

## Convention Highlights

Monday, July 20, 2015  
Joint Opening Session

### ‘Warrior Monk’ Stirs Delegates

Retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis accepted the *Dwight D. Eisenhower Award* on behalf of all the men and women he served with, as well as Gold Star Families. Mattis, former head of U.S. Central Command who retired in January 2013, noted that failure to counter threats—such as Russia, China, North Korea and terrorists—weakens the country. “We advise our enemies in advance what we won’t do,” the favorite of Marines of all ranks said.

Known to be a controversial speaker, Mattis joked that after some of his “highly publicized remarks” he was surprised to be accepting the award. During a speech earlier in the month at Columbia Basin College in Washington state, he said, “I’ve lived a very colorful life and I’ve said some things. But not once have I taken them back, and I’ve never apologized for them—and I won’t. I like the enemy knowing there are a few guys like me around.”

Somewhat of a cult figure in the Marine Corps, Mattis has been complimented with the title of “warrior monk” and called a “soldier of the republic” for his reputation of being a thinker as well as a fighter.

Mattis, who commanded troops in the Persian Gulf War and later in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, noted that veterans have two significant powers: inspiration and intimidation. VFW members set the example, he said. “You enjoy the respect of the nation.” We all have to pass freedoms on to succeeding generations, the former general stressed.

“We are not perfect,” he said, “but we are the good guys. I will leave perfection to God.” Trying to rediscover fundamental unity and striving to live up to American ideals are worthy objectives.

Mattis warned of the repercussions of a reduced defense budget, adding that it’s doing more damage to our military today than any foe in the field. Our military is getting smaller, even though we continue to make overseas promises. At full strength, our military remains the “enemy of the world,” he said. “The enemy’s longest day and the enemy’s worst day when necessary” is the U.S. military.

Mattis told of being just outside Fallujah in April 2004. He overheard a young corporal ask his commanding officer if Fallujah was going to be rough. His CO responded, “We took Iwo Jima, Fallujah won’t be nothing.” This is the sort of spirit Americans have always demonstrated in battle, Mattis told the audience.

Receiving a standing ovation, Mattis credited VFW members with inspiring today’s troops to carry on the nation’s legacy of valor as well as stoicism in the face of adversity.

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## **Henry Repeating Arms Donates \$50,000**

Anthony Imperato, president and owner of Bayonne, N.J.-based Henry Repeating Arms, presented six individuals each with a Henry Military Service Tribute Rifle. In honor of his father who was a Korean War vet and moved by what VFW represents, Imperato unexpectedly donated \$50,000 to the organization.

## **SVA Tallies 460,000 Members**

D. Wayne Robinson, president and CEO of Student Veterans of America (SVA), updated VFW members on his organization and explained the life cycle of student veterans in their transition into the workforce. He said there are currently 1,200 chapters on college campuses, more than 460,000 members, and that they are growing at a rate of 15 chapters per month. "They are stable, educated and looking forward to serving," Robinson said of student veterans.

## **1991 Persian Gulf War Memorial to Honor 293 Americans**

Scott Stump, CEO and president of the National Desert Storm Veterans War Memorial, said his proposed memorial to the 293 Americans who died in the war will cost an estimated \$25 million. Some 148 GIs were killed in action and 145 died from non-hostile causes. Stump urged VFW members to go back to their Posts and Districts to help him raise the \$200,000 seed money needed by Aug. 1 to begin the project. "We need your help folks," said Stump, a VFW life member of Post 12132 in Maggie Valley, N.C. "Help us do the right thing because the time is now." Visit [www.nationaldesertstormwarmemorial.org](http://www.nationaldesertstormwarmemorial.org) for more information.

## **Recognizing Outstanding Service**

Army Command Sgt. Maj. Gerald Ecker accepted VFW's *Armed Forces Award* on behalf of all Army medics. He asked all VFW Army medics, Navy corpsmen and Air Force medical technicians in attendance to stand. Some 28 medics have been awarded the Medal of Honor, 15 of those posthumously. With regard to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Ecker said that wounded troops had a 92% battlefield survival rate. "Medics carry hope with them," said the member of VFW Post 515 in Minneapolis. "And life is a good course of action in combat."

Also receiving awards were All-American commanders and Legacy Life contest winners. Ken Kraft from Post 12140 in Lake Oswego, Ore., was named *VFW National Recruiter of the Year* for recruiting 529 members. Dennis Flynn from Post 2866 in Saint Charles, Mo., was awarded the *Certified National Recruiter of the Year Award* for recruiting 311 new or reinstated members. The Department of Arizona received accolades for 48 consecutive years of membership growth.

## **Various Awards and Speakers**

Eric Benken, military affairs relationship director at USAA, thanked VFW members for their patriotism, saying, "It is your legacy of the American fighting spirit that lives on in [current service members'] hearts, minds and souls."

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto welcomed VFW delegates and touted the city's new *Operation Black and Gold Ribbon Program*, aimed at connecting returning veterans with local employers, affordable housing and access to higher education.

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# 116TH NATIONAL CONVENTION



P I T T S B U R G H , P E N N S Y L V A N I A

Jimmie Spencer with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration Committee encouraged all Vietnam veterans to stop by its booth to receive a lapel pin.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf welcomed VFW to his state and used five points to illustrate that citizens have a responsibility to fulfill freedoms that exist due to veterans' sacrifices. Wolf spoke of a so-called "democratic deficit" in terms of the obligations of citizenship along with an itemized list of objectives he wants to achieve for the state's veterans.

Adam Densmore, national Voice of Democracy winner, presented his winning essay.

Al Lugo updated delegates on the VFW Retirement Home. Constance Scharff, director of addiction research at Cliffside Malibu, presented VFW with a \$25,000 check.

## **Historic Name Change Approved**

A key amendment to the by-laws made history in today's business session when the Ladies Auxiliary was renamed simply the VFW Auxiliary. The change was accepted by an overwhelming voice vote.

**--The End--**