

THE MILITARY TIMES FOUNDATION
PRESENTS

MILITARY TIMES
SERVICE MEMBERS
of the YEAR
— 2024 —

APRIL 24, 2024
THE RONALD REAGAN BUILDING AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER
WASHINGTON, D.C.



**YOU WEAR THE UNIFORM.
WE STAND BY, READY TO SUPPORT.**

At Fisher House Foundation, we are behind everyone who wears a uniform. We are a nonprofit organization that builds comfort homes where military and veteran families can stay at no-cost while a loved one receives care at military or Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals. On any given night, up to 1,300 service members, veterans, and their families can call Fisher House home.

We are honored to serve you and all service members, veterans, and their families.

**NO-COST LODGING | HERO MILES | HOTELS FOR HEROES
SCHOLARSHIPS | FISHER SERVICE AWARD**

VISIT [FISHERHOUSE.ORG](https://www.fisherhouse.org)



Welcome

Welcome to the 2024 Service Members of the Year awards ceremony. Tonight, we gather to pay tribute to seven remarkable individuals whose valor and commitment have exemplified the finest traditions of our nation's armed forces. In a world marked by uncertainty, their steadfast dedication serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration to us all.

Since its inception in 2001, the Military Times' Service Members of the Year awards have honored those who go above and beyond the call of duty. In 2018, we established The Military Times Foundation to formalize our commitment to supporting service members and their families. Through our Spotlight Programs, we've channeled over \$20 million into vital organizations, assisting military-connected families and veteran-owned businesses.

In an era marked by geopolitical uncertainty and emerging challenges, the commitment and valor of our service members serve as a bulwark against adversity and a testament to the enduring strength of our nation. As we commend these distinguished recipients, we are acutely aware of the evolving landscape of military service. From confronting traditional threats to navigating the complexities of cyber warfare and space exploration, our armed forces continually adapt to safeguard our interests and uphold our values.

We extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guests, including senior military leadership, members of Congress, and the families of our honorees. Your presence underscores the importance of this occasion and the deep appreciation we hold for our service members' sacrifices.

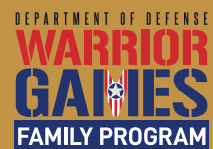
None of this would be possible without the generous support of our sponsors and partners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Fisher House Foundation, Regent, Veteran Benefits Guide, Leonardo DRS, Source America, Humana, Capital Bank, University of Maryland Global Campus, Disney, IHG Army Hotels, Delta, and the Nationals for their unwavering commitment to this event.

As we gather tonight, let us join in congratulating each recipient and expressing our profound gratitude for their extraordinary contributions.

Military Times Foundation

SCAN TO DONATE

*Donations this evening
will support the Fisher
House Warrior Games
Family Programs.*





Military Times Foundation

Military Times Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that recognizes, salutes and highlights the exemplary service of active duty personnel serving in each branch of the U.S. Armed Services and supports other organizations conducting activities with similar goals. The Military Times Foundation's flagship program, Service Members of the Year, recognizes and awards outstanding service members and veterans each year.

militarytimesfoundation.org

OUR SPOTLIGHT PROGRAMS:

VSO Spotlight:

Supports veteran and military service organizations.

Small Business Spotlight:

Provides no-charge print and digital ad campaigns to small and mid-sized active duty, veteran and spouse-run companies.

Legacy Spotlight:

Provides free obituary posts to veteran families.





\$20M+

**DONATED OVER \$20M IN
ADVERTISING AND CASH
DONATIONS SINCE 2019**

175+

**DONATED OVER 175
STANDARD & HIGH IMPACT
PRINT CAMPAIGNS**

8M

**PARTNERS GET ACCESS
TO OUR 8M+ MONTHLY
READERS & SITE VISITORS**

250+

**DONATED OVER 250
DIGITAL, NEWSLETTER &
SOCIAL CAMPAIGNS**



Organizations We Support



The Acadiana Veteran Alliance (AVA) | American Heart Association (AHA) | American Veterans Center | AMSE - Association of Military Spouse Entrepreneurs | ASYMCA | Blue Star Families | Boot Campaign | Boots to Books | Boulder Crest Retreat for Military & Veterans Wellness | Coast Guard Foundation | Disney Institute | Dream Foundation | Dror For The Wounded | Easterseals DC MD VA | Gary Sinise Foundation | Give an Hour | Home of the Brave | Homeless Not Toothless | Homes for Our Troops | Hoof Prints in the Sand | Hope For The Warriors | In Honor of Our Troops Foundation | Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund | Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Inc. (IAVA) | Ironbound Boxing | Luke's Wings | Marine Raider Foundation | Memories of Honor | Military Spouse Advocacy Network | Navy Seal Foundation | Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society | NYU / Dove Transplant Center | Objective Zero | Operation Homefront Trade | Operation Warrior Resolution | Our Community Salutes USA | Our Military Kids | PALS SkyHope | Pentagon Memorial Fund | RUYTS Foundation | SOWF (Special Operations Warrior Foundation) | Suicide Prevention Lifeline | TD Foundation | The Elk Institute | The Rosie Network | The Veterans Connection | Travis Manion Foundation | USO - Metro | Valor Home | Vet2Vet Maine | Veterans Bridge Home | Warrior Reunion Foundation | Women Veteran Alliance | Wounded in Action Warriors Foundation | Wreaths Across America | Yellow Ribbon Fund | + MORE



Testimonials

“The support of Military Times for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors has given us a powerful platform to share the TAPS mission. They have expanded our reach exponentially and given us a forum to recruit military mentors.”

Bonnie Carroll
Founder and President
TAPS

“I credit the Military Times Foundation with putting Donor Outreach for Veterans, Corp. (DOVE) on the map. Because of the increased visibility provided through the donated ad space, there are five Veterans who received living donor kidney transplants.”

Sharyn Kreitzer
Executive Director
Donor Outreach for Veterans, Corp. (DOVE)

“The Military Times Foundation has been an invaluable partner to Fallen Patriots in spreading awareness of our mission among Gold Star families and attracting new corporate and individual donors. They have had a profoundly positive impact on our mission and we're very grateful!”

David Kim
Co-founder and CEO
Children of Fallen Patriots

“Military Times Foundation has exponentially increased awareness of Our Military Kids unique mission through a generous pro-bono media package allowing us to further impact the well-being of military and Veteran communities.”

Kara Dallman
Executive Director
Our Military Kids

Menu

First Course

HEIRLOOM TOMATO CARPACCIO
(GF, VG, NF)

Main Course

BEEF TENDERLOIN
Risotto style potatoes with asparagus,
Morel mushroom sauce (NF)

STUFFED ROASTED TOMATO
Vegetarian option (GF, NF)

Dessert

ASSORTED MINI DESSERTS
Cheesecake: lemon blueberry on graham cracker crust (NF)
Cupcake: classic carrot cake
Parfait: triple chocolate mousse (GF, NF)

DECAFFEINATED COFFEE AND TEA

Program

PRESENTATION OF COLORS & NATIONAL ANTHEM

INVOCATION

Chaplain (MG) William "Bill" Green, Jr., Chief of Chaplains, U.S. Army

WELCOME REMARKS

Mr. Michael Reinstein, Chairman / Director, Military Times Foundation

RECIPIENT AWARDS

DINNER

REMARKS FROM PHILANTHROPIC PARTNER

Fisher House Foundation

RECIPIENT AWARDS

CLOSING REMARKS

Congrats to our Recipients

2024 SOLDIER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Sgt. 1st Class Elizabeth Marks

2024 MARINE OF THE YEAR AWARD

Col. Nicole Mann

2024 SAILOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Personnel Specialist 1st Class Alexander Boston

2024 AIRMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Senior Airman Kostiantyn Khymchenko

2024 GUARDIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Capt. Daniel Reynolds

2024 COAST GUARDSMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Chief Petty Officer Matthew Casper

2024 VETERAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Frederick W. Smith

Special thanks to our Master of Ceremonies

Kyra Phillips, Anchor/Correspondent, ABC News

OUR MISSION IS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY



**At Fisher House Foundation, we believe
a family's love is good medicine.**

We are an international nonprofit organization established to improve the quality of life for service members, veterans, and their families. There are nearly 100 Fisher Houses at military and VA medical centers around the country and overseas that make up our core mission, but our programming goes beyond the doors of the houses. Through Scholarships for Military Children, Heroes' Legacy Scholarships, the Fisher Service Award, Hotels for Heroes, Hero Miles, and support to adaptive sports programs, our mission is to help you throughout your healing journey.

FISHERHOUSE.ORG



SCHOLARSHIPS

Fisher House Foundation provides scholarships for military children and children of the fallen and 100% disabled. The Foundation awarded over \$2.4 million in scholarships in 2022, helping more than 1,200 students achieve their educational goals.

FISHER SERVICE AWARD

In partnership with Military Times, the Fisher Service Award is a grant that recognizes and celebrates innovative programs of other nonprofits that support and strengthen our military and veteran communities.

**FISHER
SERVICE
AWARD**
FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY SERVICE



HOTELS FOR HEROES

There are times when a Fisher House is unavailable. Our Hotels for Heroes program steps in when this happens and provides a hotel room for families eligible to stay in a Fisher House.

HERO MILES

Life doesn't stop when a service member is injured or becomes ill. Hero Miles provides flights enabling these heroes and their loved ones to balance hospital and home life.



ADAPTIVE SPORTS SUPPORT

Fisher House Foundation helps service members, veterans, and their families celebrate how far they have come by sponsoring the family programs at the Department of Defense Warrior Games and the international adaptive sports event Invictus Games.



BECAUSE A FAMILY'S LOVE IS GOOD MEDICINE

IN MEMORIAM

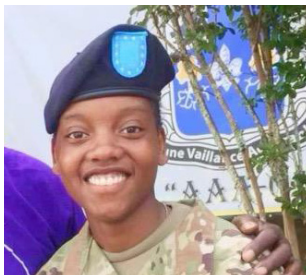
Staff Sgt. William
Jerome Rivers



RIVERS

Died Jan. 28, 2024
In Jordan
Operation Inherent Resolve

Sgt. Kennedy
Ladon Sanders



SANDERS

Died Jan. 28, 2024
In Jordan
Operation Inherent Resolve

Sgt. Breonna
Alexsondria Moffett



MOFFETT

Died Jan. 28, 2024
In Jordan
Operation Inherent Resolve

Special Warfare
Operator 2nd Class
Nathan Gage Ingram



INGRAM

Died Jan. 11, 2024
In Somalia

Special Warfare
Operator 1st Class
Christopher J. Chambers



CHAMBERS

Died Jan. 11, 2024
In Somalia

HONORING THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE FOR THEIR COUNTRY
MARCH 2023 – MARCH 2024

Join us for ROLLING to REMEMBER

Honoring Our Veterans, Remembering Their Sacrifices

Date: May 26th

Location: The Pentagon

Gear up for an unforgettable ride and join us for Rolling to Remember, an annual motorcycle rally dedicated to honoring our nation's veterans and raising awareness for our POWs and MIAs.

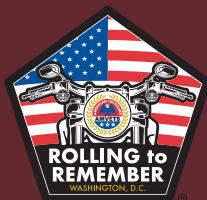


Why You Should Join:

- Stand in solidarity with our veterans and their families.
- Raise awareness about the issues facing our POWs and MIAs.
- Pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

What to Expect:

- A scenic ride through the heart of Washington, D.C., escorted by fellow veterans and supporters.
- Powerful ceremonies and tributes honoring our brave servicemen and women.
- Opportunities to connect with veterans' advocacy groups and learn about ways to support our military community.



Spread the word and join the cause

Together, let's ensure that the sacrifices of our veterans are never forgotten. Join us for Rolling to Remember and make a difference.

RollingtoRemember.com



Supporting Heroes in the Field

and at Home.

Leonardo DRS is a proud supporter of servicemen, servicewomen and their families everywhere.

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2024 Service Members of the Year Award. We are grateful for your dedication and selfless service.

VETERAN OF THE YEAR

FREDERICK W. SMITH

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Frederick Smith founded the multibillion-dollar shipping company FedEx, was enshrined in the Business and Aviation Halls of Fame, earned a Silver Star, and has been dubbed one of the greatest living business minds worldwide.

But he says the most meaningful honor he received was when his Marines dug a hole for him.

"When I was a company commander in Vietnam ... I had to go up and talk to the colonel nearly every day, while my troops were setting into positions, digging their fighting holes," Smith said. "And I'd dig my hole when I came back."

"One night I came back and my troops had dug my fighting hole for me. They were as tired or more tired, but they took their energy to take care of me. And it was one of the best things that ever happened to me, because it told me they cared for me, they appreciated my leadership."

Smith has long insisted he learned more about corporate success from his three years in the Marine Corps than his time at Yale Business School. The 79-year-old entrepreneur said college helped him learn how companies work. The military taught him how people work.

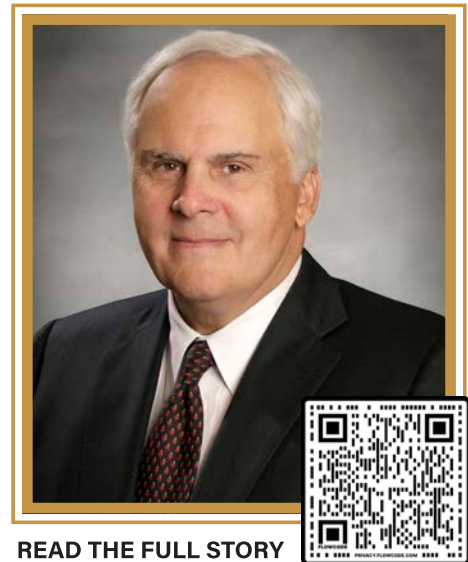
His time in the military included a tour in Vietnam punctuated by a Silver Star award for heroism in May 1968. During a search and destroy operation, the young first lieutenant rushed through incoming fire to direct counterattacks and overtake enemy defensive positions.

Smith was wounded twice during his time in country and also earned a Bronze Star. He also lost six friends during the war, a burden he says he carries with him daily.

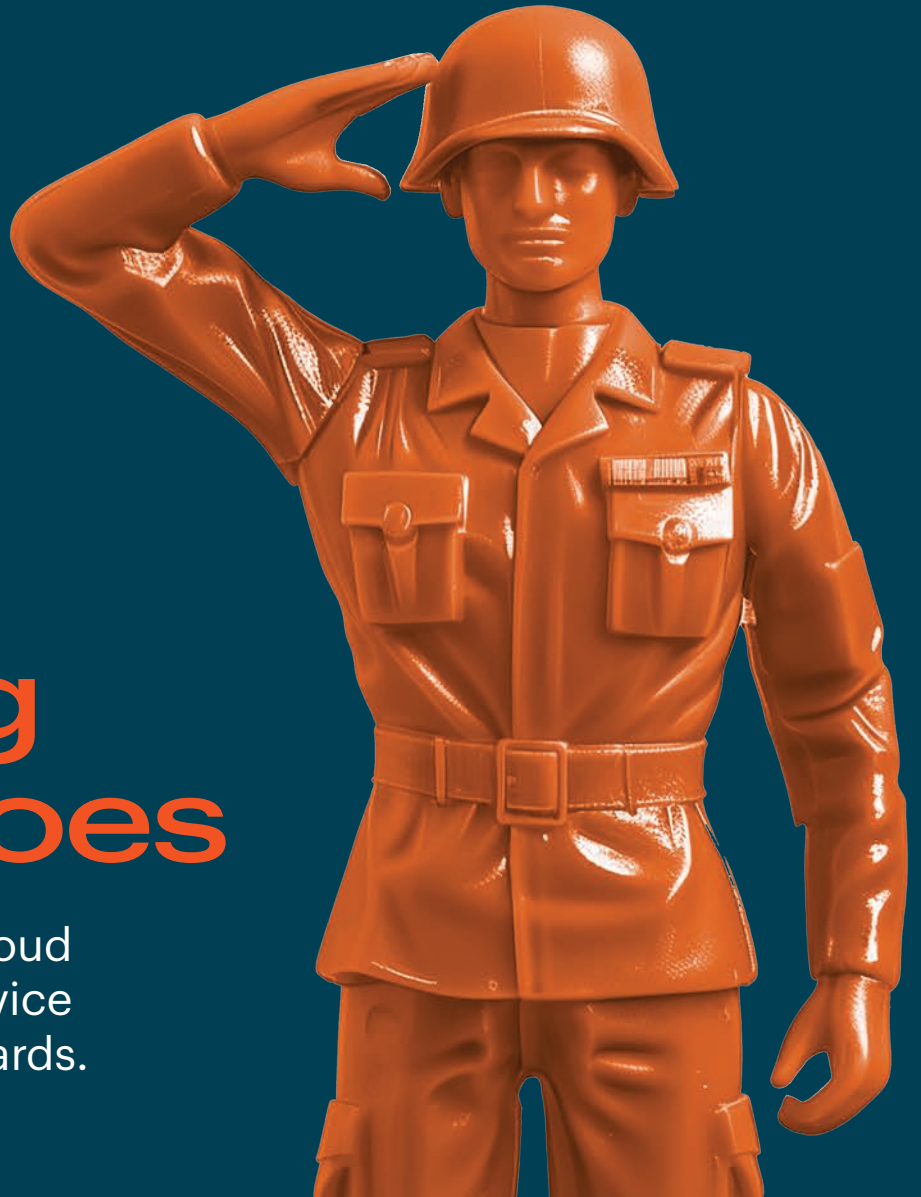
While growing FedEx from a small aircraft maintenance company to one of the world's largest transportation firms, he was also involved in numerous philanthropic efforts, many with military ties.

He served as co-chairman of both the U.S. World War II Memorial project and the campaign for the National Museum of the Marine Corps, helping raise money and public support for both locations.

"As I've gotten older and look back, I realize how defining my time in the Marine Corps was to my whole life, and it makes me want to give back," he said.



READ THE FULL STORY



Saluting our heroes

IHG® Army Hotels is a proud sponsor of the 2024 Service Members of the Year awards.

We're honored to serve all military personnel, retirees, DoD, and families at our hotel locations in 40 U.S. Army installations.

Celebrating 15 years of providing True Hospitality to the military community.

IHG® **ARMY HOTELS**



www.ihgarmyhotels.com

SOLDIER OF THE YEAR

SGT. 1ST CLASS

ELIZABETH MARKS

FT. CARSON, CO

Before the medals, before finding purpose in the pool and the platform for advocacy it offered, before the injuries, before there was a Sgt. 1st Class Elizabeth Marks, there was Ellie — a girl who grew up surrounded by “100 grandparents who had all served in the military,” exposure courtesy of a father — a Marine and Vietnam veteran — who worked maintenance at a Veterans Affairs hospital.

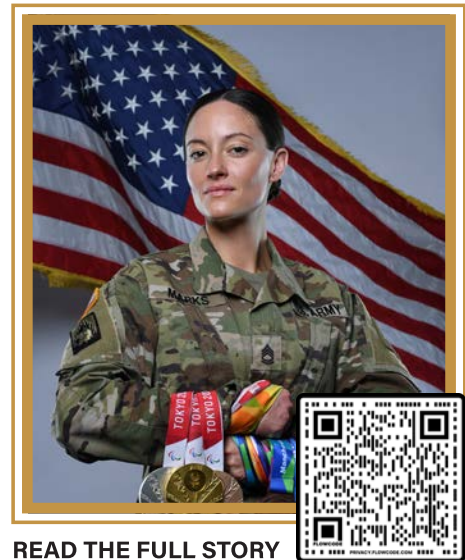
Marks, Military Times’ 2024 Soldier of the Year, joined the Army in 2008 as a combat medic. After being injured in Iraq in 2010, she was sent to Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. There, she found her road to recovery. “I found so much more than swimming,” she said. “I got to dictate my own pain and push as hard as I wanted.”

Swimming provided a path to stay in uniform and led to adaptive events like the Warrior Games and, later, Paralympic competitions and opportunities to mentor fellow service members. It was never awards or recognition that motivated Marks, but the chance to set an example. “The only reason I became or have stayed a swimmer or stayed in the military wasn’t because of medals and accolades,” Marks said. “It was because of my brothers and sisters in the military and my hope that they could be afforded opportunity and support.”

In 2012, after being declared fit for duty, Marks joined the Army’s World Class Athlete Program to pursue competitive swimming full-time while in uniform. In 2016, Marks won gold at the Rio de Janeiro Summer Paralympic Games, setting a world record for her classification in the 100-meter breaststroke. She also took home bronze in a medley relay. ESPN recognized her with the Pat Tillman Award for Service that same year.

Less than a year later, chronic pain and complications from injuries necessitated the amputation of Marks’ left leg below the knee. Then it was back to the pool. While competing in the rescheduled 2020 Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games, Marks won gold in the 100-meter backstroke, silver in the 50-meter freestyle, and bronze in the 50-meter butterfly.

Marks is far from done and considered a favorite to qualify for the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. Such pursuits are inherently tied to ensuring those in uniform know they always have someone in their corner. “I just want more service members to pursue adaptive sports,” she said. “My dream is to help them get there.”



[READ THE FULL STORY](#)



CONGRATULATIONS to the **2024**
SERVICE MEMBERS
of the **YEAR!**

**VBG is proud to join the Military Times Foundation
in honoring our military and Veterans**

From all of us at VBG, congratulations to the 2024 Service Members of the Year. We commend your exemplary service to our country and distinguished leadership.

As a Veteran-owned company made up of many Veteran employees, VBG strongly believes in recognizing military service and sacrifice. We are committed to continuing to help Veterans receive the disability rating and compensation they deserve.



No compensation may be received by any person advising or assisting another person with a matter relating to veterans' benefits except as authorized under Title 38 of the United States Code. Veterans' benefit services are offered at no cost by federally chartered veteran service organizations and accredited veteran service officers. The services being offered are not provided by or affiliated with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or any other governmental agency or recognized veterans services organization. You may qualify for benefits other than or in addition to benefits obtained by the services offered.

MARINE OF THE YEAR

COL.

NICOLE MANN

HOUSTON - NASA

As a child growing up, Marine Col. Nicole Mann would look at the stars and wonder if she could ever explore them herself. "It seemed like some far, far distant thing that other people got a chance to do," she recalled.

In 2022, Mann got that chance.

As a NASA astronaut, she led a multinational team into space for a nearly six-month stay aboard the International Space Station.

Mann, Military Times' 2024 Marine of the Year, received her commission from the Naval Academy in 1999, and became an F/A-18 pilot. She flew 47 combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and then served as a test pilot. She has accrued more than 2,700 flight hours in 25 types of aircraft.

Following the intensive astronaut candidate training, Mann was assigned to command NASA's SpaceX Crew-5 mission, which launched in October 2022. Being in space reminded Mann of her military deployments. Yet it differed, she said, in that she saw the best of humanity, rather than the worst, with crewmates from across the planet working toward a common goal. For Mann, a highpoint of the mission was the chance to do a spacewalk.

But it didn't go as planned at first.

She and Koichi Wakata of Japan exited the station on Jan. 20, 2023, to install a support structure for a new solar array. During their first spacewalk, they were installing the final strut on the structure when they faced mechanical interference. After nearly seven and a half hours, they had to return inside the station.

They tried again on Feb. 2, 2023, and after six and a half hours, the pair managed to install that strut. "I remember feeling so frustrated and so disappointed when we came back in the door that first time not accomplishing the mission, and then so proud and so absolutely amazed by the teamwork of everybody on the ground to overcome that obstacle," Mann said.

In March 2023, the Endurance splashed down off the Florida coast.

The trip beyond Earth made Mann, who is registered with the Wailacki of the Round Valley Indian Tribes, the first Native American woman in space.

"As a kid, you should dream," she said. "If you want to explore, if you want to go to the stars, that's something that's within your reach."



READ THE FULL STORY

May is Military Appreciation Month.

The number of veterans with disabilities is larger than the population of Los Angeles.



**There are over 5.3 million veterans with disabilities.
Many are in need of employment.**





PepsiCo salutes the

Military Times

2024 Service Members of the Year

**Honoring those who go beyond the call of duty
to defend our freedom**

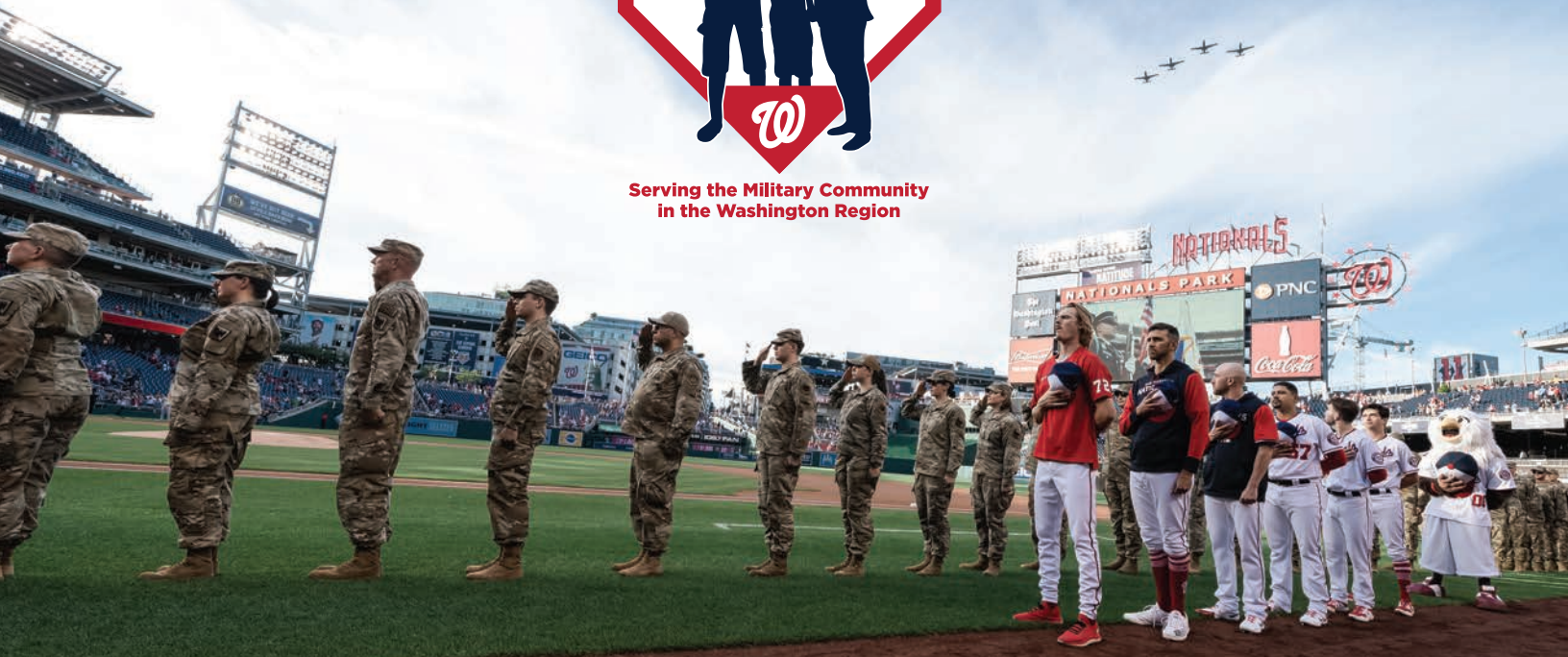


PEPSICO

NATS ON BASE



Serving the Military Community
in the Washington Region



Through the Nats on Base initiative, the Nationals provide year round experiences that contribute to the quality of life for service members and their families in the Washington, DC region, reaching them where they live and work as well as at Nationals Park.



PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE

Leadership Development
Employee Recognitions

INTRAMURAL SUPPORT

Uniform Program
Battle of the Bases

BASE HIIT

SUMMER READING

IN-PARK RECOGNITIONS

Salute to Service
Branch Days
Patriotic Series



**FOR MORE ON THE NATIONALS MILITARY OUTREACH, VISIT:
[NATIONALS.COM/MILITARY](https://www.nationals.com/military)**

SAILOR OF THE YEAR

PERSONNEL SPECIALIST 1ST CLASS

ALEXANDER BOSTON

JACKSONVILLE, FL

It takes all the sailors onboard to operate a U.S. Navy warship. And in the Middle East wartime environment that the destroyer Carney has found itself operating since October, every role becomes doubly important.

In such environments, some sailors make an impact in their day job and behind the scenes, serving as the quiet glue that keeps a ship's crew together. To hear his command tell it, Personnel Specialist 1st Class Alexander Boston exemplifies this ethos, and for that reason he is the Military Times' 2024 Sailor of the Year.

By his own admission, the married father's job isn't the flashiest. He attends to the human resources needs of hundreds of Carney sailors, making sure their pay and benefits are squared away. Such a job is always important in a unit, but the Carney isn't just any old ship at sea these days.

Since Oct. 19, it has shot down an at-times relentless barrage of missiles and air attack drones fired by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Boston works to help ensure they stay focused on that fight. "I may not be shooting Tomahawks and different things like that and armoring up, but ... as long as I know that their families and/or them don't have to worry about that and they can concentrate on their job, that makes me happy," he said.

A steady, light presence, Boston backs up his crewmates at every turn. "He helps them take care of any issues back home that may cause undue stress, to keep them locked in and positive," Cmdr. Jeremy Robertson, Carney's commanding officer, said of Boston.

A Barstow, Florida, native, the 39-year-old played football for Florida State University and earned a bachelor's degree in science. After a stint with the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars, Boston enlisted in 2010.

"He is never overwhelmed, and he keeps a positive attitude through even the most difficult situations," Chief Personnel Specialist Wesley Taylor, Boston's direct supervisor, said in a statement.

Boston doesn't hide the affection he feels for Carney's crew as they continue their historic deployment. "They are some resilient young men and women," he said. "I look at them daily, and that's why I like joking, having a good time with all of them and trying to make their day better."



READ THE FULL STORY

100 YEARS OF

Disney SALUTING THE U.S. MILITARY



WALT POSES WITH ROY O. DISNEY IN HIS NAVY UNIFORM.

WORLD WAR I

Roy O. Disney enlists in the U.S. Navy in 1917. Walt Disney joins the Red Cross Ambulance Corps in the fall of 1918, just before the armistice.



THIS DONALD DUCK INSIGNIA IS CREATED FOR UTILITY SQUADRON #5, UNITED STATES NAVAL AIR STATION, CAPE MAY, NEW JERSEY.

WORLD WAR II

The Walt Disney Studios develops World War II training films and over 1,200 insignias for military and auxiliary units around the world.



WALT DISNEY IS AMONG FIRST TO SUPPORT THE MARINE RESERVE "TOYS FOR TOTS" CAMPAIGN IN 1948. ABOVE, HE POSES WITH TOYS FOR TOTS IN 1966.

1948

Walt Disney and his artists create the iconic three-car train logo for Toys for Tots.



DISNEY LEASES LAND TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE TO CREATE SHADES OF GREEN® RESORT AT WALT DISNEY WORLD® RESORT.

1994

Shades of Green® Resort, one of four Armed Forces Recreation Center Resorts, opens at Walt Disney World® Resort.



THE DISNEY SALUTE VETERAN AFFINITY GROUP IS CREATED.

2014

Disney SALUTE is an employee resource group for military veterans or friends and families of veterans.



DISNEY LAUNCHES "HEROES WORK HERE" VETERAN HIRING PROGRAM.

2012

The Walt Disney Company announces Heroes Work Here, a company-wide initiative to hire, train and support U.S. military veterans.

PRESENT DAY



FLAG RETREATS ARE HELD DAILY AT WALT DISNEY WORLD® RESORT AND THE DISNEYLAND® RESORT.

Daily tributes to veterans and service members are conducted for their service, sacrifice and dedication to protecting our country.



THE ADMIRAL JOE FOWLER FERRY SAILS THE SEVEN SEAS LAGOON.

Named after the retired Navy admiral involved in the construction of both the Disneyland® Resort and Walt Disney World® Resort, the Admiral Joe Fowler ferry transports Guests to Magic Kingdom® Park each day.



THE U.S. AIR FORCE THUNDERBIRDS FLY OVER MAGIC KINGDOM® PARK.

Disney celebrates military service in many ways all year, including hosting flyovers and military band performances, and more.

AIRMAN OF THE YEAR

SENIOR AIRMAN

KOSTIANTYN KHYMCHENKO

LANGLEY - EUSTIS AFB, HAMPTON, VA

Senior Airman Kostiantyn “KK” Khymchenko barely spoke a word of English when he arrived in the U.S. from Ukraine in 2019.

Though his official role is that of a heating, ventilation and air conditioning journeyman with the 633rd Civil Engineer Squadron at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia, Khymchenko has doubled as a translator during multiple deployments since Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022.

In February 2022, the 32-year-old airman agreed to a last-minute deployment to Ramstein Air Base, Germany. He led eight translators in 50 multinational teleconferences, assisted four generals and advised his homeland’s air force on defensive campaigns. His translations helped to provide intelligence on 400 sites targeted for missile attack and 1,500 missile launch alerts. His work ultimately protected 40 aircraft and more than 8 million lives — and earned him Military Times’ 2024 Airman of the Year award.

Details about his work remain classified. But for Khymchenko — a native of the city of Konotop in northern Ukraine — the stakes of serving both his homeland and his adopted nation were high. “This was [a] big stress, because I [was] scared to be wrong,” he said. “I hope my translations helped to save somebody’s [life].”

Khymchenko arrived in Utah after his wife received a green card in 2019. He spent his first several months in America working as a mechanic and enlisted in the Air Force in early 2020.

A graduate of the Ukrainian Academy of Customs, Khymchenko worked as a border patrol agent in Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014, and in Russia’s Kursk region. That experience prepared him well for his first Air Force deployment, said retired Col. Rob Swertfager, who directed the California National Guard’s State Partnership Program with Ukraine.

Khymchenko’s dedication was immediately apparent, and his professionalism and talent “far exceeded his rank,” Swertfager said. He’d arrive to work early and stay late, translating essential information, adding context to conversations and building trust with Ukrainian counterparts.

On his second deployment, to Saudi Arabia in 2023, Khymchenko was again sent to Germany to translate during U.S.-led training of Ukrainian special forces.

Since then, he’s set his sights on becoming a commissioned officer, perhaps to fly rescue or intelligence aircraft. “America gives my family everything we need,” Khymchenko said. “I want to serve and protect this country.”



READ THE FULL STORY

**UMGC
congratulates
the 2024
Service Members
of the Year.**

**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SERVICE.**



**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS**
AT YOUR SERVICE SINCE 1947

UMGC.EDU

GUARDIAN OF THE YEAR

CAPT.

DANIEL REYNOLDS

COLORADO SPRINGS - PETERSON

Last fall, a Space Force guardian went where no one from the newest military branch had gone before: Army Ranger School.

In October, Space Force Capt. Daniel Reynolds became the first in his service to graduate from the training program. That accomplishment earned Reynolds Military Times' 2024 Guardian of the Year award. "When I first arrived at Ranger School, I was nervous," Reynolds, 29, told Military Times. "But what I also realized, as I checked in, was that everyone around me was feeling the exact same way."

The Army leadership course — a three-part, 62-day gauntlet through mountains and swamps — is among the military's most rigorous mental and physical tests. While there were times Reynolds said he hit a wall, he knew that he wanted to become the best possible version of himself. When he succeeded, his father, a fellow Ranger School graduate, pinned on the new tab.

Reynolds said that gaining firsthand knowledge of how elite field units work can improve how the Space Force supports them, and that mindset can be useful in any job. The Space Force pioneer encouraged others in his service to follow in his footsteps. "We have to be well-equipped to tackle complex challenges, and to apply decisive and bold leadership," Reynolds said.

He was recently accepted as an instructor at the Air Force Security Forces Center's Ranger Assessment Course — which coaches and evaluates airmen and guardians for nomination to Army Ranger School — where he hopes to further motivate the next generation of Ranger-qualified leaders.

Before he earned his Ranger tab, Reynolds was no stranger to astronomical achievements. He became the first guardian to graduate from the Army's Air Assault School in 2021. The next year, he followed that feat by becoming the first guardian to complete the Army's 28-day Sapper Leader Course.

Meanwhile, Reynolds finds time to volunteer with the Department of Defense's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office and the Air Force's Language-Enabled Airman Program, which deploys troops who speak a foreign language.

He credits his family for serving as his role models, and countless others for helping him achieve out-of-this-world successes. "I am who I am because of so many phenomenal mentors, leaders, teachers, professors, instructors, friends, colleagues," he said. "I am here because of them."



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US Army photo by Spc. Joshua Zayas



US Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Austin Berner

COAST GUARDSMAN OF THE YEAR

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER

MATTHEW CASPER

MAUI, HI

Last year, as high winds swept across the Pacific Ocean and battered Maui, Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew Casper was at his team's small rescue station on Mā'alaea Bay when he got the call. A devastating wildfire was spreading and residents of the nearby town of Lahaina were fleeing to the harbor.

For four days, beginning on Aug. 8, Casper directed his crew of Coast Guardsmen in their lone 45-foot-boat as they assisted in the rescue of dozens of people. For his actions, he has been named Military Times' 2024 Coast Guardsman of the Year.

Despite their experience and training, the rescue boat crew were nervous as they prepared to head to the harbor. Then Petty Officer 2nd Class Teddy Kirkbride heard Casper on a call with higher command, telling them they needed a safety waiver due to the conditions, but that his team was ready.

"We've got the best crew members at Maui, the best engineer and two of the best coxswains standing by," Casper said.

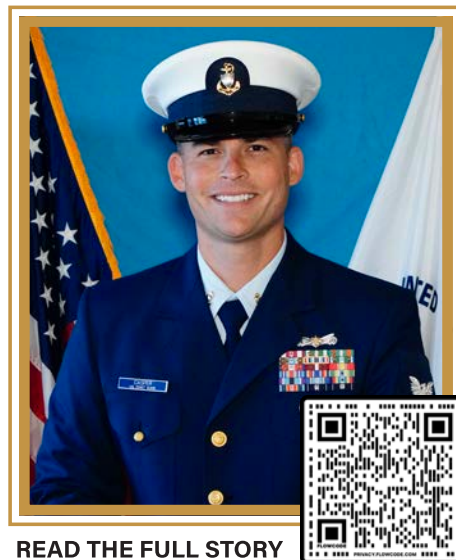
"Just hearing him say that ... helped my confidence going out there and doing the hard thing," Kirkbride said.

The crew made it to the harbor, weaving through unmoored boats, dead bodies and thick smoke. Over the next six hours, the crew would hear from Casper, checking in on them, advising them and running interference from the cascade of radio traffic flooding the airwaves.

They hauled people off stranded boats, they threw lines to a jetty wall that survivors used to pull themselves to the boat, they picked up people who swam out to meet them to escape the smoke and flames. Casper recalled the rest of the station's personnel, rotating teams nonstop to the harbor.

By sunrise the next day, the station crew had run nonstop shifts to the harbor and saved 17 people. In total, they would go on to rescue 40 people over four days. The fires killed at least 100 people and caused nearly \$6 billion in damage, devastating Maui.

Casper was the calm voice amid the storm, connecting the crew with those in need throughout those harrowing days. "I've never been more proud to be part of a group of men and women in my life," Casper said. "It's really an honor to be a part of that."



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