



# The Communiqué

Southwest Virginia Chapter  
Military Officers Association of America



A Five-Star Chapter

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 1

ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

JAN-FEB-MAR 2021

## CHAPTER MOVES FORWARD IN 2021 DESPITE CORONAVIRIS (COVID-19)

## President's Corner

While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the day to day life of chapter members and curtailed in person gatherings, the Southwest Virginia Chapter has been conducting membership and board meetings via Zoom since October 2020. Great strides have been made in developing a number of vaccines which are now being administered throughout the country but when everything gets back to normal is anyone's guess. So while COVID-19 is still affecting our lives, the chapter continues to move forward with community activities and direct veteran support while adhering to health department safety guidelines to grow and keep our membership engaged "marching on" safely in difficult times.

On Thursday 21 January 2021 the Southwest Virginia Chapter held a Zoom Membership meeting. The first order of business was the presentation of the two Southwest Virginia Chapter Leadership Awards for 2020. The awards would have normally been presented in the spring of 2020 but due to the COVID-19 pandemic were presented in January 2021.



Major General Randal D Fullhart, USAF, Commandant of Cadets presented to Cadet William M. Lloyd of Radford University the General William B. Rosson USA Leadership Award. Since Cadet Lloyd was in quarantine the presentation was done via Zoom. Later the Leadership Award Certificate and \$500 check were presented to Cadet Lloyd in person by the Radford University Army ROTC OIC Major Melissa Manigault. Cadet Lloyd is completing a double Major in Finance & Economics with a Minor in Leadership & Military Science. He has a 3.72 GPA, graduating in May

2021 and will be commissioned in the US Army.



Major General Randal D Fullhart, USAF, Commandant of Cadets presented to Cadet Mame B. Ngom of Virginia Tech the Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey USA Leadership Award. Cadet Mame B. Ngom is completing a Major in Political Science with a Minor in Leadership/Peace Studies and Violence Prevention. She has 3.4 GPA, graduating in May 2021 and will be commissioned in the USAF. The Leadership Award includes an Award Certificate and a \$500 check.

The Southwest Virginia Chapter of MOAA established two Leadership Awards to be presented to ROTC Cadets /Midshipmen at Virginia Tech/Radford University during each academic year. Recipients are to be juniors or who will be starting their final year in the coming fall of the academic year. Each Leadership Award was named after a General Officer who was a member of the Southwest Virginia Chapter. The Leadership Awards were established to recognize the recipient's academic, community service and leadership qualities that demonstrate exceptional potential for military leadership while a member of the Virginia Tech/Radford University ROTC Program. Each Leadership Award consists of an appropriate framed award certificate and a \$500 monetary award.



The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been in the news recently. Our newly appointed Secretary of Defense, General

Lloyd Austin, delivered a message to his counterpart NATO defense ministers. He stated that they would now "consult together, decide together, and act together." This is the policy of our new administration and a reversal of the policy we saw during the last few years. General Austin also made it clear that diplomacy will be the primary means to be used by the US of engaging with the world.

The NATO military alliance was established in 1949 to counter the Soviet threat in central and eastern Europe and to stop the spread of communism. Russia's refusal to withdraw from European countries it occupied during WWII led to the Iron Curtain behind which multiple countries became mere satellites of Russia, governed by puppet governments controlled from Moscow. NATO's founding Western democracies also aimed to prevent a repeat of the two catastrophic world wars of the 20th Century.

Only twelve member countries chartered NATO in 1949. Today, there are 29 members. As the Soviet Union began splintering in the 1980's, bankrupted by corruption and the

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**2021 OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**VIRGINIA WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
STARTS OFF THE 2021 PROGRAM YEAR**

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Following the Leadership Awards presentations the guest speaker(s) and program was presented by Ms. Amy White and Ms. Michele Hilts from Virginia Western Community College (VWCC) on the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Program and Veterans. The focus is on project based learning.



Ms. Amy White



New STEM Building



STEM Student Lounge

**VIRGINIA WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ( VWCC)**

- Serve the Counties of Botetourt, Roanoke, Craig, Franklin and the City of Salem.
- Approximately 9,000 students and 90 FT faculty
- 37% of students are Pell eligible (program placed = 50%)
- 18% are First Generation college students
- Largely Part time students –65% annual
- Enrollment is PT (program placed = 55%)

**Associate Degrees (AS) in Science Offered -Transfer to a Four Year University**

- Science
- Engineering
- Computer Science – Engineering and Science
- Agriculture
- Integrated Environmental Studies
- Mathematics
- Health Science

**Associate of Applied Science degree (A.A.S.) Offered**

- A two-year degree that meets requirements for specific skill sets in the workplace
- Engineering Technology
- Mechanical, Electrical and IT
- NSF ATE grant awardee
- Focuses on project based learning
- Siemens MTI and NC3 industry certifications

**Career Studies Certificate – Biotechnology**

- 20 credits / 2 semester
- NSF Mentor Links grant awardee
- Focuses on project based learning and soft skills

Continued from Page 2 “VWCC STEM Program

**Career Studies Certificate – Biotechnology**

- Designed for MLT students
- Post baccalaureate students
- Science majors

**Computer Science and Information Technology**

- AS, AAS and Certificates
- Cybersecurity
- Networking
- Brand new labs for both

**Tech Talent – Computer Science and Information Technology**

- Funded by the Commonwealth to encourage transfer in the CS/IT field
- 8 community colleges chosen to participate
- To date have used this money to:
  - Conduct intentional advising to work with students on meeting graduation requirements
  - Provide academic support in CS/IT classes – peer tutors
  - Provide academic support in foundational math classes
  - Conduct a CS/IT Scholars lecture series
    - Local professionals spend virtual time with our students

**Labs For Student Study**

- Mechatronics Lab and Classroom – CIM (Center for Intelligent Mechatronics)
- Mechatronics Lab and Classroom – CIM (Center for Intelligent Mechatronics)
- Mechatronics Lab and Classroom – Hydraulics trainer
- Mechatronics Lab and Classroom – Process Control
- FabLab (digital fabrication laboratory) with 3D Printers, CNC Machining, Water Jet Cutter, Laser Jet Cutter, Manual Mill-Lathe Combos, Thermoforming machine



Process Control Trainer



Hydraulics Trainer



Robotics and Electronics Trainer and Lab



Robotics and Electronics Classroom and Lab



### A TOUR OF THE HANOI HILTON IN THE COMPANY OF POW PORTER HALYBURTON

The chapter Zoom membership meeting held on 18 February 2021 featured our guest speaker chapter member Joe Obenshain who presented a program titled "*Tour of the 'Hanoi Hilton' in the company of POW Porter Halyburton*" The tour was arranged through Davidson College where both Joe Obenshain and Porter Halyburton attended college. This was Porter and his

wife's ninth trip to Vietnam where they led a group of Davidson College alumni to absorb the culture of the vibrant country and retrace Porter's steps as a POW. Porter Halyburton was a Navy pilot shot down over North Vietnam and was held in the Hoan Lo Prison (the infamous Hanoi Hilton) as a POW. Porter's plane crashed and exploded into a karst ridge 40 miles northeast of Hanoi on 17 October 1965. No parachutes were sighted, and no radio contact made. A year and a half later, well after Marty held a memorial service and the tombstone was placed in the family cemetery, six men visited with news that they had reason to believe Porter was a prisoner of war. Porter spent seven-and-a-half years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, living in the infamous Hanoi Hilton and several other prisons. Listed as killed in action for one-and-a-half years,



Porter's status was changed to POW in 1967 and his wife Marty became active on the home front with efforts to publicize the plight of the POWs and MIAs in Southeast Asia. He was finally released on 12 October 1973. Pictures were shared of the entrance to the prison, relief panels depicting the torture of political prisoners, a monument commemorating the anti-aircraft battery that shot down John McCain's aircraft,

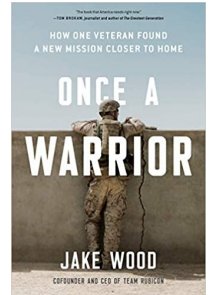


pictures of the prison cells plus maps and drawings of the prison complex. POW's were designated "Special Guests". Pictures were also shown of the POW release and credit given to the POW wives who were instrumental in detailing the condition of the POW's and putting pressure on the government to secure the release of the POW's.



## "ONCE A WARRIOR AND TEAM RUBICON"

The chapter Zoom membership meeting held on 18 March 2021 featured our guest speaker **Mr. Ed Glover** a Vinton, VA resident with Team Rubicon working as a technology analyst working on their technology team, configuring their systems that help deploy Team Rubicon members to disaster zones here at home and internationally. From 2018-2020 Ed was the volunteer Roanoke City Coordinator with Team Rubicon, tasked with growing the team, and engaging our local members with meaningful service projects, social and training opportunities. He spoke about Jake Woods a Marine sniper and his book "Once A Warrior" and Team Rubicon. The book is the powerful story of one Marine who found healing and renewed purpose after returning from combat, for himself and tens of thousands of fellow veterans. The book chronologes his early life and military and post military transition experiences. Coming home in 2009 from grueling tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, his country asked yet more of him: to compartmentalize his traumatic memories, put his elite military training on a shelf, and adjust to living outside high-stakes situations. Jake feared he would join the huge population of veterans struggling to reintegrate. Since 2001, more service members have died by suicide than have been killed in Afghanistan. One activity helped Jake and his friend and fellow Marine Clay Hunt find a measure of hope: helping communities after disasters, where their training rendered them unusually effective in high-stakes situations. But as their new organization struggled to get off the ground and the VA tied up Clay's meds in red tape, Clay committed suicide. Reeling, Jake resolved to help as many disaster-affected communities and provide a mission to as many veterans as possible.



Ed Glover then provided an outstanding overview of **"Team Rubicon"** using a slide presentation. "Team Rubicon" is a veteran led, disaster response team built **"TO SERVE"**. Team Rubicon serves the community by mobilizing veterans to continue their service leveraging their leadership skills and experience to help people respond and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises. Founded in 2010 with just eight veterans the organization today has 168 full time employees, 1,500 volunteer leaders and over 140,000 volunteers. Team Rubicon provides a dual impact in providing opportunities to veterans for continued service in disaster response and transition by the repurposing of their skills and experiences. Volunteers, identified by and called **"Grayshirts"** gain an increased sense of purpose, a sense of community and



identity in the community. As of May 2020 Team Rubicon participated in over 500 operations. For additional information check this out on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uasLagBDnqA>. In the state of Virginia there are approximately 5,800 volunteers and 55 volunteer leaders in nine metro areas. In the Roanoke area there is the Roanoke and Blue Ridge Counties Metro area consisting of Highland County south to Henry and Pittsylvania Counties with some 250 + volunteers. Outside of operations Team Rubicon is involved in Community Service, Training and Social events. To get involved, or to help financially support their mission please visit [www.teamrubiconusa.org](http://www.teamrubiconusa.org).



- Christiansburg: 540-394-3311
- Clifton Forge: 540-862-5656
- Dublin: 540-674-5100
- Hollins: 540-777-1230
- Ridgeway: 276-956-2002
- Roanoke (Brambleton Ave): 540-989-5245
- Roanoke (Williamson Rd): 540-362-1868
- Salem: 540-380-4607
- Vinton: 540-890-5010
- Winston Salem: 336-768-3886

*Cont'd from Pg 1 "PRESIDENTS CORNER"*

failure of communism in the competition with the Western democracies, former Soviet countries realigned themselves, eager to join the free world. It is important to note that all NATO members, particularly those newer, former Soviet countries, have joined the alliance through their own democratically elected governments. Not one of the 29 members has chosen to withdraw. Before the current administration, the complaint was that some NATO countries were not "paying their fair share" of the alliance's defense costs. But NATO is not a business enterprise or a for-profit organization. It is a military and political alliance, based on mutual support.

Certainly, some of the NATO countries are wealthier than others. The US is obviously at the top of the list. Lack of parity occurs in any alliance where no two entities are truly equal in wealth or ability to contribute. I served a three-year tour in London, attached to NATO's headquarters for the Eastern Atlantic and English Channel. Part of my job was participating in military exercises and inspections of other NATO forward operating bases, including in the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway, Greece and Turkey. I saw the military infrastructures and capabilities of, and economic differences between, these countries. There are vast differences among them. But I experienced in each the pride of their defense establishments in their NATO membership and their commitment to contributing manpower and materiel to the best of their abilities. Their political leaders have shown the same commitments, based on the fact that our NATO allies have increased their total defense spending for seven straight years.

So, has NATO been successful operating as it has over the past 70 years? Has it been a deterrent to aggression? Has it been worth it for the US?

In my opinion, most definitely. In my opinion, the alliance has been a bargain, not to be measured in terms of money or profit, but in terms of security and sacrifice. Just look at its 70 year history and the performance of meeting its goals.

Should NATO continue to exist? Without question. Russia, although much diminished from its threat as the former Soviet Union, continues to rattle the saber in multiple threat arenas, led by a corrupt autocrat with delusions of bringing his country back to its former strength and breadth of control. Just look at its adventures since the fall of the Berlin Wall and its failure in Afghanistan in 1989: Georgia, Ukraine, the Crimea, and now Syria and Libya. And Russia's active cyber warfare all over the planet is most certainly a serious, possibly an existential, threat to this country as well as to all of Russia's long-term adversaries of the democratic world.

Finally, do not forget the other hot spots where NATO forces have cooperated with the US – the Balkans, Korea, Berlin during the crisis post WWII, and Iraq, among the most prominent and costly.

To paraphrase General Austin, collective security is a shared responsibility. Building a ready and capable force is inextricably linked to our work with our allies and partners. Job 1 for NATO is to deter conflict. Should we fail, we must be prepared to fight and win. America is now ready to continue that commitment and resume its historic partnership with its NATO allies.

*Lee Ensley*



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## **MOAA on the Hill: Testimony Outlines Legislative Priorities for Veterans**

By: Amanda Dolasinski MARCH 03, 2021

MOAA is looking out for veterans' access to health care – a topic increasingly important as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to stifle daily life across the country.

Cory Titus, MOAA's director of government relations for veteran benefits and Guard/Reserve affairs, outlined the association's legislative priorities for the VA during a joint Veterans Affairs Committee virtual session. MOAA is advocating for examining the department's COVID-19 response, eliminating health disparities for women and minorities, and passing comprehensive toxic exposure reform, among other priorities. "My experience, thus far, has been the VA at its best," said Titus, who served in the Army for seven years. "However, not all have enjoyed the same care as I. MOAA's members, soldiers I served with and even members of my family have not had that same experience. We need to keep going and create equity for all veterans to enjoy the same quality experience and access to benefits and care regardless of their gender, race, location, or generation of service."

MOAA was one of seven groups testifying during the hearing, joining the Blinded Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, Minority Veterans of America, National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, and Student Veterans of America to offer advice and priorities to members of the House and Senate. The joint committee is responsible for approving and funding programs for veterans, such as health care at VA centers to education stipends through the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the hearing provides an opportunity for lawmakers to hear directly from veterans on their needs. "This is one platform that allows us to hear many voices," Takano said. "This point is incredibly important as we face the challenge of a global pandemic. And it gives us the opportunity to discuss ways to build better veterans programs that can overcome the difficulties of future crises and address problems for all veterans."

Takano lauded the efforts of veterans service organizations (VSOs) that work with the committee, noting there were several recent victories for veterans, including laws expanding benefits to Vietnam-era Blue Water Navy veterans and offering more support to women veterans. MOAA's priorities are focused on improving services in the Veterans Health Administration, which oversees the VA's health care facilities, and Veterans Benefits Administration, which includes a wide range of benefits, such as disability compensation and transition programs.

One of the recommendations made by MOAA is for the VA to examine every aspect of its COVID-19 response. The VA should conduct the exam through a range of demographics, then apply lessons learned to improve support to veterans.

"With a third vaccine now approved for emergency use, optimism continues to grow as an end to the pandemic seems near," Titus said. "VA quickly moved to expand the VA workforce to meet the health crisis – one of many positive steps. However, vulnerabilities were also exposed like in state veterans' homes and VA community living centers."

Another of MOAA's recommendations was to eliminate disparities for women and minority veterans. Women will make up about 19% of the department's patients by 2025, making women the fastest growing population of veterans, according to the VA. MOAA recommends eliminating health disparities for women and minority veterans to assure timely access to compassionate, quality care, Titus said. "Women transitioning out of uniform face unique challenges because of their experiences in service," Titus said. "While VA has implemented a comprehensive primary care model for women, there remain several barriers to getting the care and services they need."

Additionally, according to the [Government Accountability Office], the VA has taken steps to reduce disparities in health care outcomes linked to race and ethnicity, but lacks the mechanisms to measure progress and ensure accountability."

Finally, MOAA recommended Congress pass comprehensive toxic exposure reform that would concede exposure, expand access to health care through the TEAM Act, and improve the reporting requirements for presumptive conditions to ensure they are helping veterans the way they are intended. Comprehensive toxic exposure reform will be one of MOAA's topics in the upcoming Advocacy in Action, the association's rebranded annual event to meet with federal lawmakers on veteran legislation.

MOAA's legislative priorities for the VA in 2021:

- Strength and modernize VA's workforce.
- Eliminate health disparities for women and minority veterans to ensure health equity in accessing timely, compassionate, and quality care.



*Continued from Page 8 "MOAA's Legislative Priorities for Veter-*

- Expand access to caregiver, palliative care, geriatric care, extended care, and hospice programs and services for veterans and wounded warriors, and their caregivers.
- Improve veteran suicide prevention programs and increase access to behavioral health care services.
- Improve medical exam and claims processing to meet pandemic-related and enduring challenges.
- Support our nation's economic recover through increased educational opportunities and protections to get veterans back to work.
- Pass comprehensive toxic exposure reform.
- Strengthen and protect service-connected disability compensation.

MOAA offered details on all of the above priorities in written testimony to the joint committee. See MOAA On The Hill: Testimony Outlines Legislative Priorities For Veterans at MOAA.org for full details.

### Surviving Spouses Launch New Virtual MOAA Chapter

Surviving spouses of fallen troops from across the country connected virtually in a new group that aims to solve problems and shape future legislation. About 25 members of the newly formed Surviving Spouses Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America met in a telephonic meeting. It's the association's second virtual group - following the Uniformed Services Nurse Advocates group. "The purpose is to provide a forum for surviving spouses across the United States to come together," said Gail Joyce, one of the group's founding members. "We want to find solutions to problems we might be having." Related reading: **Armed Services Committees Need Funding to End "Widows Tax"**

The group started with 13 members and has grown to about 40. It is open to any surviving spouse of an officer of any U.S. uniformed service across the country. If you are interested in joining, please send an email to: [mssvc02@gmail.com](mailto:mssvc02@gmail.com).

The group plans to hold hour-long virtual meetings every quarter. Joyce said one of the group's top goals is to connect with younger spouses. Since the group meets virtually, it makes it convenient for spouses to participate without leaving home, which can be a challenge for young spouses that have children or jobs, she said. The group also bridges the gap for surviving spouses that live in areas that don't have local MOAA chapters. Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret.), president of MOAA headquarters, participated in the inaugural meeting. Spouses' input benefits MOAA at large, he said, adding that as word gets out about the group, it'll continue to grow. That will have a powerful effect. "Those numbers start influencing legislative outcomes that we seek," Atkins said. "You're shaping solutions ... that we'll share in congressional offices that we visit."

The group was started by six women who serve on MOAA's Surviving Spouses Advisory Council: Gail Joyce, Micki Costello, Patricia Berquist, Pat Farnsworth, Sharon DeVaney and Anne Hartline. MOAA is the country's largest association of military officers. It stands for a strong national defense and representing the interests of military officers and their families at every stage of their career. The association recently pushed federal lawmakers to end the "widows' tax" on military survivors.

Related reading: **'Widow's Tax' Costs Families of Fallen Servicemembers \$15,000 Each Year**

The tax requires survivors of deceased military members to forfeit part or all of the Survivor Benefit Plan annuity when they were awarded VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. See MOAA Surviving Spouse Corner: Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter at MOAA.org for full details.



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<p align="center"><b><u>SW VIRGINIA VETERANS CEMETERY</u></b> <b><u>WREATH LAYING CEREMONY</u></b></p> <p>The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Wreath Laying at the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery Dublin, Virginia was conducted by volunteers on 19 December. 1,349 wreaths were placed. Mary Lou expressed profound thanks for those chapter members who financially supported the purchase of the wreaths for this year. Wreaths cost \$9.00 each and all costs were covered. Contributions to the Wreath Program can still be mailed to: Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery Volunteers, PO Box 11373, Blacksburg, VA 24062- 1373. Checks should be made payable to: <b>SWVAVCV</b>. Check their website, <a href="https://www.swvavcv.org/">https://www.swvavcv.org/</a> for details and updates.</p>	<p align="center"><b><u>CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP</u></b> <b><u>as of 31 March 2021</u></b></p> <p>Regular Members            112 Surviving Spouses            <u>11</u> Total Members                123</p> <p>Talk to a fellow officer about joining the Southwest Virginia Chapter!</p>	<p align="center"><b><u>JOIN THE CHAPTER</u></b></p> <p>Looking to join the Southwest Virginia Chapter? Want more information on how to join and become involved? Check us out on the chapter website at <a href="http://moaaswva.org">moaaswva.org</a> or on face book at <a href="https://www.facebook.com/moaa-swva">moaa swva</a> then Contact COL Bob Brown, USA (Ret), Chapter Membership Chair at (540) 904-2810 or email at <a href="mailto:bfbrown68@gmail.com">bfbrown68@gmail.com</a>.</p>
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**MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**  
**SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA CHAPTER - ENROLLMENT/RENEWAL FORM**

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 Branch of Service \_\_\_\_\_ Retired \_\_\_\_\_ Active Duty \_\_\_\_\_ NG \_\_\_\_\_ Former Officer \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse Name \_\_\_\_\_ MOAA Membership ID No. \_\_\_\_\_

Annual Chapter Dues are \$30.00. Widows (ers) dues are \$15.00. Dues for those entering MOAA between 1 July and 31 December are \$20.00. Please mail dues payment to: **MOAA, Southwest Virginia Chapter, P.O. Box 3090, Roanoke, VA 24015-1090**

*Note: The **Communique** is now published quarterly. The next issue will be published **June 2021**.*

**NEVER STOP SERVING.**



**Bring a fellow officer and their spouse to our next meeting.**

*Featured in this Issue*

Chapter Leadership Awards Presented  
 Chapter Zoom Programs Continue  
 Presidents Reflection on NATO  
 MOAA's Legislative Priorities for Veterans  
 Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter