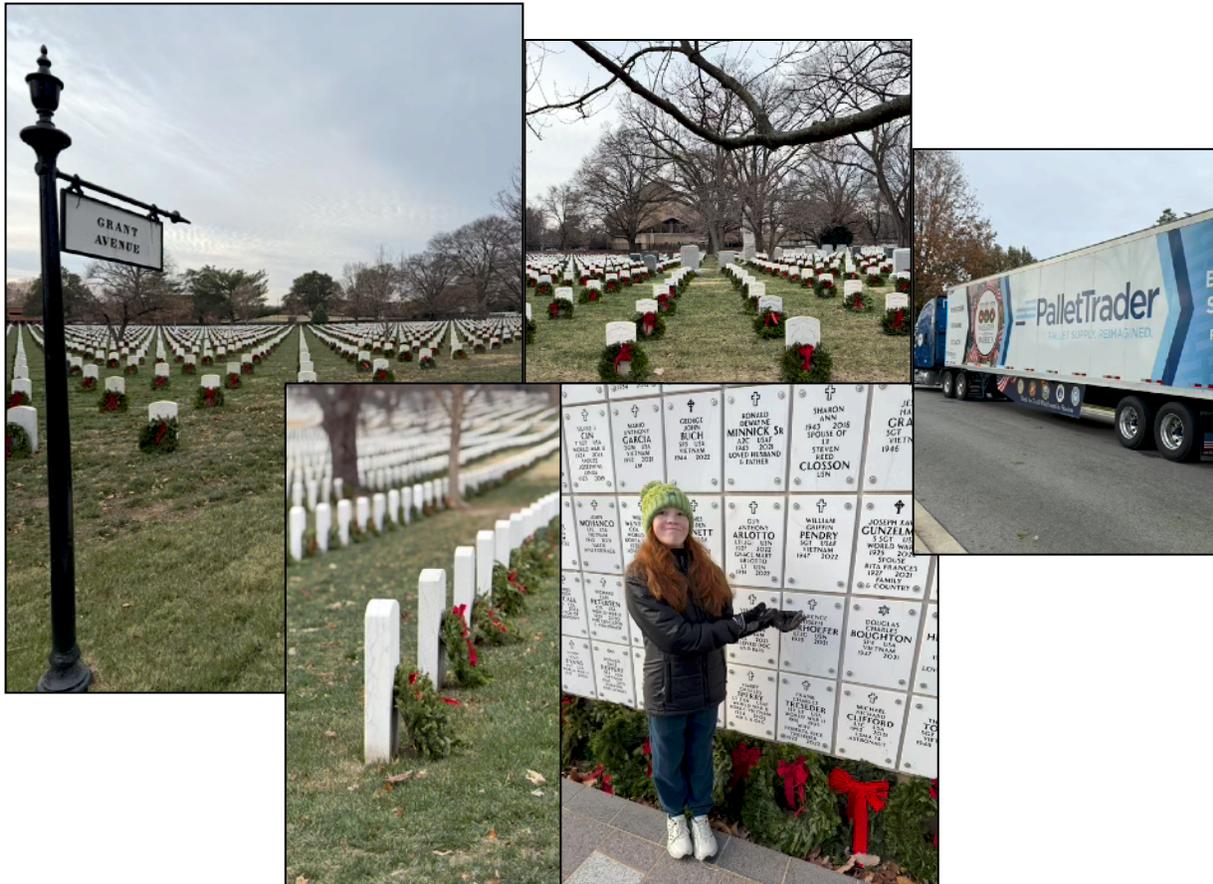
Photos by Kate Guttormsen on December 18, 2025 at Arlington National Cemetery



Photos taken from Veterans of the First Engineer Battalion Facebook Page

# Wreaths Across America 2025

Remember the fallen. Honor those who serve. Teach the next generation the value of freedom. It's the mission of Wreaths Across America. You can join us by sponsoring a wreath, volunteering or partnering with us on National Wreaths Across America Day and every day.



## 2026 THEME: REMEMBER ME

"We often speak of "our service members" as though they are one unified group. Yet within that group are countless individuals, each with a name, a family, and a story that helped shape the freedoms we cherish today. While we honor them collectively, we can sometimes overlook the deeply personal sacrifices: the parent who never met a grandchild, the young recruit asked to shoulder more than any teenager should, the veteran who returned home carrying memories too heavy to share."- Karen Worcester, Executive Director

<https://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/>

# From Manned Breach to Robotic Maneuver: How the Army Reserve Advances Transformation in Contact

75th U.S. Army Reserve Innovation Command article by: Col. Trahon Mashack, director, G5, 75th USARIC Lt. Col. Davin Walz, deputy, G5, 75th USARIC Lt. Col. Charles An, chief, Public Affairs Office, 75th USARIC

Introduction "Shame on us if we make first contact in combat with a human again and that the technology exists to trade robots for that instead of trading blood for first contact."

Gen. James Rainey, former commanding general of Army Futures Command

The Army Reserve's force design role is evolving from providing depth to delivering agility, innovation, and operational experimentation. Nowhere is this shift more urgent than in combat engineering. As peer adversaries expand anti-access and area-denial capabilities, the Army must integrate robotics into engineer formations to preserve freedom of maneuver and reduce risk to Soldiers across all components.

During Exercise Northern Strike (NS) 2026 at Camp Grayling, Michigan, the Army Reserve will expand upon experimentation efforts conducted during NS 2025.. A Combat Engineer Company–Infantry (CEC-I) will be assessed against a robotics-enabled formation, illustrating how the Reserve can prototype emerging capabilities, inform force design, and contribute directly to Multi-Domain Operations.



CAMP GRAYLING,  
MICHIGAN, 02.02.2026

## Army Reserve Contributions to Transformation in Contact

Transformation in Contact (TiC) accelerates the Army's ability to prototype organizational designs and operationally test emerging technologies within a near-term zero-to-three-year horizon. These efforts directly inform future Program Objective Memorandum cycles and Total Army Analysis decisions, while empowering commanders to adapt faster than adversaries.

For the Army Reserve, TiC represents a shift from passive modernization to active experimentation inside operational exercises. During Northern Strike 25-2, senior leaders from the 75th U.S. Army Reserve Innovation Command identified clear opportunities for Reserve formations to support TiC through engineering, robotics, and data-driven experimentation. Northern Strike 2026 provides the venue to operationalize those observations.

### Why Transition to a Robotics-Enabled Engineer Company?:

The decision to bring autonomous capabilities to a Combat Engineer Company is grounded in three interrelated factors:

**Operational Demand:** Modern breaching operations occur under persistent surveillance and precision fires. Robotic platforms reduce exposure during obstacle reduction and enable maneuver in contested terrain.

**Demonstrated Feasibility:** Recent experimentation by the 20th and 36th Engineer Brigades validated the utility of unmanned ground and aerial systems for engineer missions. The 75th USARIC is building on these lessons, adapting them for Reserve formations, equipment density, and training models.

**Strategic Alignment:** Camp Grayling offers a unique environment for Joint certification, multinational integration, and industry-enabled experimentation at scale. Northern Strike's capacity to orchestrate training for over 8,000 service members and complexity allow robotics-enabled engineers to operate in realistic conditions alongside Active, Guard, and allied partnered forces.

Analyzing a USAR transition from manned breach to robotic maneuver provides a data driven assessment to support the following operational effects:

- Reduces risk to Soldiers during high-hazard missions, such as breaching and obstacle reduction.
- Enhances lethality and tempo by enabling faster maneuver through contested terrain.
- Increases resilience through distributed robotic platforms, which are less vulnerable than massed Soldiers.
- Feeds lessons learned into the Transformation and Training Command's (T2COM) Futures Concept Center and the broader force design enterprise.

Data collected during Northern Strike 2026 will extend far beyond the bounds of the exercise itself. Leveraging data-driven warfighters, the 75th USARIC will translate operational observations into actionable insights aligned with DOTMLPF-P analysis. These concepts will enable T2COM and U.S. Army Reserve Command to assess organizational design, training requirements, and sustainment implications. This disciplined approach to experimentation ensures near-term capability decisions are informed by evidence, while simultaneously shaping long-term force structure decisions that better position the U.S. Army Reserve to support the Total Army.

In close coordination with the 412th and the 416th Theater Engineer Commands, the 75th USARIC will apply specialized robotics expertise to assess the transition from legacy to robotic maneuver. Soldiers from two CEC-I's will assess a traditional breach operation and a robotic breach employing unmanned ground and aerial systems.

By capturing synchronized data—time, fuel consumption, manpower, and overall mission effectiveness—the 75th USARIC will quantify the operational impact of robotic integration. This side-by-side, data-driven comparison provides commanders with clear, empirical evidence to inform future investment, force design, and employment decisions, reinforcing experimentation as a decisive tool for achieving desired operational effects.

### Expanding Innovation Opportunities Beyond Robotics

Robotics is the entry point—not the end state.

By integrating into the Northern Strike 2026 planning cycle, the 75th USARIC will identify additional opportunities to experiment across software development, digital engineering, electronic warfare, network defense, additive manufacturing, theater acquisition, and contracting.

The Army Reserve’s access to civilian technical expertise and industry partnerships positions it to bridge operational needs with scalable solutions. In doing so, not only does the Army Reserve keep pace with continuous transformation but contributes meaningfully to shaping how the Army plans and executes tomorrow’s fight.

## DON'T FORGET OUR SOCIAL!

By F. C. “Chuck” Humphrey

Our organization maintains both a website and a Facebook Page. The website is maintained by Webmaster F. C. “Chuck” Humphrey, using Dreamhost software. (Our Domain Name: [Firstengineerbattalionveterans.org](http://Firstengineerbattalionveterans.org) is renewed each year.)

The website has several sections: Organization (names of board members and how to contact them), History, Photos, Events (info about future reunions), Links (to other websites), Items of Interest (newsletters and engineer beer drinking songs), and a Guestbook. Members should “feel free” to submit photos (Just follow the Webmaster’s instructions for submitting them, including captions). Several members have posted messages on the Guestbook recently.

The website gets quite a bit of usage, according to reports Chuck receives each month. They contain data about how people find our website; the devices they use to access it; the most frequent queries; and the top countries the queries come from. In January the website received 11 queries about the First Engineer Battalion; three queries about the First Engr Bn-Ft Riley; and one query about Dien, Vietnam (where the First Infantry Division Headquarters was located during part of the Vietnam War). Most of the queries came from the US. Someone in Poland and Nigeria also accessed the website. Thirty-nine of the queries came from a desktop computer; 47 from a mobile device; and one from a tablet. Browsers used to access the website include Google Chrome, Safari, Edge, and Firefox.

The Facebook Page, “Veterans of the First Engineer Battalion” is maintained by Pam Smoulder, Pat Zastrow, and Jerry Hunter. It’s accessible by members only. For more information about the website and the Facebook page, contact Chuck at: [humpflow@isu.edu](mailto:humpflow@isu.edu)

# RECENT SOCIAL

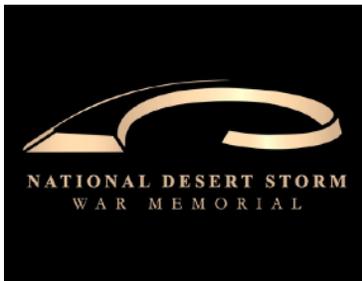


(Left) Chief showing off his new blankie.

(Right) My favorite HEMMTT wrecker operator Dade paling around with old Diehards in the sunshine state! Dade, Ball, Clark, Smitty and Crocker. (Facebook)



## Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial



### Dedication Ceremony details

The Dedication Ceremony for the Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial will take place on

**Saturday, October 24, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. EDT.**

The ceremony is open to the public and will be held at the southwest corner of **Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street NW, Washington, D.C.**



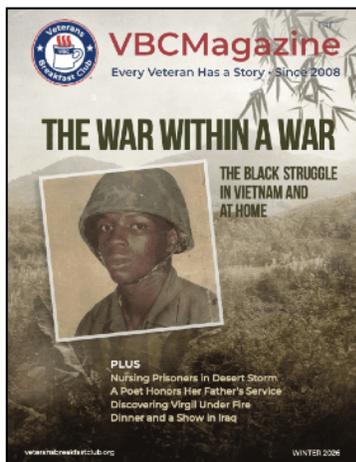
**The Veterans Breakfast Club is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that harnesses the power of storytelling in order to connect, educate, heal, and inspire**



Every [Monday night at 7pm ET \(3pm PT\)](#), a large and ever-changing group of us gather in a Zoom room for 90 minutes and talk about the rewards and hardships of military service, past and present, and hear a lot of history in the process.

We start with a theme or group of special guests and the conversation takes off. Sometimes it's anniversary that sparks discussion—the October Missile Crisis, the Tet Offensive, Desert Storm, the Battle of Fallujah. On any given night, you might meet a Holocaust survivor, a retired two-star general, a Coast Guard sailor serving on an heavy icebreaker, or a Red Cross “Donut Dolly” who served in Vietnam.

If it's International Women's Day, you'll meet women veterans from all eras. If it's the SeaBee Birthday, then SeaBee veterans will be there. And the guests aren't only veterans. We also love hearing from people who grew up as military brats, Blue Star parents, and, of course, Gold Star Mothers, Fathers, Spouses, and Families. One night a month is reserved for Open Conversation where we provide the platform, and the audience guides the discussion.



Every week the conversation is new, and everyone is welcomed to speak up and join the storytelling. We update our schedule weekly and simulcast our programs to Facebook and YouTube, where they are archived for later viewing.

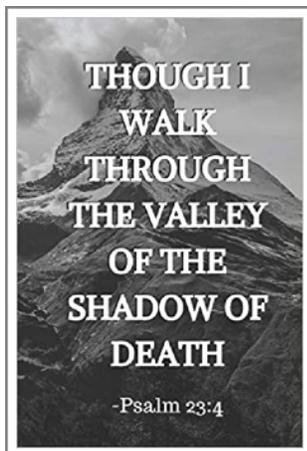


# Chaplain's Corner

## Obituary for Donald Dean Ott

Donald Dean Ott was born on July 7, 1941 in Sterling, CO., and entered eternal glory on February 13, 2025. He lived an extraordinary life of 83 years. He grew up in nearby Brush where he graduated high school in 1959. Following high school, Don attended Colorado School of Mines where he earned a professional degree in geophysical engineering in 1963. Upon graduation, he attended the R.O.T.C summer training camp in Ft. Sill, OK. His military assignments included one year in Korea where he was a platoon leader and Vietnam as 1st Lieutenant Army Combat Engineer. His personal claim to fame was that he was one of the first two people from the 1st Combat Engineer Battalion to complete a full tour of duty in Vietnam.

After the military, Don worked for AMOCO Production and attended Southern Methodist University where he earned a masters degree in Engineering Administration in 1971. His life then brought him to Tulsa where he had a career in the geophysical industry. He also worked as a manufacturers representative and adjunct instructor for various schools. Just shy of fifty years of marriage, he married Seretha (Ritchie) in March of 1974. Three daughters were born to the marriage.



When Don moved to Tulsa, he became an avid Golden Hurricane fan and had season tickets to Tulsa football and basketball games for many years. Don is survived by his wife, Seretha (Ritchie), daughters: Jill Nance (Monty), and Julie McAdams (Daniel), granddaughters: Kristie Nance, Jae Lea Nance, Everlie McAdams, and Rylie McAdams, sisters JoAnn Allen, and Janice Farless (Jack), and one brother: Richard Ott (Gloria). He is preceded in death by his mom and dad, John and Emma (Schatz) Ott, brother Gerald Ott, and daughter Jennifer Elise Ott.

A military memorial service will be held 11 AM May 30, 2025 in the Stilwell City Cemetery.



Please notify Chaplain Larry Blair if any member of the Veterans of the First Engineer Battalion passes away. Provide details, obituary, name and address of next of kin if possible. [blairylar@hotmail.com](mailto:blairylar@hotmail.com)

## Chaplain's Corner (Cont)

### Obituary for Larry E. O'Dell

Larry E. O'Dell, 79, of Greenville, Illinois, passed away on June 17, 2025, at 12:38 p.m., at his home, surrounded by his loving family. Larry was born on April 8, 1946, in St. Elmo, Illinois, the son of Lawrence Clifford and Marjorie Pauline (Peters) O'Dell. On February 26, 1966, he married the love of his life, Judy Elaine Smail, in Brownstown, Illinois. High school sweethearts and prom king and queen, Larry and Judy shared more than 59 beautiful years of marriage—a testament to true devotion and enduring love.

Larry proudly served his country as a Vietnam Veteran. Upon returning home, he built a life centered on faith, family, and simple joys. He worked at Southwestern Electric as a lineman for nearly 35 years. He was a devoted husband, proud father, cherished grandfather, and beloved great-grandfather.

He found his greatest happiness in watching his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren grow. Whether it was watching the grandkids and great-grandkids swim or spending time together watching the History Channel with the little ones, Larry's deep pride and love for his family was always evident.

He especially loved beach vacations with Judy—moments of peace and sunshine that turned into treasured traditions. Many of those trips became large, laughter-filled gatherings with the extended family, creating a lifetime of memories that will be forever cherished.

Surviving Larry are his wife, Judy O'Dell of Greenville; his children, Tina (Randy) Bingham of Greenville, IL, and Darren (Tracy) O'Dell of St. Jacob, IL; grandchildren, Randalyn (Jake) Weiss, Cody (Kendra) Bingham, Joshua (Trina Isaak), Hunter O'Dell, and Jacob O'Dell; and great-grandchildren, Paisley Randolph, Luke Weiss, and Colt Weiss. He is also survived by his brother, Terry (Susan) O'Dell of Irvington, IL, along with a host of extended family and dear friends.

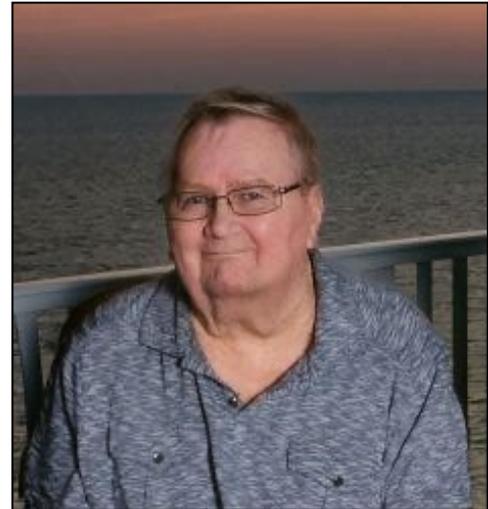
A family-hosted Celebration of Life will be held at a later date.

Memorials may be gifted to the Veterans Assistance Commission of Bond County. Please, make checks payable to VAC of Bond County and mail to the VFW Post 1377, PO Box 173, Greenville, IL 62246.

Larry will be remembered for his steady love, warm heart, and the legacy he leaves through the generations who were lucky enough to call him theirs.

The family has entrusted Assalley Funeral Home in Greenville with the ceremonies.

Please visit [www.assalleyfuneralhomes.com](http://www.assalleyfuneralhomes.com) to share memories or offer condolences to the family.



# REUNION 2026

**Naperville, Illinois: September 13-16, 2026**

## Agenda

### **Sunday, 13 September 2026**

1500-1800      Registration  
1500-UTC      Hospitality Room Open  
1900-2100      Board of Directors meeting

### **Monday, 14 September 2026**

0800-1100      Registration  
                    Hospitality Room Open  
1130-UTC      1<sup>st</sup> ID Museum & Cantigny Tour  
2000-UTC      Hospitality Room open

### **Tuesday, 15 September 2026**

0900-1730      Hospitality Room Open  
                    Possible Group Activity / Tour on own / free time  
1730-2000      Banquet  
                    Location: VFW Post 3873, 908 W Jackson, Naperville, Illinois 60540  
                    General Membership Meeting  
2000- UTC      Hospitality Room Open

### **Wednesday, 16 September 2026**      Goodbyes and departure

Guest Room Booking Information.  
Rooms rates are \$129.00 plus tax.  
Group Code: CVE  
Hotel: DoubleTree by Hilton Lisle Naperville  
Group Name: Veterans of the First Engineer Battalion  
Arrival Date: 13-Sep-2026  
Departure Date: 16-Sep-2026  
DoubleTree by Hilton Lisle Naperville  
For Reservations Via Phone: 630-505-0900

# 1st DIV Museum Announcements

Naperville, Illinois



In honor of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the First Division Museum will launch a donation initiative in 2026 to collect 250 artifacts that tell the modern-day story of the Big Red One. We are especially interested in well-documented artifacts from the late Cold War, Desert Storm, the Balkans, and the Global War on Terror.

Carefully preserved and expertly maintained, donated artifacts help ensure that the Big Red One's story continues to be told and is never forgotten. In addition to artifact collection, the Museum will conduct both short- and long-form oral history interviews. For materials donated to the Museum, we request a brief interview to document the artifact, its use, and the story associated with it. We are also seeking longer interviews to help preserve the experiences of active-duty soldiers and veterans of the 1st Infantry Division, ensuring their voices and service are recorded for future generations.

## Attention all Lionesses!

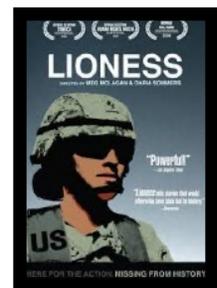
The First Division Museum would like to invite Lioness team members to participate in an oral history interview on September 15, 2026.

We are scheduling private, 1–2 hour interviews with our Emeritus Historian on the Cantigny property. These recorded conversations help us preserve firsthand accounts and ensure that important stories connected to the First Division are documented for future generations.

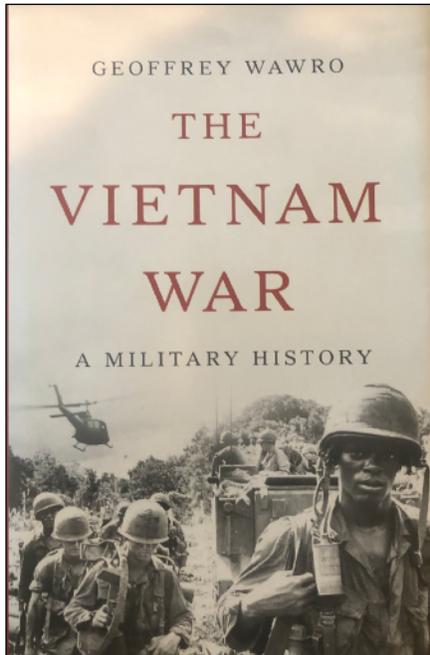
If you are interested in participating, we will send you a pre-interview questionnaire to complete in advance. Approximately one month prior to the interview date, we will contact participants to schedule a specific time slot on September 15.

Your voice and experiences are an important part of the historical record, and we would be honored to include them in our collection.

Please let us know if you would like to participate by contacting Jerry Hunter, [cw4jerry.hunter@gmail.com](mailto:cw4jerry.hunter@gmail.com)



# WORTH THE READ



“This book, authored by a faculty member at North Texas State University, was the best Vietnam War history I’ve ever read. I recommend it to fellow Vietnam lieutenants Blair Smoulder, Chad Covey, and Joe Coppolo. It’s available from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)”- Chuck

A definitive account of the Gulf War told by Pulitzer Prize–winning correspondent Rick Atkinson.

This previously untold story of the US war with Iraq in the early 1990s, Atkinson follows the 42-day war from the first night to the final day, providing vivid accounts of bombing runs, White House strategy sessions, firefights, and bitter internal conflicts.

