

WINTER SPECIAL EDITION

Pulse

**PROUDLY SERVING
VETERANS OF
NORTH TEXAS AND
SOUTHERN OKLAHOMA
FROM LOCATIONS IN**

BONHAM

DALLAS

DECATUR

DENTON

FORT WORTH

GRANBURY

GRAND PRAIRIE

GREENVILLE

PLANO

SHERMAN

TYLER

George Raunam

U.S. ARMY
INFANTRY/FIELD ARTILLERY
VIETNAM, COLD WAR
SILVER STAR
PURPLE HEART
BRONZE STAR

FACES *of* SERVICE

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Pulse is published for Veterans living in North Texas and southern Oklahoma. We welcome your story ideas and suggestions. Send to: ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov.



Changing lives.
One Veteran at a time.



Resilience and Grit

EDITOR'S NOTE

The keys to surviving and thriving in uniform are the same traits that make Veterans the unique persons they are within their communities: resilience and grit.

It takes courage and commitment to raise your hand for an oath and surrender some of your personal freedoms in the protection of greater liberties for the many. It takes grit, the personal strength of character, to stand watch and serve the nation in times of peace, in war, in the United States, vast oceans, and foreign countries. It was this resilience and grit that drove VA North Texas' Veterans, our patients, through two years of a global pandemic. It's this ability to rebound and refocus that makes Veterans a special group with personal journeys inspire strength, pride, and conviction in everyday life.

Two years of a pandemic made capturing Veteran portraits and stories nearly impossible. Since its inception in 2017, the *Faces of Service*, and related *Faces of VA*, programs, have captured over 1,500 Veteran faces and stories in print or on VA North Texas' social media platforms. Our goal is to capture as many portraits and stories of the 205,000 patients enrolled in health care with VA North Texas as we can over the next five years.

In July of 2022, the *Faces* team captured 154 portraits and stories over two days at the Dallas and Fort Worth VA Medical Centers. The portraits and stories captured during these two days is featured in this special edition of *Pulse* magazine. The people and their stories are diverse and varied, but are united in the spirit of service, sacrifice, resilience, and grit.

We hope you enjoy this Faces of Service tribute.

GET SOCIAL WITH US!  

www.facebook.com/VANorthTexas
www.twitter.com/VANorthTexas

Director's Message



3,000 daily visitors.
3,000 faces and stories.

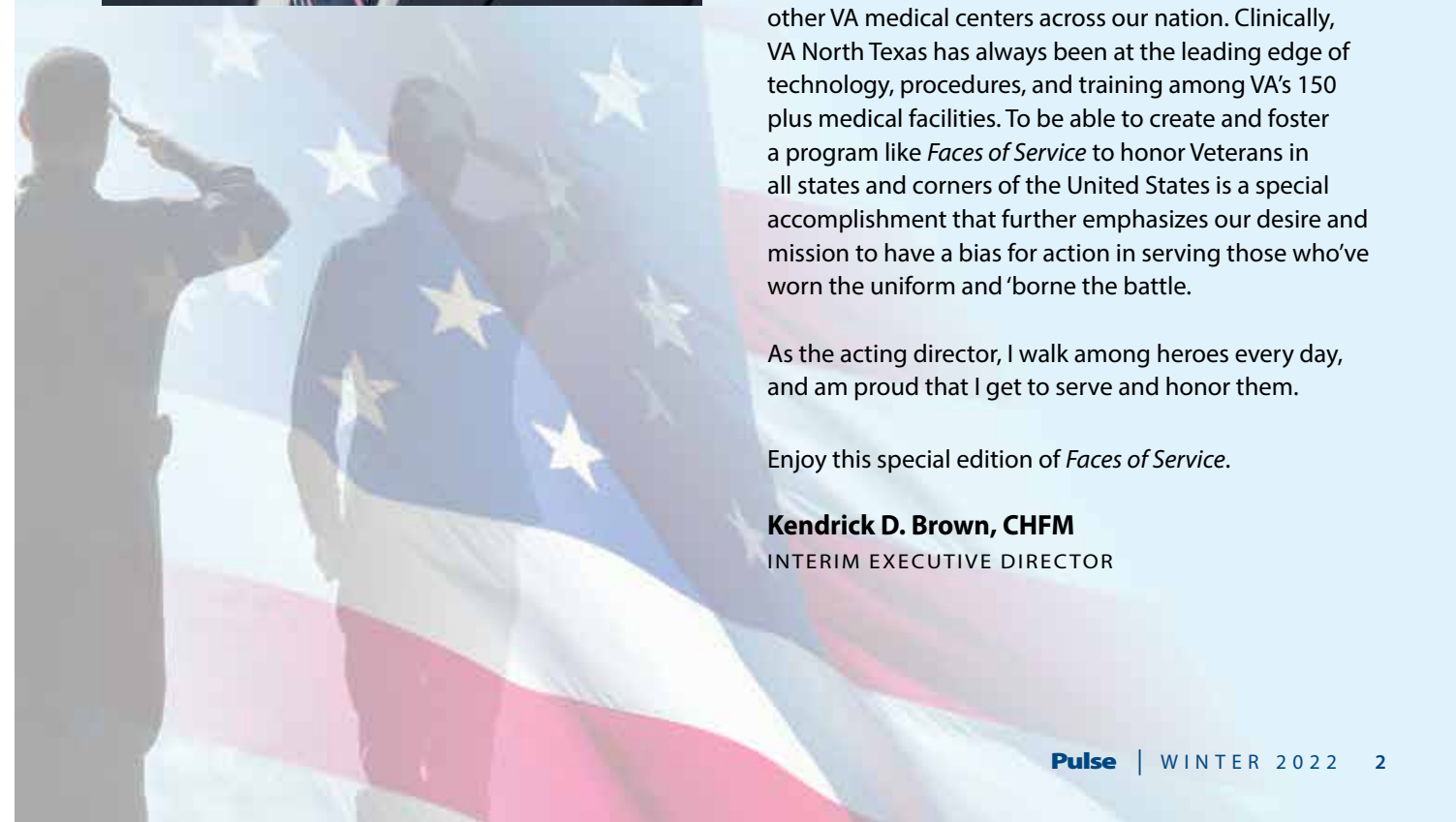
VA North Texas Health Care System is the second largest VA medical center in the nation with 205,000 enrolled patients using 11 venues for care in a 40-county coverage area of North Texas and Southern Oklahoma. A typical weekday at VA North Texas will see some 3,000 Veterans present for routine, critical, or emergency care. And with the new parameters and Veteran opportunities presented in the VA PACT Act, this number will continue to steadily grow. Every Veteran who enters one of our facilities has a story that should be told, and the *Faces of Service* program is our way of sharing these experiences and honoring their selfless service.

As of September 2022, 12 additional VA medical centers have adopted some iteration of the *Faces* program to recognize and honor their patients' service. To date, we've captured some 1,500 portraits and stories here at VA North Texas, and it's heartening to know that many hundreds more have been gathered by so many other VA medical centers across our nation. Clinically, VA North Texas has always been at the leading edge of technology, procedures, and training among VA's 150 plus medical facilities. To be able to create and foster a program like *Faces of Service* to honor Veterans in all states and corners of the United States is a special accomplishment that further emphasizes our desire and mission to have a bias for action in serving those who've worn the uniform and 'borne the battle.

As the acting director, I walk among heroes every day, and am proud that I get to serve and honor them.

Enjoy this special edition of *Faces of Service*.

Kendrick D. Brown, CHFM
INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Gregory Leal U.S. Marine Corps

INFANTRY
OPERATION DESERT STORM
OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
BRONZE STAR FOR VALOR

I had two brothers that served in the U.S. Army, but I spent 30 years in the Marine Corps.

I was among the first Marines into Afghanistan after the tragedy of 9/11 and I was privileged to lead over 5,000 Marines and sailors into Iraq in 2003 as the 1st Marine Regiment Sergeant Major. Every Marine is my brother or sister. We never served alone, and we are never alone after we leave the battlefield.



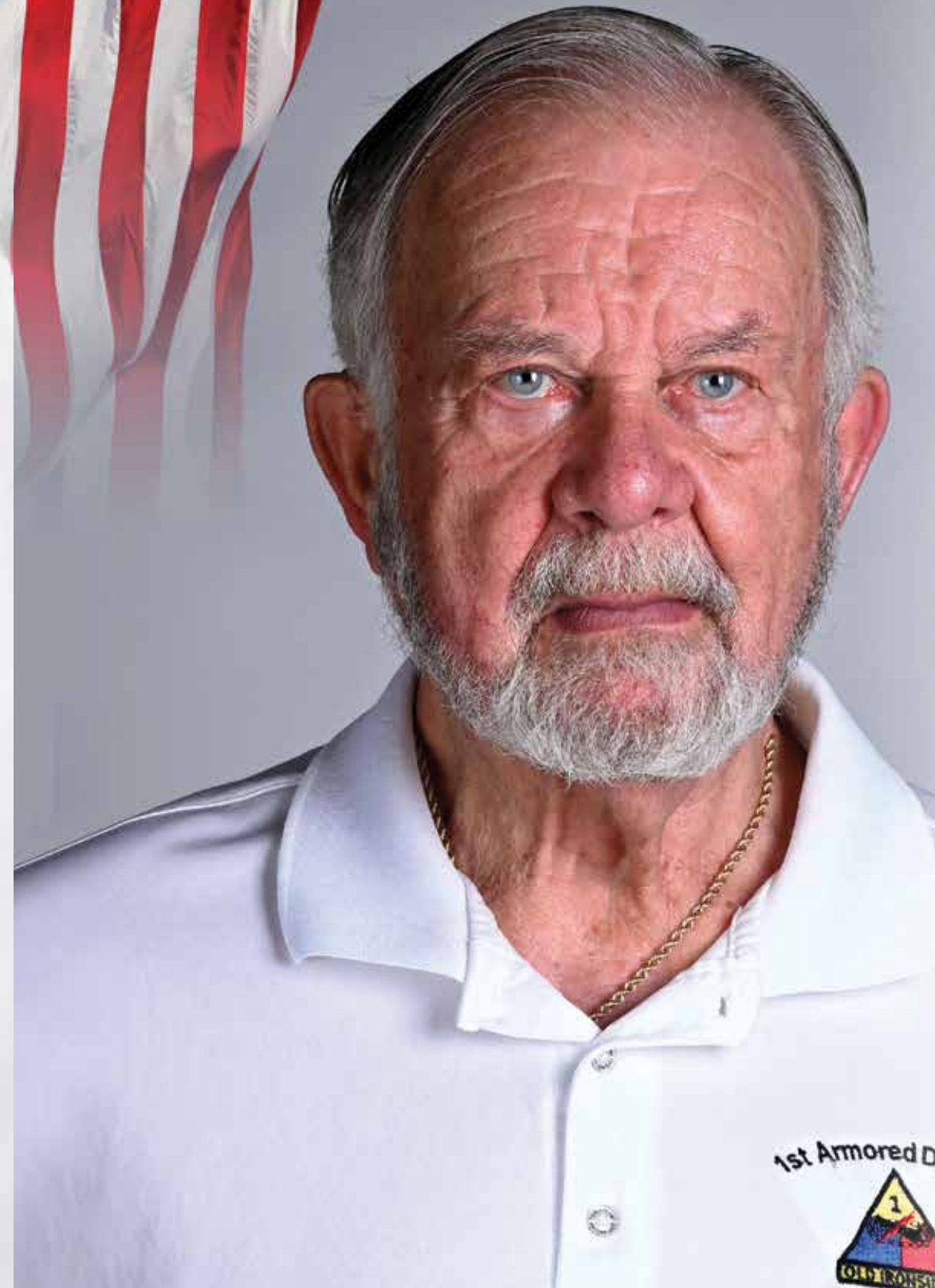
George Raunam U.S. Army

INFANTRY/FIELD ARTILLERY
VIETNAM, COLD WAR
SILVER STAR, PURPLE HEART, BRONZE STAR

I was born in Estonia, and when I was 12 years old, I met General of the Army, Omar Bradley.

I later joined the U.S. Army in 1953 and became General Bradley's aid-de-camp from 1976 to 1978.

In 1965 I was part of the team that developed the M-16 rifle. They needed soldiers to field test the rifle, so I went to Vietnam from 1966-1968 to do just that. I have a soft spot for my Air Force brethren as their air strikes saved my life and the lives of my men many times in the jungles of Vietnam. My 25 years in the military was the best thing that ever happened to me. I got to meet a lot of people and a few of them helped me live.



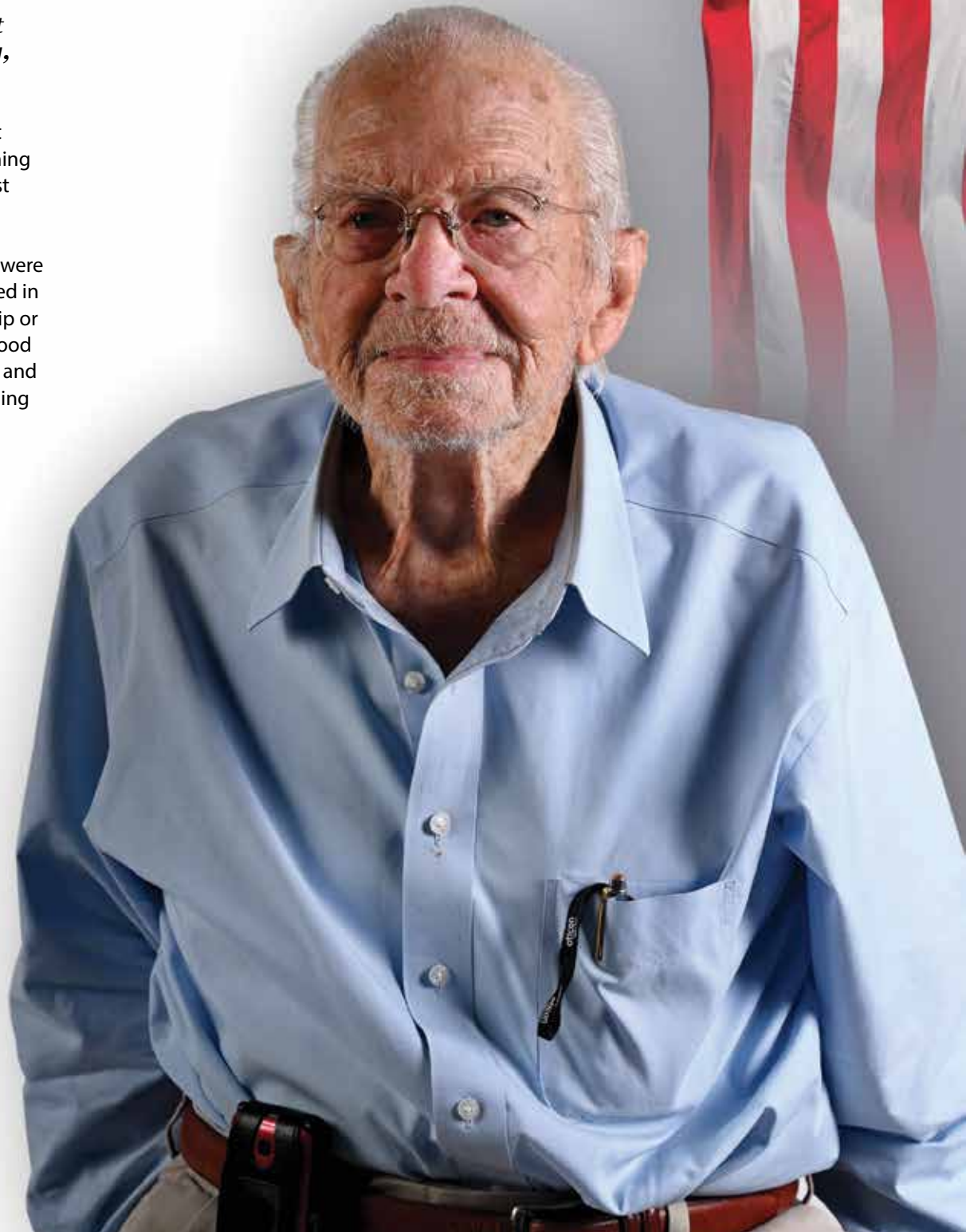
Otis Vannatta Jr. U.S. Coast Guard

GUNNER'S MATE
WORLD WAR II

I was the first man in Fort Worth to join the U.S. Coast Guard on Monday, December 8, 1941.

I was going to join the Merchant Marine but got turned around that morning and walked into the Coast Guard office instead.

The German submarines were everywhere where I served in the North Atlantic. No ship or boat was safe. It took a good crew to operate the boat and the guns to keep everything operating and flowing.



Sumera Huebsch U.S. Army

INTERPRETER/TRANSLATOR
OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

I was born in Pakistan and was the first woman from my village to attend school and then ultimately join the military.

I joined the U.S. Army in 2012 to overcome the gender biased standards of Pakistan and had the opportunity to serve in Afghanistan from 2013 to 2014 as part of a legal outreach team.

My family looks up to me for what I've done, and my service has helped me gratefully overcome any shortcomings that I might have thought I had.



Tracy Payton U.S. Army

COMBAT MEDIC
OPERATION ENDURING IRAQI FREEDOM
VA EMPLOYEE

I joined the military to be well-rounded.

Being a soldier, a combat medic, taught me selflessness, personal integrity, and how to be excellent in everything that I set my mind to. These traits allowed me to excel on humanitarian missions in Haiti, Thailand, Mexico, Poland, Germany, and Iraq.

I came to VA after my time in uniform because I wanted to be around and serve my fellow Veterans. They speak my language.



Leroy Cameron U.S. Navy

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHER
COLD WAR

I joined the Navy in 1978 to be a photographer

and was eventually selected to be one of the elite underwater, dive-qualified, photographers in Norfolk, Virginia. We did everything from diving wrecks to world cruises overseas, and several classified recovery operations. We were the eyes of Navy's leadership underwater and I wouldn't change a thing about my 20 years in uniform.



FACES of SERVICE

Ray Baruth U.S. Air Force

RADAR COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST
VIETNAM

In 1971, I was stationed in Chiang Mai, Thailand and spent a year there. We supplied the communications capabilities for everyone that was out in the battlefield. We were also there to monitor the goings on throughout the theater with radar technology. Fifty some years later and I still talk with many of my fellow service members on a regular basis.

Ten years ago, when I came to VA, I was a mess on a whole lot of medications, and now, I'm in the best shape of my life. I work out, eat well, and take care of my body. I'm now off all those medicines.

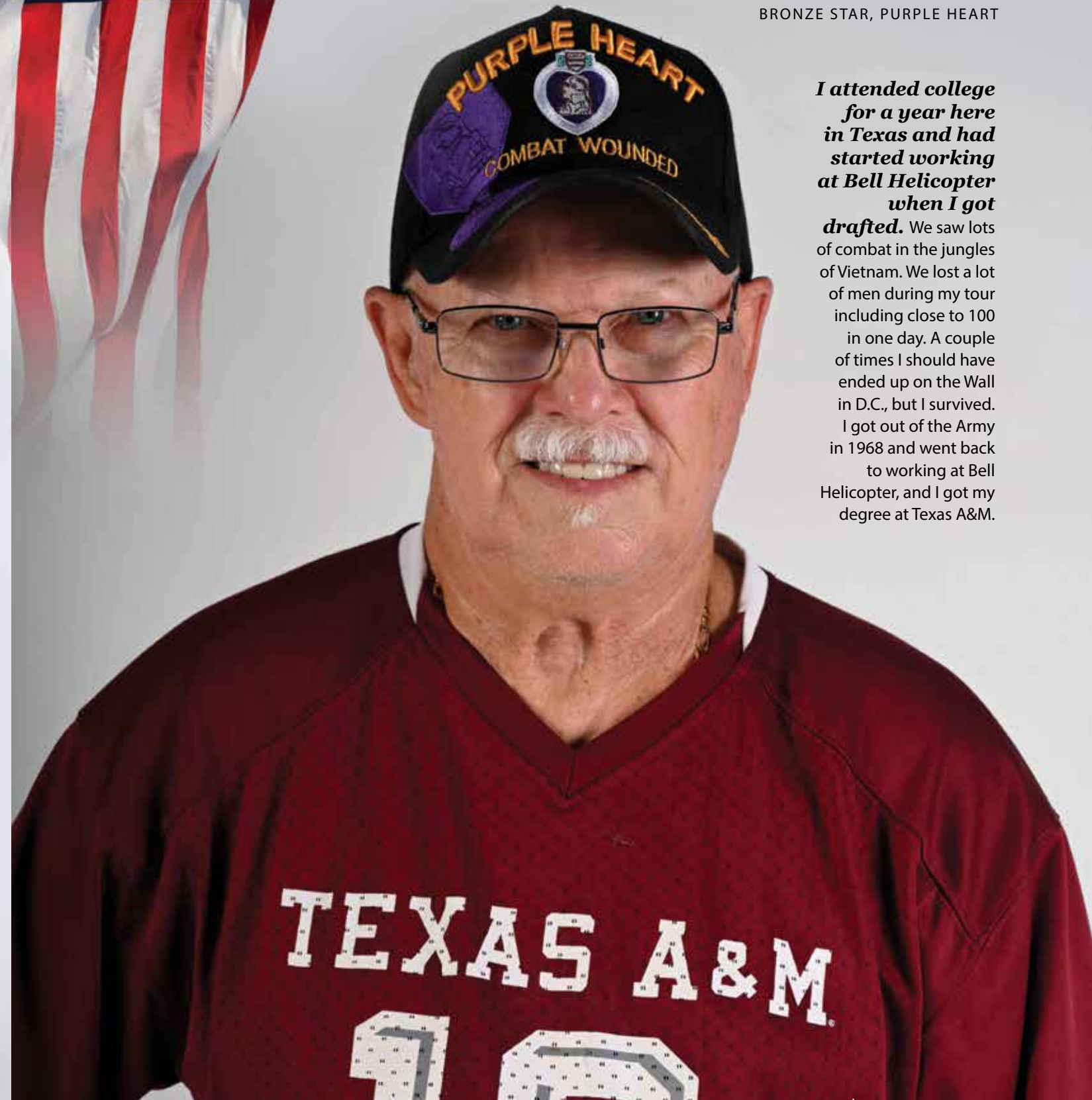


FACES of SERVICE

Johnnie Holloway U.S. Army

ARTILLERY
VIETNAM
BRONZE STAR, PURPLE HEART

I attended college for a year here in Texas and had started working at Bell Helicopter when I got drafted. We saw lots of combat in the jungles of Vietnam. We lost a lot of men during my tour including close to 100 in one day. A couple of times I should have ended up on the Wall in D.C., but I survived. I got out of the Army in 1968 and went back to working at Bell Helicopter, and I got my degree at Texas A&M.



FACES of SERVICE

Maria Brown-Spense
U.S. Army

PETROLEUM SUPPLY
SPECIALIST
GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

Military service is in my blood thanks to both of my parents.

Being the only woman in a newly integrated combat arms unit, I had to do a lot to prove myself to others. I took my experiences and founded Hearts2Heal, a nonprofit dedicated to designing and implementing culturally responsive mental health & wellness strategies for underserved communities, including military service members, Veterans & their families



April Brown
U.S. Marine Corps

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
OPERATION DESERT STORM

I was born into a military family when my father was in the Air Force.

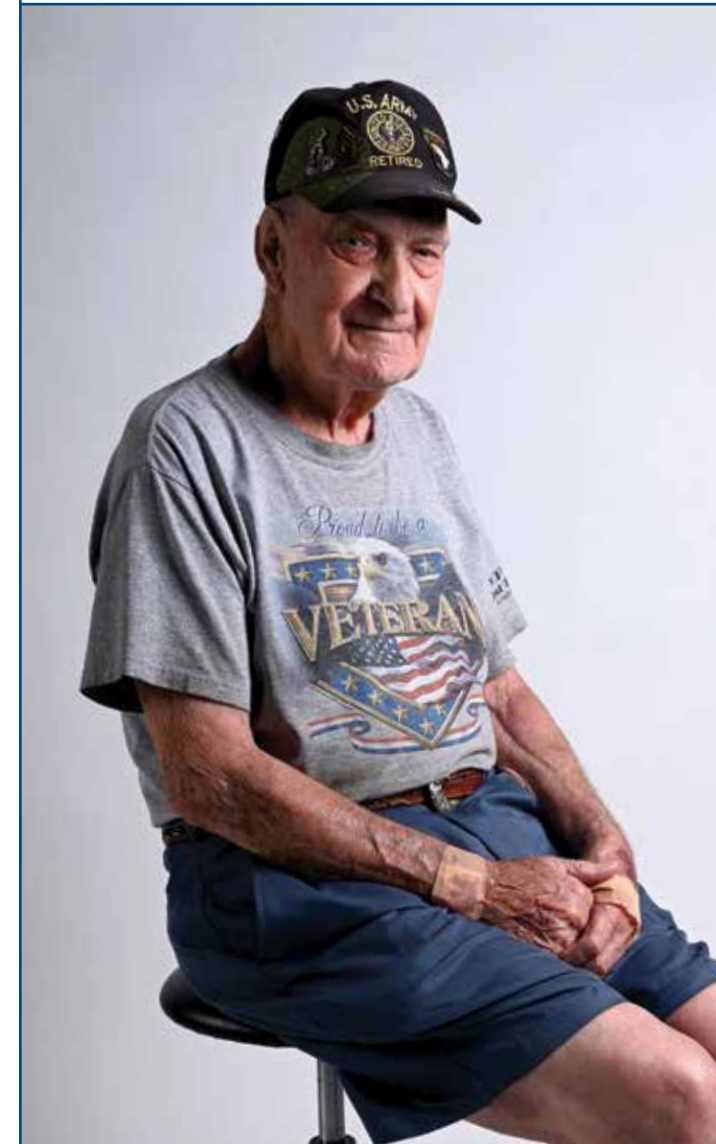
I became a Marine officer in 1985, I married a fellow Marine, and my daughter Maria served in the U.S. Army. In my 13 years in uniform, I never served with another female Marine African American officer. I thought that by continuing to serve I could serve as a lens for cultural and racial understanding.

I serve as the Director of Veteran Services at Texas Christian University because I know how much Veterans strengthen the campus through their diverse experiences.

FACES of SERVICE

Juergen Klein
U.S. Army

INFANTRY/FIRST SERGEANT
VIETNAM, COLD WAR



I was originally in the German Army. I spent a lot of time training with U.S. service members and the first chance I got, I came to the U.S. and volunteered to serve with the U.S. Army. I wanted to jump out of airplanes, so I requested service with the 101st Airborne Division. I loved it. I spent six years as a First Sergeant and wouldn't change a thing about my 21 years in uniform.

Yasmeen Rivera
U.S. Marine Corps

SUPPLY ADMINISTRATION
OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM
VA EMPLOYEE



I wanted to be the first female in my family to join the Marines. During my tour at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, in 2010, I met my husband who was on his third tour. As a female Marine you are held to a higher standard, and you must always be on point for what's next. You really must become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

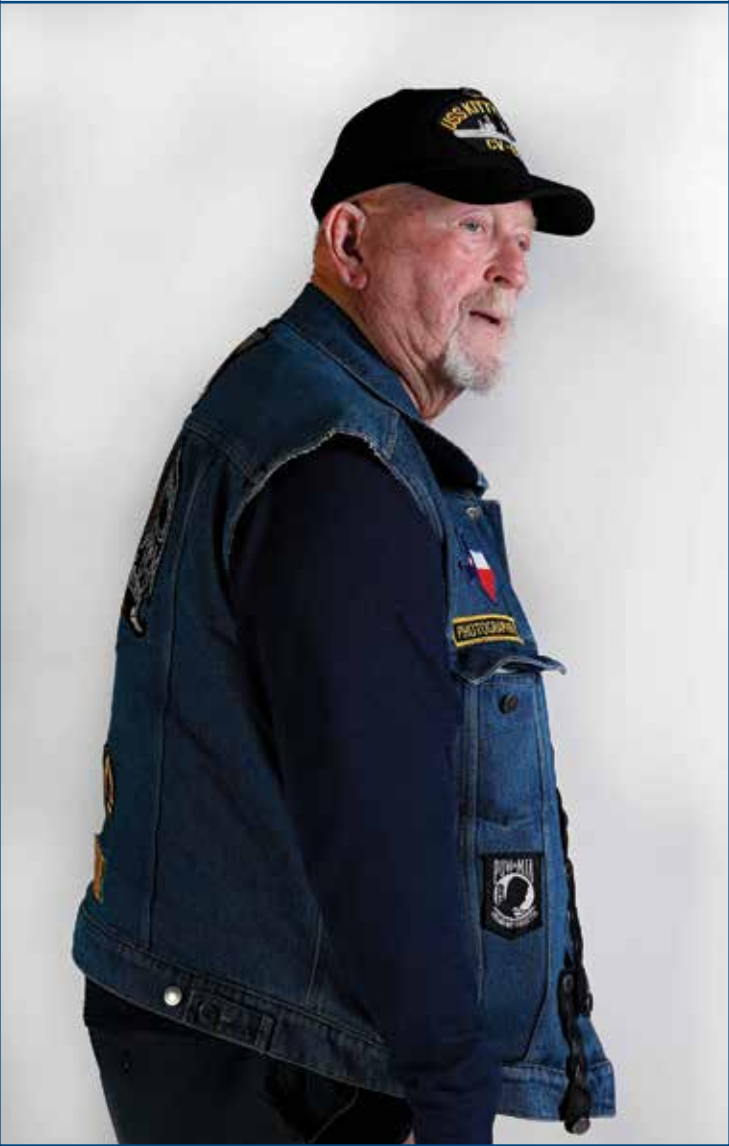

FACES of SERVICE

Arthel Martin U.S. Army	COMBAT ENGINEER VIETNAM	Melissa O'Neal U.S. Marine Corps	MOTOR TRANSPORTATION
			

I was drafted directly out of college in Gary, Indiana, in 1962. I later attended Officer Candidate School and was sent to Vietnam in 1967 to serve as a battalion S4 during the Tet Offensive. I was the only black officer in leadership and faced a fair number of comments and racism. I went back to Vietnam in 1971 and served another tour. Despite some bad memories, I enjoyed my time in the U.S. Army.

I watched the movie GI Jane repeatedly as a teenager and it motivated me to eventually join the Marines. I was gung-ho and ended up in Okinawa. Unfortunately, I was kicked out of the Marines for being gay. I guess they felt I couldn't be gay and be a good Marine. Today I own and operate an air duct cleaning company and I'm still very proud of my service in uniform.

FACES of SERVICE

Fred Jerger U.S. Navy	DAMAGE CONTROL VIETNAM, COLD WAR	Richard Wittrup U.S. Air Force	FIGHTER CREW CHIEF COLD WAR
			

I quit school at 17 to join the U.S. Navy out of New Orleans. I was on the USS Kitty Hawk on December 6, 1965, when a fire broke out in a machinery room during a refueling operation from tankers in waters off Vietnam. Two sailors were killed, and 48 more sailors and a civilian were injured before the fire was brought under control. Within hours of the fire, we resumed launching planes for strikes against North Vietnam.

I joined the Air Force when I was 17. My mom had to sign for me. I spent 18-months in North Africa, specifically Tripoli, taking care of my F-86, F-89, and F-100 fighter aircraft. I made staff sergeant in less than four years and was among the youngest NCO's in the Air Force at that time.

FACES of SERVICE

Crystal Guerra
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S. Army

COMBAT ENGINEER/
PATIENT ADMINISTRATION
GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

Timothy Johnson
U.S. Army

AH-64 ARMAMENT
SYSTEMS REPAIR
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
VA EMPLOYEE



I was going to join the U.S. Army but a Marine recruiter came to my school in his dress blue uniform, and I changed my mind.

As a Marine, I was the only woman in my unit of 35. I later served in the Army National Guard for six years and moved into the medical field where I continue to work.

I was in basic training when the invasion of Iraq occurred in 2003.

Within a few years I oversaw 27 AH-64 attack helicopters and was on a rapid response team for downed helicopters in the theater. We lost 10 soldiers. After I left the military, I became homeless for a year and the VA's supportive housing (HUD-VASH) program saved my life. I started my VA career in the kitchen, went back to school, and became a Networking Biomedical Equipment Support Specialist for VA North Texas Health Care system.

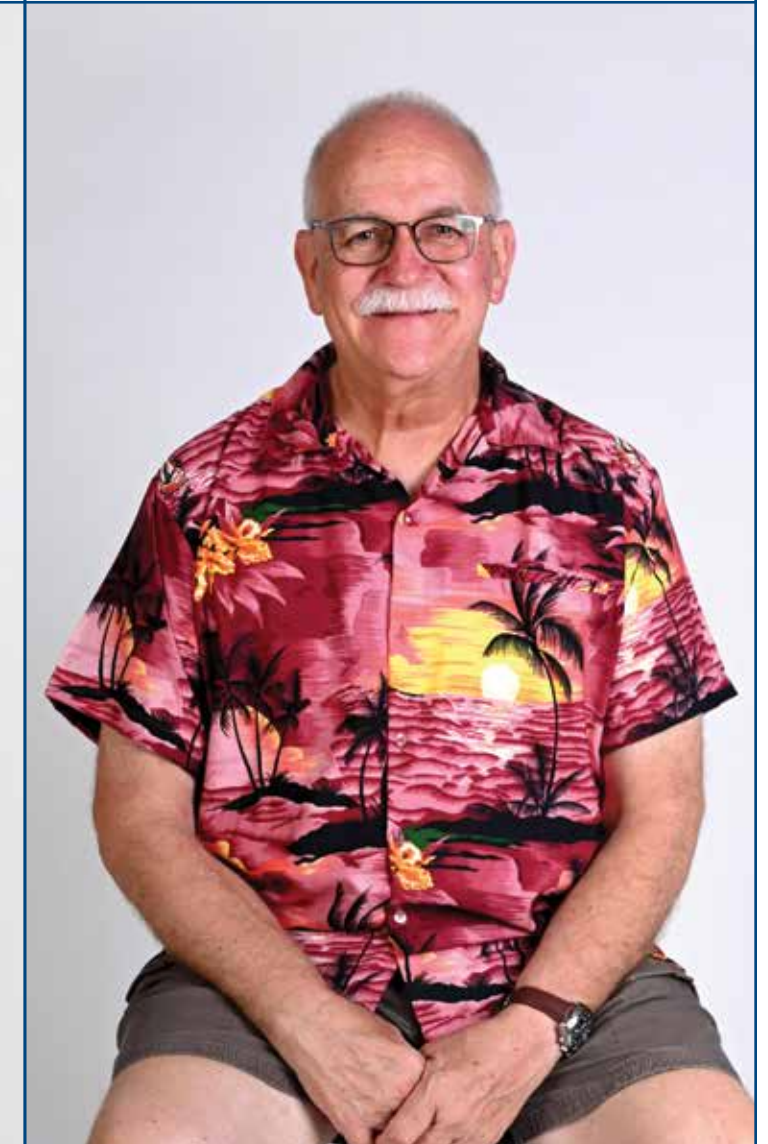
FACES of SERVICE

Joanne Passons
U.S. Navy

NURSE
VIETNAM

Howard Clapper
U.S. Air Force

MEDICAL LABORATORY
TECHNICIAN
VIETNAM



I loved being in uniform as a Navy Nurse.

I worked as an ICU and trauma nurse at Naval Medical Center San Diego in Balboa from 1970 to 1972. My fellow nurses were great, and we helped a lot of young sailors and Marines on their way to or back from the Pacific theater and Vietnam. I am very grateful that VA, especially mental health services, has taken such great care of me in all those years since I left the service. VA truly saved my life.

I remember being at Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts, mid-1973,

treating some of returning Vietnam Prisoners of War who were on recovering on base before continuing their military careers or being medically retired. Most of them didn't have family or friends close by, so a few of us in the hospital would take them on evening and weekend trips to help them reorient to the world after years in captivity. Many of them were our guys our age who just wanted to grab a beer, check out the local colleges, and enjoy simple things they had missed and thought they might never again experience. It was cathartic for them, and for us as their caregivers. These were our heroes.

FACES of SERVICE



As of 2020, the United States was home to 18.82 million Veterans, or roughly 6 percent of the total population.

Nearly 2 million of these Veterans call Texas home. VA North Texas Health Care system, covering 40 counties in North Texas provides care to 205,000 of these Veterans each year. Every Veteran has a story of service of sacrifice.



FACES of SERVICE



Our Veterans come from all walks of life and service. From World War II to stability operations in Southwest Asia, old and young, our Veterans represent the best of our society in peace time and war. They have all worn the uniform, stood watch, and placed mission before anything else on countless occasions. They continue to serve their communities, cities, and fellow Veterans with selfless acts, dedication, bound by the camaraderie that they shared in uniform, home and abroad. Their faces and stories are as diverse as their backgrounds, and it these differences that make their stories of service and sacrifice all that much more relevant in today's world.



They also served.

The United States is home to

1.63 million
women
VETERANS

and represents the
fastest growing Veteran
population in VA. ★★★★★

VA North Texas
proudly provides
health care to

23,000
women Veterans,
a **57 percent increase**
from 2016 to 2021.

Our hope is that every ❤️
woman Veteran will never
have to sit in a VA clinic and
hear the words "Are you
waiting for your husband?"



And they served proudly and with honor.





WE ARE

PROUD

Veteran, employee, volunteer, family member — we share a common bond and a legacy of service to those who've borne the battle.

These are the Faces of Service.

The Faces of VA.

We are strong and we are VA Proud.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA North Texas Health Care System