



Hal Roesch II

2020-2021 Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander-in-Chief

2020 Vision For Veterans

Good morning, comrades! It is a distinct honor and privilege to now serve as the 112th Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Commander-in-Chief. I stand before you, humbled, elated and ready to selflessly serve the 1.5 million members and its Auxiliary as we continue the tradition of serving America's veterans, service members and families worldwide.

Today, I must first thank Past Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz for his unwavering leadership and commitment to our outstanding organization. Doc was instrumental in leading the VFW into 2020, while facing a challenging and trying national pandemic. For that, we owe him a debt of gratitude and I assure him that the tradition of excellence will continue.

I must also thank Glenn Gardner for installing me as Commander-in-Chief and John Gwizdak, John Smart, Gunner Kent, Jim Nier, Larry Rivers, Bob Wallace, Ed Banas, Paul Spera, Brian Duffy, Keith Harman, B.J. Lawrence and all the Past Commanders-in-Chief for the leadership and mentorship you have provided me and our VFW.

To my mom (Janice Penny) for teaching me at a very young age about love of country and patriotism. My sister, Terra who has been my biggest fan and cheerleader since we were

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

youngsters. And to my rock – my wife, Beth, you have and forever are my best friend and the love of my life. Thank you for always standing alongside me throughout this journey we call life. You three women are the strongest people I have ever known and you serve as dedicated, committed and selfless Life members of our amazing VFW Auxiliary. Thank You!

It's important that I thank my strong team of supporters – my family – for their service to our nation, not in the military, but in the medical field. As you know, our families take on a huge burden of sacrifice to support us and it is vital that we always recognize that. To my daughter Sara and her husband Jason, my grandkids Owen and Max. My nephew, Lucas Hopkins and his wonderful family. Thank you for your steadfast support throughout the years. I love all of you.

Special thanks to First Command Financial Planning for allowing me the time away to pursue my dream. I am extremely lucky and fortunate to work for a company that believes in and works for active duty military, veterans and their families as they achieve their financial goals.

Thank you to the Department of Virginia VFW and Auxiliary and everyone at Post 3219 led Commander Stephen Roche. Everyone at the Kansas City and Washington offices who have taught and guided me through the transition – I appreciate each of you for the amazing work and time you dedicate to our outstanding organization and our nation's veterans.

To my good friend Bob Neil and everyone at Lake Gaston, for providing me a sanctuary

to get away to, and to Kim Deshano, for being a friend and confidant.

To my team leaders, Senior-Vice Fritz Mihelcic, Junior-Vice Designee Tim Borland, Quartermaster Debra Anderson and Adjutant General Kevin Jones, I couldn't ask for anyone better to help lead this organization. I must also thank my partner, Aux President Sandy Onstwedder, for her steadfast support and commitment to our Auxiliary and the VFW.

Lastly, I must thank you – the members! Thank you for your tireless efforts to make our organization a pillar of our communities. For it is you who do the day-to-day work of the VFW, in your posts, communities, schools, hospitals and nursing homes.

You have opened your posts and your hearts in times of crisis – be it natural disasters or pandemics. You have conducted buddy checks, raised money, fed those in need, ran errands for those who could not do so for themselves, but just as important, you showed the nation and the world that the Veterans of Foreign Wars remains resilient.

Resiliency is the VFW's watchword.

Since the founding of our organization in 1899 by James C. Putnam to the present and future days that lie ahead, the VFW has faced and will continue to face hurdles, obstacles and pitfalls in our everyday efforts to serve our nation's veterans, service members and families. Although we may face various challenges along the way, one thing remains constant – the

Veterans of Foreign Wars will continue to rally together and meet every mission it is assigned.

The very lifeline of the VFW remains its members. In order for our organization to maintain its dominant presence on Capitol Hill, within both Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and in our neighborhoods, townships and cities around the country, we must assert ourselves and make membership paramount.

I remember the first time I was introduced to the VFW. I had just returned home from Desert Storm and found myself inside my local VFW Post dropping off a donation for a local charity. Little did I know that my supervisor, that I had just deployed with for 10 months would also be there and was a member of the Post. The Quartermaster gave me the nickel tour and educated me about the invaluable mission of the VFW and its need for more veterans like me to join its ranks. I entered the Post as a non-member, and a few weeks later left as the Junior Vice Commander. Funny how things work out, but it shows the impact one person had on me to become part of the team. This is the same energy and passion we must have heading into this year.

I encourage each of you to seize the moment and become that one person. Find that veteran who does not know what a great team we are and educate them. Ask them to become part of the Largest Combat Veterans Organization in the world, THE VFW. I don't care what age, sex, orientation, race or religion they are, just ask.

We are at a major turning point in our nation's history. All across our country, men and women are demonstrating and making their voices heard in an effort to end racial injustice. It's imperative that the VFW answer this call and stand alongside these agents of change. To our African American members, veterans and communities – Black Lives Do Matter! The VFW stands shoulder to shoulder with you. Your VFW is here for you, but most importantly, we need you to help lead us into 2021, 2031 and beyond as we continue to fight for the benefits and entitlements that our veterans have earned by serving their country with honor and courage. You know the VFW has not always been the most inclusive veterans' organization, in fact we were downright exclusive. But we have learned and changed over the years and we are still learning and changing. Our doors are open to ALL eligible veterans, and today I stand here before you and personally invite all eligible veterans to join our organization. If you are a member of the VFW and you cannot treat people with dignity and respect, then I ask you turn in your membership card and get out. Let there be no doubt in your minds – if you can't treat people with dignity and respect regardless of gender, race, age, sexual orientation or religion, we do not need you in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Fostering and maintaining lasting relationships with sponsors and donors is critical for the success of the VFW and its service to our nation's veterans. I must thank our teammates at USAA, Humana, Sport Clips, Burger King, Wounded Warrior Project, Dell, Twisted X and the thousands of individual donors nationwide for their steadfast support in helping us make a difference in the lives of our defenders of freedom and our next generation of young men and

women. Your contributions have directly resulted in the VFW delivering top-notch educational and immediate financial assistance our nation's patriots and families.

Since 2004, we have provided more than 10,000 grants totaling nearly \$12 million dollars through the Unmet Needs Program helping struggling military families. Since 2014, we have awarded more than 1,600 scholarships for veterans and service members totaling more than \$7 million dollars. Last year alone, we distributed 8.7 million Buddy Poppies raising more than \$8 million dollars through the VFW Buddy Poppy Program for needy veterans. And our dedicated accredited service officers helped veterans recoup more than \$9 billion dollars in VA disability compensation and pension benefits, including \$1.6 billion dollars in new benefits paid to veterans in fiscal year 2019. And while these are amazing accomplishments, it's important to know that you and I are just getting started on building a *20/20 Vision for Veterans*.

So, as we prepare to build a *20/20 Vision for Veterans*, I ask each of you to stand with me and continue the good fight that our founders started in 1899. It's imperative that we re-educate and reintroduce, our VFW, to this great nation. We are the pillars of our communities. We represent the strength of our nation. And we will lead the charge into 2021 and beyond in protecting the very benefits and entitlements that our service members, veterans and military families have earned through their sacrifice, commitment and selfless service in defense of freedom. "*No One Does More For Veterans*" is not just our motto – it is who we are and what we strive to achieve daily.

Comrades, Auxiliary members and fellow veterans, in closing, our VFW remains the resilient force it has always been. We are stronger today because of you. Together, our voices will continue to be a dominant force in our communities, on the Hill and within the halls of The White House.

It is truly a distinct honor to have the opportunity to serve as your VFW Commander-in-Chief.

May God continue to bless our veterans, service members and military families worldwide. And, may God continue to bless the VFW and the United States of America. Thank You!