

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR  
VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIM BORLAND  
123rd VFW NATIONAL CONVENTION  
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI  
JULY 21, 2022

**“Every Veteran Counts”**

Thank you, thank you.

Wow, thank you again. I am truly humbled to be standing in front of the greatest veterans' organization in the entire world; **THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS!!!** All of you! Thank you.

I would like to thank Past Commander-in-Chief Tom Pouliot of Montana for nominating and installing me, and my Chief of Staff Cynthia Archuleta of Arizona for the second. It's truly an honor to have the both of you part of my election as Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Thank you.

I would like to thank the comrades from James R. “Bob” Currie VFW Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Arizona, where I have been a Life member since 2000. District 7, the Department of Arizona, the Western Conference, council members from 2012 – 2016; and my Commanders Class from 2011 – 2012 who I call my cousins, and everyone I have met along the way!!!! Thank you.

I thank my friends and family who attended today. I thank the Maakestad family, very true friends who I call brothers, sisters and part of the family. Peter Sr. and his wife De De, and their son and daughter-in-law Peter Jr. and Katie. Thank you for coming. My daughter Leah. Leah served 6 years in the United States Air Force and then went to college for both her LPN and RN degrees. She just graduated this past June in Dayton, Ohio, where she now works proudly as an RN in the oncology clinic helping children deal with their cancers. Thank you, baby, for what you do. I love you.

Then, my son Levi and granddaughter Sarah Mae. Levi is a three-year United States Marine Corps veteran, and owner of Sierra Vista News Network (SVNN), a social media site with local news and updates. Levi and my granddaughter Sarah live in Sierra Vista, Arizona, with my beautiful daughter-in-law Sasha, who couldn't be here with us today. Thank you too for your service Levi, and Sarah, who is 8-years-old, for being the sweet granddaughter you are, I love you both.

At home in Sierra Vista and unable to be with us today is my son and daughter-in-law Jonathan and Nikkle Jessee, who are responsible for the other three grandchildren we have, another Leah 14, Ava, 8, and little Nathan who just turned one on March 13th. I'm sure they are all watching the livestream. Jonathan also spent three years in the United States Marine Corps. Love you all.

Then there is my wife, Shannon! Shannon has been to hell and back, believe me. I've been stressed, angered and saddened, and Shannon has always been there for me, to lift my spirits. She keeps me moving forward with a positive attitude. She might not know this, but Shannon, you ... are my rock. You make me sound and I love you for that. Thank you.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the delegates attending the 123rd National Convention, here and on the livestream. Without all of you, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary wouldn't exist! I work for you, the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars!!!! I will lead by example and from the front. I will not ask you to do something I haven't done or willing to do myself.

My slogan this year is **"EVERY VETERAN COUNTS."** It's our service to country, and courage to defend that country that makes us veterans. Every veteran from every war and conflict are important. Let all veterans know that we thank them for their service, honor their bravery and respect them as true heroes. And to spread this word even further is why I chose the word veteran in our Voice of Democracy scholarship program and Patriot's Pen essay competitions. The theme for this year's Voice of Democracy is *"Why is the Veteran Important"* and the Patriot's Pen theme this year is *"My Pledge to the Veteran."* These two themes will give the children of our future a better perspective of why America is free. It's about time the word VETERAN is back in our classrooms! Our children and the future of our great country need to believe that **"EVERY VETERAN COUNTS!"**

I want to congratulate my new team. Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento of New Jersey; Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lippardt of Georgia; Quartermaster General Marc Garduno of Delaware; incoming Adjutant General Dan West of Texas; and Carol Whitmore of Iowa who just recently endorsed by the Big 10 Conference as their next choice for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief – designee for 2023 to 2024.

I also want to congratulate my appointees – Chief of Staff Cynthia Archuleta of Arizona; Inspector General Shawn Watson of Guam; Budget and Finance Chairman Tim Peters of Montana; Shout-out to my Commanders of 2022 – 2023; *"Borland's Brigade,"* and lastly, a big thank you to all of you for being here. Congratulations to all our new Post, District and Department Commanders! You are all part of one huge team.

Then, making it an even bigger team is our VFW Auxiliary, so I would also like to congratulate our National President Jane Reape of New York and her Secretary and Treasurer Ann Panteleakos of Missouri along with their entire staff. May we both, the VFW Comrades and the VFW Auxiliary work side by side and as one large team. A team that means **"Together Everyone Achieves More"** because **"EVERY VETERAN COUNTS."**

I am humbled and honored to join alongside a group of Commanders, comrades, brothers and sisters so focused on executing the mission and strengthening the ranks of our great organization. It's time for us to focus on today and into the future. Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

We shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military branch of service, in any of our duties as a comrade of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Discrimination will not be tolerated! All veterans are equal. Do not let petty jealousies or trivial personalities influence our deliberations. Period!!

There's a new wave of veterans that have returned home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and they're ready, willing and waiting to join our ranks. One of those veterans is standing right here behind this podium. I am an Iraq War veteran and very proud to be the first as your Commander-in-Chief.

We must let the post-9/11 veterans know that the Veterans of Foreign Wars was founded in 1899 by just 13 Spanish-American War heroes for the reason to help the veteran with the care they so honorably deserved and without discrimination or judgement when coming home from war. Yes, history repeats itself and yes, we have all heard the stories from the past and present. How different generations serving are treated when they try to join the VFW or a local Post.

Remember how you were treated, and I'm not just talking about the Vietnam veteran; we all are guilty of discrimination in some way or another sometime in our lives. Unfortunately, as generations die, new arise but with the same history, treating the younger generation as if they are kids. Bottom line is "*treat others how you want to be treated.*" Soon the Iraq and Afghanistan troops in large numbers will want to join the VFW, just like the Gulf War veteran, Vietnam War veteran, Korean War veteran, World War II veteran and so on did and again, in very large numbers.

Just because the post-9/11 service member returning from conflict still wears the uniform and most haven't received a DD-214, doesn't mean that they are not veterans. We must remind them that all veterans are equal and that all veterans who served our country "to preserve and defend the United States from all enemies" are welcome to join our ranks. We've just got to get out there and shake their hands, welcome them home, show our support and guide them in their needs.

Remember, those that served before us so that we can respect those who serve later. When I entered high school, I remember the end of the Vietnam War. I remember telling my dad that when I was old enough, that I was going to join the service. Because I didn't like the way the Vietnam veteran was treated, and I didn't understand how our country could be so horrible to them. To me, it was disrespectful and unwanted. We should have thanked them and welcomed them home. They were just kids, no older than when all of us joined. Remember that they were just kids.

Well, that time came for me and after my junior year in high school, the summer of 1979 and barely a man at 17 years young myself, I ended up in the recruiter's office being interviewed to join the Army. I was instructed to take my ASVAP test and then off the recruiter's office again to find out what I qualified for.

There is where it all began. You know how recruiters tell fibs? Just a little bit to get their quotas??? And how they tell you everything you want to hear but not what you really need to

hear? Well, that happened to me. I was told that I would get to go to Florida and stay in air-conditioned condos on the beach while attending basic training. I thought it was going to be awesome and I believed him, but to my surprise, here comes Tank Hill in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in a 40-man, non-air-conditioned bay in the middle of the summer. Yes, recruiters sometime fib just a little bit. But what made it worse comrades, brothers and sisters, my recruiter; was my dad!

My message is clear. I joined the Army because of the Vietnam veteran and I still serve the veterans today because of the Vietnam veteran. Thank you and welcome home. I encourage you to reach out to all our veterans, old and new, and without bias. Let them know we appreciate them, want them to join and that we understand they are raising families and have careers.

Let them know that every qualified member who joins the VFW is a vote on the hill when the Commander-in-Chief testifies on behalf of all of us. Priorities that are focused solely on our veterans, military, spouses and their families.

I know we have talked a lot about “The Honoring our PACT Act of 2022” so I will be brief, but I must give a huge shout out to our soon-to-be past Commander-in-Chief Fritz Mihelcic, who in March this past year, testified in front of the 117th Congress during a special joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs on Capitol Hill. I commend Chief Mihelcic for his professional testimony which lit the fire in Congress. As you know, it was then that the PACT Act first passed in the House of Representatives, and it was sent to the Senate. In June, the Senate passed the bill with amendments, and returned it to the House for a final vote. However, a procedural rule held up the bill from going forward, so the House passed another version, and returned it to the Senate. As of today, the PACT Act is pending the Senate’s final vote before it is placed on President Biden’s desk for signature.

The PACT Act is a pivotal piece of legislation that will provide health care and benefits for veterans who suffer from conditions related to toxic exposure, to include burn pits. If you were exposed to toxins while serving our country, you deserve the benefits you earned, period. No exceptions.

You have my word we will not let your voice be ignored. If for some reason, it continues to be amended or pushed back and forth, I will personally guarantee our legislative team in D.C. and myself will fight this! **WE WILL NOT LET THIS BILL DIE.**

Another important bill amongst many is the Major Richard Star Act. Our nation’s combat disabled veterans are being denied full access to their hard-earned benefits. Over 50,000 medically retired veterans, many of whom are Purple Heart recipients, are forbidden from receiving their full retirement pay and disability compensation. The VFW firmly believes that your military retiree pay, and your service-connected disability compensation pay are two different benefits, and they should be two different payments.

The VFW demands that Congress includes the Major Richard Star Act as an amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2023. I encourage all of you to use Action Corps and get

this passed. Again, our veterans deserve the benefits they earned. We push both of these important bills because “Every Veteran Counts.”

A little shout out that is well deserved. Congratulations to the 19 Departments, 150 Districts and 700 Posts who all made All-American this year. A special congratulations goes out to the Department of Montana for leading the nation again with 102.91% and to the Department of Arizona who now has 55 consecutive years at 100% or more in growth.

Our work is not done. Last year we finished with just over 1,018,000 members but unfortunately lost just over 76,000 members both Life and Annual due to death from a national data scrub that the VFW conducted this past year. If that doesn't concern you, I don't know what will! I have provided the Department Commanders with their new membership numbers and strength as of July 1st, 2022. And they all know what to do with it.

Here's some more statistics. From last year's numbers, we only had 8,358 members that recruited at least one member. Out of over one million, just 8,358 recruited at least one. That's just under 1% comrades, .008% to be exact of our total membership last year. Think if we could just triple that to 3% of our current year's membership to recruit just one member; that would be over an additional 28,000 members. If I can recruit, you can recruit.

One more statistic that needs to improve drastically is our Posts not recruiting or retaining ANY members at all. There were 2,109 Posts that didn't recruit one new member, and 2,871 Posts that didn't reinstate one member. That's almost another 5,000 members we missed out on. As your Commander-in-Chief, I will not let this happen again. I encourage everyone to recruit or retain members this year. If we focus on these three areas alone and consistently do what we have done in the past with the recruiters who work membership every day, we could increase our numbers from last year a whopping 33,000 plus members.

Too many of our members slip out of the back door because we simply don't engage with them. This year, I have developed a new idea and that idea is a 1 membership pin. I encourage all of you in this room to recruit one! It can be a neighbor, brother, sister, friend or someone you see wearing a veteran hat. Then, I encourage you to mentor that ONE member and take them to recruiting events, Post meetings, “Buddy” Poppy events, memorial services and veteran services. Let them see what we do and then have them do the same.

Remember history repeating itself comrades? Well, this is where comrades from post-9/11 will start joining our ranks. By being visible, conducting more recruiting drives, carrying at least one application with you, or the app, and by displaying passion through respect for all generations, we will rebuild!! Remind them that “**EVERY VETERAN COUNTS.**” Display a good vibe and not a negative one. We all need to lead by example and that starts from the top! Right here! It's time for a new generation, but not forgetting the old. It's time to pass the torch, but at the same time, remember and appreciate the torch being passed, and by whom. You see comrades, brothers and sisters, every veteran in this room counts and so do the ones we still need to seek.

Our Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and our Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt, believe that the three of us as a team working together can reach 102%+ in

membership each! That means a focus for the next three years should once again put us over one million members strong. Membership is my number one priority as your Commander-in-Chief. It will not be ignored, nor will any eligible veteran out there be ignored. No One Does More For Veterans than the Veterans of Foreign Wars. So, let's live up to that! "EVERY VETERAN COUNTS."

Before I close, I've got to tell you one short recruiting story! Now comrades, I have many recruiting stories believe me. But, as promised, this will be short. My wife and I were flying back from Kansas City in January coming from Jane Reape's Auxiliary Senior Vice Conference this year. We landed in Dallas Fort Worth and hustled to the skylink to get to another terminal and when we got on, there was a young gentleman sitting on the bench. He got up immediately and offered my wife his seat so the both of us could sit together. That was very kind, so I thanked him. He noticed my shirt I was wearing "We are Still Serving," and asked me if I served. "Yes! and you?" I replied. Come to find out, he was serving in the Space Force.

I, then without a thought asked him if he was prior service and his immediate response was yes, Air Force. Did you deploy, I asked? His response was yes, served in Iraq. I couldn't resist, I asked him, "How would you like to be my first Space Force service member to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars?" His immediate response was yes. I showed him the portion he needed to fill out, reviewed it, turned it over and had him date and sign it. I gave him a handshake and my business card and thanked him again for his service as my wife and I exited the skylink. This all took no more than two minutes. Just goes to show you that recruiting can happen anywhere, you've just got to be prepared. Again, I encourage all of you to have at least one application on you at all times, be ready, but most importantly listen and give feedback. Even Space Force comrades! EVERY VETERAN COUNTS!

I can't tell you enough how honored and humbled I am to be your Commander-in-Chief. It's like a dream come true. I dedicate my service to you because, as our Senior Vice Commander in Chief always says, "I work for you," in other words "We work for you." I wish the best to any of you out in the audience today who might start the quest for this honorable position. Up till now, I had no idea how it really would feel. From the bottom of my heart and to yours, I sincerely thank you for the continued support and look so forward to working with all of you. My Commanders have a mission this year, to recruit, retain and lead from the front. They and I both will set the example for others to follow. We will continue to push legislation on the Hill, continue to work our programs, continue to honor the dead by helping the living, and we will continue to remind everyone that we are the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the most elite combat veterans' organization in the entire world. We will continue to recruit and mentor others to recruit. So, put your recruiting and retention plans to work! Draw upon each other for ideas to help develop new strategies, new tactics, and unique ways of doing membership and programs.

Lastly, once again, thank you for being you and for coming to this 123rd VFW National Convention. You are the work force, and we appreciate you. Thank you for what you do for our veterans. May God bless you, our families, our military past and present, may God bless those still in harm's way, please keep them safe, may God bless our Gold Star families, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, our flag and may God bless the United States of America. Thank you.