

Greetings Greater Birmingham Chapter MOAA
Members and Friends!

The May picnic meeting was a huge success! With 23 attendees and a great presentation by Mark Davis on the planned Hoover veteran memorial, it was really a nice change of pace to see people and feel comfortable in an outdoor setting. We will plan to do it again next year. Our summer luncheon meetings beginning on June 3rd and will be at Lloyd's Restaurant; meeting at 11:30 and lunch at noon (buy your own off of the menu). I am looking forward to seeing even more of you there.

Memorial Day is coming up and is a time to remember, especially our fallen fellow veterans. This year many of the venues and celebrations will still be virtual or restricted to a very limited number of participants. The Veterans Memorial Park brick laying ceremony that our chapter normally supports with volunteers will again be virtual; hopefully the November ceremony will be back live.

Even with the COVID, our chapter continues to survive and thrive! This is a tribute to all of the membership and especially to the individuals who work behind the scenes to make it all happen. You know who you are and I much appreciate it. Stay safe, be well and look forward to seeing you soon!

Respectfully,

Don

Summer monthly luncheons begin on Thursday, June 3rd!

Location: Lloyd's Restaurant on 280

Time: Gather at 11:30, lunch at noon

Cost: Buy your own from the menu

Please RSVP so they can have an estimated count, to Doug Markham; text or call 205-420-2631 or email to

dgmarkham3143@gmail.com

See you there!

Volume 121 Issue 6 June 2021

Officers' Call

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Surviving Spouse Liaison Donna Martin

Newsletter Linda DeMarco, LTC, USA (Ret)

Statement of Publication

Officer's Call is the newsletter of the Greater Birmingham Chapter—Military Officers Association of America. It is published once each month to inform the membership of issues and activities of interest to all.

GBC MOAA is a non-profit 501(c)19 entity in the state of Alabama organized to represent the membership and to support the activities of the Alabama Council and MOAA National.

MOAA and its affiliated chapters and councils are non-partisan.

Advertising contained in the newsletter is not endorsed by MOAA or its affiliate the Greater Birmingham Chapter, and does not represent any recommendation to the membership. Opinions expressed in articles contained herein are not necessarily those of the membership as a whole or the Chapter. Questions should be directed to newsletter@moaabirmingham.org.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Each year (the author) is hired to go to Washington, DC, with the eighth grade class from Clinton, WI., where I grew up, to videotape their trip. I greatly enjoy visiting our nation's capital, and each year I take some special memories back with me. This fall's trip was especially memorable. On the last night of our trip, we stopped at the Iwo Jima memorial. This memorial is the largest bronze statue in the world and depicts one of the most famous photographs in history -- that of the six brave soldiers raising the American Flag at the top of a rocky hill on the island of Iwo Jima, Japan, during WW II. Over one hundred students and chaperones piled off the buses and headed towards the memorial. I noticed a solitary figure at the base of the statue, and as I got closer he asked, 'Where are you guys from?' I told him that we were from Wisconsin. 'Hey, I'm a cheese head, too! Come gather around, Cheese heads, and I will tell you a story.'

It was James Bradley who just happened to be in Washington, DC, to speak at the memorial the following day. He was there that night to say good night to his dad, who had passed away. He was just about to leave when he saw the buses pull up. I videotaped him as he spoke to us, and received his permission to share what he said from my videotape. It is one thing to tour the incredible monuments filled with history in Washington, DC, but it is quite another to get the kind of insight we received that night.) When all had gathered around, he reverently began to speak. (Here are his words that night.)

'My name is James Bradley and I'm from Antigo, Wisconsin. My dad is on that statue, and I wrote a book called 'Flags of Our Fathers'. It is the story of the six boys you see behind me.

'Six boys raised the flag. The first guy putting the pole in the ground is Harlon Block. Harlon was an all-state football player. He enlisted in the Marine Corps with all the senior members of his football team. They were off to play another type of game. A game called 'War.' But it didn't turn out to be a game. Harlon, at the age of 21, died with his intestines in his hands. I don't say that to gross you out, I say that because there are people who stand in front of this statue and talk about the glory of war. You guys need to know that most of the boys in Iwo Jima were 17, 18, and 19 years old - and it was so hard that the ones who did make it home never even would talk to their families about it.

(He pointed to the statue) 'You see this next guy? That's Rene Gagnon from New Hampshire. If you took Rene's helmet off at the moment this photo was taken and looked in the webbing of that helmet, you would find a photograph...a photograph of his girlfriend Rene put that in there for protection because he was scared. He was 18 years old. It was just boys who won the battle of Iwo Jima. Boys. Not old men.

'The next guy here, the third guy in this tableau, was Sergeant Mike Strank .. (from Johnstown, PA). Mike is my hero. He was the hero of all these guys. They called him the 'old man' because he was so old. He was already 24. When Mike would motivate his boys in training camp, he didn't say, 'Let's go kill some Japanese' or 'Let's die for our country' He knew he was talking to little boys. Instead he would say, 'You do what I say, and I'll get you home to your mothers.'

'The last guy on this side of the statue is Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from Arizona. Ira Hayes was one of them who lived to walk off Iwo Jima. He went into the White House with my dad. President Truman told him, 'You're a hero' He told reporters, 'How can I feel like a hero when 250 of my buddies hit the island with me and only 27 of us walked off alive?'

So you take your class at school, 250 of you spending a year together having fun, doing everything together. Then all 250 of you hit the beach, but only 27 of your classmates walk off alive. That was Hayes. He had images of horror in his mind. Ira Hayes carried the pain home with him and eventually died dead drunk, face down, drowned in a very shallow puddle, at the age of 32 (ten years after this picture was taken).

'The next guy, going around the statue, is Franklin Sousley from Hilltop, Kentucky. A fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. His best friend, who is now 70, told me, 'Yeah, you know, we took two cows up on the porch of the Hilltop General Store. Then we strung wire across the stairs so the cows couldn't get down. Then we fed them

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER CONTINUED

Epsom salts. Those cows crapped all night.' Yes, he was a fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. Franklin died on Iwo Jima at the age of 19. When the telegram came to tell his mother that he was dead, it went to the Hilltop General Store. A barefoot boy ran that telegram up to his mother's farm. The neighbors could hear her scream all night and into the morning. Those neighbors lived a quarter of a mile away.

'The next guy, as we continue to go around the statue, is my dad, John Bradley, from Antigo, Wisconsin, where I was raised. My dad lived until 1994, but he would never give interviews.

When Walter Cronkite's producers or the New York Times would call, we were trained as little kids to say 'No, I'm sorry, sir, my dad's not here. He is in Canada fishing. No, there is no phone there, sir. No, we don't know when he is coming back.' My dad never fished or even went to Canada. Usually, he was sitting there right at the table eating his Campbell's soup. But we had to tell the press that he was out fishing. He didn't want to talk to the press.

You see, like Ira Hayes, my dad didn't see himself as a hero. Everyone thinks these guys are heroes, 'cause they are in a photo and on a monument. My dad knew better. He was a medic. John Bradley from Wisconsin was a combat caregiver. On Iwo Jima he probably held over 200 boys as they died. And when boys died on Iwo Jima, they writhed and screamed, without any medication or help with the pain.

'When I was a little boy, my third grade teacher told me that my dad was a hero. When I went home and told my dad that, he looked at me and said, 'I want you always to remember that the heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who did not come back. Did NOT come back.'

'So that's the story about six nice young boys. Three died on Iwo Jima, and three came back as national heroes. Overall, 7,000 boys died on Iwo Jima in the worst battle in the history of the Marine Corps. My voice is giving out, so I will end here. Thank you for your time.'

Suddenly, the monument wasn't just a big old piece of metal with a flag sticking out of the top. It came to life before our eyes with the heartfelt words of a son who did indeed have a father who was a hero. Maybe not a hero for the reasons most people would believe, but a hero nonetheless.

One thing I learned while on tour with my 8th grade students in DC that is not mentioned here is, that if you look at the statue very closely and count the number of 'hands' raising the flag, there are 13. When the man who made the statue was asked why there were 13, he simply said the 13th hand was the hand of God.

May God bless All of You, may He bless our currently serving men and women in our Armed Forces, and may God Bless the United States of America.

Mac Chandler
LTC, IN, U.S. Army (Ret)

HAPPY
FATHER'S
Day!



MAY MEETING PICNIC



All having a good time at the picnic



And the leftovers went to...Percy Lawson.
(Percy is a former Marine, who received a MOAA COVID relief fund grant last year.)

Application for Membership/Renewal – Greater Birmingham Chapter MOAA (Please print or type)

First Name MI Last Name Grade Rank Preferred Name Name of Spouse
 Branch of Service: ☐ Army ☐ Air Force ☐ Navy ☐ Marines ☐ Coast Guard ☐ Other: _____
 Status: ☐ Active Duty ☐ Retired ☐ National Guard ☐ Reserve ☐ Former Member ☐ Surviving Spouse
 Mailing Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
 Telephone #: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Email Address: _____
 National MOAA Membership Number: _____ National Membership Type: ☐ Basic ☐ Premium ☐ Life
 Signature: _____ Date: _____

☐ Renewal or ☐ New Membership (membership runs by calendar year)
☐ Regular Membership or ☐ Surviving Spouse: ☐ \$20/year ☐ \$35/2 years ☐ \$50/3 years
☐ Supporting Membership (\$50) or ☐ Sustaining Membership (\$100)
☐ ROTC Affiliation (electronic communications only – no cost)



Mail this form to Greater Birmingham Chapter MOAA, P.O. Box 530153, Birmingham, AL 35253



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

(visit Legislative Action at <http://www.moaa.org>)

Comprehensive Toxic Exposure Reform Legislation Taking Shape in Congress By Cory Titus

MOAA and other veterans service organizations (VSOs) have been sharing for years the need for comprehensive toxic exposure reform – and this Congress seems to be listening and ready to act. The Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees hosted back-to-back legislative hearings April 28 and May 5, respectively. Committee leaders in both chambers have made it clear they are ready to move quickly on a comprehensive bill. Many of the toxic exposure-focused bills reviewed by the committees align with the cornerstone principles MOAA supports such as fixing the presumptive process, expanding health care eligibility, conceding exposure, and increase reporting. During the hearings, the MOAA-backed TEAM Act and Veterans Burn Pit Exposure Recognition Act received significant coverage from lawmakers on the benefits that these bills offer.

VA Overhauls Application Process for Caregiver Support Program After Court Ruling By Leo Shane III

Veterans Affairs officials are overhauling their application process for caregiver benefits while simultaneously fighting a court ruling that would force them to allow a legal review for individuals rejected from the program. The move follows an order last month from a panel of U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims judges, which ruled that families rejected by the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers should have an opportunity to appeal those decisions to the Board of Veterans' Appeals, which handles other VA benefits disputes. VA officials have opposed the idea, arguing instead that keeping program decisions within the clinical side of department operations will produce better health care options for veterans and less complexity for families. Currently, leaders from individual VA medical centers review applications and make decisions on who receives the benefit. That has led to complaints about inconsistency and a lack of transparency with the application process from a number of veterans' advocates and formed much of the basis of the recent lawsuit.

Changes to VA Loan Eligibility: What You Need to Know By Kevin Lilley

The VA recently implemented changes to its home loan program mandated by a MOAA-backed law passed in January, expanding the benefit to more veterans who served in Vietnam and making other changes, including National Guard eligibility. Under one of a wide array of provisions included in the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, those who served in the Republic of Vietnam from Nov. 1, 1955 to Feb. 27, 1961, now need only to have served 90 total days on active duty to qualify for the home loan benefit, instead of 181 continuous days. The change comes as part of the law's redefinition of the "Vietnam era" of benefits qualification. That period has expanded to include those who served in the Republic of Vietnam from Nov. 1, 1955 to May 7, 1975. The start date had been Feb. 28, 1961 for in-country service; those who served between Aug. 5, 1964 and May 7, 1975, regardless of location, still are considered "Vietnam era" veterans. The law also provides loan-program eligibility for servicemembers and veterans who performed full-time National Guard duty for at least 90 days, including at least 30 consecutive days.

RECRUITER'S CORNER

The GBC MOAA 2021 Recruiting Season Begins

The GBC MOAA 2021 Recruiting Season Continues

Completed

Hoover Day

GBC MOAA Outdoor Picnic

Alabaster Community-Wide Yard Sale

Upcoming

Luncheons

Zoom meetings

Danberry meetings starting in September

We've made it as easy as possible for eligible individuals to join GBC MOAA.

Prospects can join – **or renew** – with GBC electronically. If you know of anyone who qualifies, our chapter's membership page is [GBC MOAA Website](#). Please email or direct any prospective chapter members there.

Most of our current chapter members are former or retired Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines officer, Warrant, or Chief Warrant veterans encountered in everyday life. The membership's constituency consists of Retired, Regular, Active, Reserve, National Guard components, or the US Coast Guard. Some current members were at one time merely an acquaintance of an existing member who came to mind and were asked to join.

Feel free to ask prospective members to sign up as GBC members. As another option, interested and qualified persons can visit the redesigned [National MOAA Website Join and Renew System](#). Thanks again for everyone's support to GBC past, present, and future. Let's continue to make our chapter an even more convenient option for everyone to join or renew. Ease of entering and sustaining membership in GBC MOAA helps veterans. Always encourage eligible applicants to join our chapter.

Michael A. Walker
LTC(Ret), USA
Membership Chair
zxvwalk@gmail.com





Surviving Spouse Corner: Resources for Surviving Spouses

By: Barbara Smith

As a surviving spouse and a member of MOAA, you have access to a host of people who are there to guide you through any difficulties or questions you might have. MOAA exists to protect military benefits and to offer you resources which cannot be found elsewhere.

MOAA membership is 350,000 strong, of which 16% are surviving spouses. Experts in the Washington, D.C., area advocate for legislation benefiting our community; they are equally vigilant when fighting legislation that would harm our benefits.

You are encouraged to visit MOAA.org, where you can sign up to receive [The MOAA Newsletter](#) and choose areas of most interest to you, such health care and earned benefits, finance, and spouse and family.

On the homepage when you see the prompt "I AM A," scroll down and click on "Surviving Spouse," which will lead you to the [Surviving Spouse Page](#). This site provides information relevant to our community.

MOAA has a Surviving Spouse Advisory Council (SSAC) consisting of eight surviving spouses advocating for issues and concerns of interest to our community. Email SSACouncil@moaa.org with any questions or concerns you may have.

MOAA's Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter meets once a month and is open to all MOAA surviving spouses and surviving spouse liaisons. Speakers cover important information regarding issues and concerns one month and the next is an open forum meeting taking questions and hearing concerns of attendees. [Learn more about the chapter, including how to join.](#)

Additionally, [MOAA's Surviving Spouses and Friends](#) Facebook group provides information, answers questions, and offers an opportunity to interact with others traveling the same course. Although not sponsored by MOAA, another Facebook group, [DIC Surviving Spouses & Friends](#), is open to all surviving spouses who receive or who have questions regarding Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

Join your [local MOAA chapter](#) where you can meet new people and other surviving spouses. Some of our events have speakers on a variety of subjects that might interest or concern you, with some other events providing entertainment. Most chapters have a surviving spouse liaison who is there to assist you with any issues or concerns you might have or just to provide some comfort or a sounding board.

GREATER BIRMINGHAM CHAPTER INFORMATION

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Chad Richmond	2
Sandy Vitalis	2
JD Crawford	6
Helen Green	8
Pat Singletary	10
George Lord	11
Sam Faires	12
David Hicks	15
Harb Moore	19
Rick Ballintine	21
Bud Jensen	22
GT Merriam	26
Tim McGraw	29

OBITUARIES

Gene Cushman's wife,
Eleanor passed away
5/6/21.

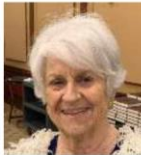
MOAA on-line photo directory

Below is a sample of our chapter on-line photo directory, available via a private link to our members only on our website. It can be found at: <http://moaabirmingham.org/#>. You will need to request a log-in/join if you gave not already in order to access the "Members Only" page. If you and or your spouse do not have and would like to have your photo(s) in the directory, please send a selfie or photo to Donna Martin at: donnamaemartin@aol.com.



Killian, III, Sam P.
4545 Magnolia Drive
Birmingham, AL 35242
Email: spkiii@bellsouth.net
Spouse: Martha T. Killian
marthak36@gmail.com

USN Ret CDR Life
205-408-7721 (h)
205-903-6638 (c)
BD: 8/28
BD: 11/10



Lehman, Donald D. (Don)
1204 Greystone Parc Drive
Birmingham, AL 35242
Email: don.lehman1@gmail.com
Spouse: Patricia A. Lehman
islandmomma1@gmail.com

USMC Ret LTCOL Life
404-441-3882 (c)
BD: 7/10
BD: 11/20
404-725-7152 (c)



Click on these to
access website
and/or Facebook



Website



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Greater Birmingham MOAA Coins

The new Greater Birmingham Chapter MOAA Challenge Coins are now available to order for only \$10 per coin! This coin will make a wonderful gift and must-have for any challenge coin collection. You can also order coins by contacting:
LTC (ret) Don Lehman at don.lehman1@gmail.com.
Display cases are available for \$1 each, and orders to be mailed should add \$1 per coin.



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government-issued marker, presidential certificate and much more. We are also able to offer a FREE Veterans Planning Guide that includes worksheets and valuable information.

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We invite you to call us for more information.



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HOMEWOOD

Lt. Col. (Ret) Mac Chandler, Family Service Counselor

205-879-3401 RidoutsValleyChapel.com

Donald Lehman

LtCol USMCR (retired)

Consulting Petroleum Geologist

AAPG CPG #4560

Lifetime memberships:

MOAABirmingham.org

AlabamaMarine.org

VVA.org - DAV.org

Cell: (404) 441-3882
don.lehman1@gmail.com

Still serving veterans – Once a Marine always a Marine



145 1st Avenue West, Alabaster, Alabama



Hours

Thursday 4–10PM

Friday 4–11PM

Saturday 3–11PM

Sunday Closed

Monday Closed

Tuesday 4–10PM

Wednesday 4–10PM

Veteran Owned and Operated



JUNE MEETING JUNE 3