



## Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Cultivating community connections  
– empowering Georgia’s veterans  
and their families to flourish.

March 2023

## NATIONAL VIETNAM WAR VETERANS DAY

On National Vietnam War Veterans Day, we honor all those who bravely served in the Vietnam War and who sacrificed, as did their families and caregivers, on behalf of our nation.

Every service member of the Vietnam generation should know that their sacrifices mattered and that their service made a difference.

To the families of the over 1,500 service members who remain missing and unaccounted for, know that our Nation’s efforts to bring them home will never stop.

Thank you for your service, Vietnam Veterans.

Thank you for putting your life on the line for our country in the fight for the liberties and freedoms of others.

Thank you for your personal sacrifice in a time of great uncertainty.

The State of Georgia and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service will never forget your bravery, your dedication, and your sacrifice.

## GREENVETERANS.COM AND SAMSUNG DONATE TECHNOLOGY FOR VETERANS SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM

The Georgia Veterans Service Foundation recently received a donation of 60 tablets from GreenVeterans.com and Samsung to support suicide prevention programs for veterans, military service members, and their families. Shawn Hanley, CEO of GreenVeterans.com and Chairman of Georgia’s Veterans Service Board, and Samsung presented the gift on Tuesday, March 21, 2023.

Mr. Hanley met with Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, Benita Miller, Deputy Network Director of the U.S. Department Veterans Affairs Southeast Network (VISN 7), and Patricia Ross, the Commissioner of Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) to commemorate the donation.

“Georgia is committed to doing our part to support the brave men and women whose service safeguards the freedoms we hold dear,” **said Governor Brian Kemp.** “This means providing our veterans facing mental health challenges the resources they need to recover and thrive. I want to thank Samsung and GreenVeterans for their support of this cause, and I look forward to the impact this initiative will have on our veterans.”

The devices will provide access to a suicide prevention screening assessment for veterans visiting Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) offices. The assessment is currently available through a scannable QR code but was difficult to access for those without mobile devices or who need help navigating the web-based form.

“Building and uplifting communities across the U.S. is a core part of Samsung’s work in America. Our outreach to veteran groups is one with a rich history and one that we are proud to support and celebrate,” **said Mark Lippert, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs – Samsung Electronics America.** “It is an honor for Samsung to assist the Georgia Department of Veteran Services in its outreach to veterans who are at risk of suicide. We thank Governor Kemp, CEO Shawn Hanley of Green Veterans, Commissioner Patricia Ross, and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service for the opportunity to play a role in this important suicide prevention program.”



## GDVS VSO ANSWERS PRAYERS FOR TUSKEGEE AIRMAN



“We had to do so much to prove and be accepted as a patriotic American, but we continue to love our country. Looking back, I was proud to serve,” said **WWII Veteran and Tuskegee Airman, Thomas Bristow, Sr.**

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Formed in 1941, in the segregated South, these fighter pilots destroyed close to 300 enemy aircraft and collectively won more than 850 medals over the course of the war.

He received training from the legendary Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr., who became the first African American to reach the rank of four star general in the US Armed Forces. Bristow was assigned to the 100<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron and served under Col Benjamin Davis, the first black general of the Air Force.

“As black men in segregated America, we were extremely proud to be given an opportunity to demonstrate our abilities during wartime,” said Bristow. Their duties included providing protection for white bombers, who Bristow recalls were shocked to discover that the servicemen who protected them were actually black.

Bristow was honorably discharged in 1951 and is one of 10 remaining Tuskegee Airmen. Despite his many accomplishments, accolades, and years of training, Bristow struggled to find employment after leaving military service, though he never requested or received any veterans benefits.

Bristow and his daughter, Linda, recently crossed paths with Steven Fay, GDVS Assistant Director of Training, while visiting the Lawrenceville VA CBOC. Now at the age of 95, his claim has finally been submitted.

“We are so grateful to have found the GDVS and Mr. Fay. He reassured my father and I that we finally reached someone who understood our plight and would do everything he could to help us,” said Bristow’s daughter.

For Fay, it was an honor to meet and learn about Bristow’s extraordinary experience, as well as helping him receive the benefits he earned through his one-of-a-kind military career.



## GET TO KNOW YOUR VSO: BILL SMITH



“I take pride in still being able to take care of Soldiers,” said **GDVS Lafayette office manager Bill Smith.** “I ensure that they get the help and care that they need.” Smith has been with the department for 4 years.

The help he provides veterans is a result of not only being understanding, but also “...just being a good listener.”

His advice to future or current VSOs is to spend all the time you need to actively listen to the veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors who visit your office. “Find out what they are trying to tell you what they need... they don’t know the terminology or understand the VA system. Our job to help them through the process and make it easier for them to get the benefits they deserve,” said Smith.

A native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Smith retired from the Army in 2018 with 23 years of active service and a total of 32 years with the Guard and Reserve. He has worked in various jobs and was deployed twice during his military service.

When he takes a break from helping veterans, he and his wife of 27 years, enjoy dog sports with their 5 dogs. They are currently training their Dutch Shepherd and 3 German Shepherds in sport protection, dock diving, and nose/scent work.



## PACT ACT UPDATES

**VA has added 3 new response efforts to the list of presumptive locations for radiation exposure:**

- Cleanup of **Enewetak Atoll**, from January 1, 1977, through December 31, 1980
- Cleanup of the Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons off the coast of **Palomares, Spain**, from January 17, 1966, through March 31, 1967
- Response to the fire onboard an Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons near **Thule Air Force Base** in Greenland from January 21, 1968, to September 25, 1968

**If you took part in any of these efforts, VA will automatically assume (or “presume”) that you had exposure to radiation.**

VA recently added 3 new presumptive locations for radiation exposure through the PACT Act.

If you participated in clean-up efforts in Enewetak Atoll, Palomares, or Thule Air Force Base during the specified periods, you may qualify for benefits.

Did you serve in one of these locations? Contact your local GDVS field office to speak with an accredited veteran service officer to start working on your claim:

<https://veterans.georgia.gov/field-offices>.

The PACT ACT, named after Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, was signed into law in August 2022. An estimated 3.5 million veterans may now be newly eligible for VA care.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **VETlanta— PACT ACT Claims Workshop**

– Kennesaw State University, April 4

### **We CARE** Veteran Resource Fairs

- Rome, May 18
- Marietta, August 4-5



### **LET’S CONNECT** Suicide Prevention Two Day Summit

– Kennesaw State University, May 24-25