

The South Georgia Voice



*South Georgia Chapter
Military Officers Association of America
September, 2011*



www.sgamoaa.org

Community Blueprint

A **Community Blueprint** retreat was held in Valdosta August 22-24. Led by Mr. Bob Verhey, Veteran Innovation Center's Executive Director and Col Barry Wright, MOAA's Council and Chapter Affairs Deputy Director, over 40 **Community Blueprint** Mission Area volunteers attended. We still need additional volunteers for each of the 8 Mission Areas:

- Behavioral Health
- Education
- Employment
- Family Strength
- Legal/Financial(Life Skills)
- Homelessness
- Reintegration
- Volunteerism

Veterans and their families are returning to civilian life and all too often find themselves in situations of confusion and loneliness with many experiencing depression, drug abuse and divorce. Over 20% are homeless and the unemployment rate of our veterans is at 12%, well above the national average. The unemployment rate of veterans age 22-26 is 25% and it's estimated another 25% are underemployed. They're working for \$8-10/hour, often with two jobs just to

make ends meet. The suicide rate among our veterans exceeds combat deaths and over 40% bring home those invisible wounds of war, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The **Community Blueprint** project is designed to help communities address these issues. We covet your participation.

Membership Chair Report

By: Don McArthur, Maj. USAF, Ret.

Can you believe that it is September already?! Only four months left in 2011.

There is still time to sign up for the 52nd GA MOAA Convention which is being held in Columbus at the Hilton Garden Inn, October 13-15. Go online to the Columbus Chapter website at www.cvcmoaa.org The deadline for registering is Sept. 25th or there is a late fee. Applications and hotel info can be downloaded and mailed.

Our own Buddy Johnson will be installed as the new Georgia state president during the convention. This is a great honor not only to have Buddy represent our chapter but to represent our entire state. Y'all come!

Let's continue to keep our eyes and ears open for new prospects. In most cases folks do not realize that Valdosta has a local MOAA chapter so let's invite them when the opportunity arises.

Food for Thought

*From: Thoughts on the Business of Life
By the editors of FORBES Magazine*

“There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us, that it behooves all of us not to talk about the rest of us.”

Robert Louis Stevenson

Thoughts of a C-17 Pilot

I had an unforgettable day yesterday and wanted to share it with you. I know we've all sat around and discussed in detail why we do what we do and if we will be willing to continue to do what we do day in and day out regardless of deployments, retirement decisions, job opportunities, missed birthdays, missed holidays, etc. This is something I wanted to share and you were the people that came to mind. It's another reason I continue to serve. I guess because many others do and sacrifice a lot more, some even their lives.

My crew was alerted yesterday to find that our mission had changed. We were now a backup to a high priority mission originating from Afghanistan. When I asked where we would be going the answer was "back to the states". Later I learned our destination was Dover. I was the aircraft commander for one of two C-17s that transferred the Chinook helicopter crash soldiers back home.

The crew that started this mission in Afghanistan would end up running out of crew duty day and another crew had to continue the soldier's journey. We just happened to be available.

After being alerted and going through our normal sequence, I found myself at the foot of the aircraft steps. Before I took my first step upward I noticed a transfer case close to the door. I had only seen one in pictures. The American Flag was tucked smartly, folded and secured on top. I paused at the bottom of the stairs, took a deep breath and continued up with my mind and eyes focusing on making it to the next ladder leading to the cockpit. However, as I entered, I couldn't help but notice the remaining nineteen transfer cases in the cargo compartment. The entire cargo compartment was filled with identical transfer cases with American Flags. I made my way up to the cockpit and received a briefing from the previous aircraft commander.

After the briefing we exchanged a handshake and the other pilot was on his way. I felt a need to ensure the crew focused on their normal duties. I instructed the other two pilots to begin the preflight. I went back down into the cargo compartment to see what needed to be done and find the paperwork I needed to sign. The cargo compartment was now filled with numerous people from the mortuary affairs squadron. They were busy adjusting, resetting and preparing the cases for their continued flight. Before they began I asked who was in charge because I knew there was paperwork I needed to sign. I finally found a Staff

Sergeant who was working an issue with the paperwork. After it was complete, he brought it up to the cockpit for me to review and sign.

There are moments in life I will never forget. For me, it's the days my son and daughter were born. Another occurred five months ago when I had to deliver the unthinkable news to a mother that her son was killed in Afghanistan and although I didn't anticipate another day like that this soon, yesterday was another. I looked at the paperwork I was signing and realized the magnitude of the day. I glanced over the paperwork and signed. In a way, I felt I had taken ownership of these fallen soldiers. It was now my duty to ensure they make it home.

After confirming the preflight was complete and the aircraft was fueled, I went outside to start my walk-around. As I walked down the steps, a bus had parked in front of the aircraft and unloaded eleven passengers. The passengers were fellow SEAL team members who were escorting the fallen back to the states. I stood at the front of the aircraft and watched them board. Every one of them walked off the bus with focus in their eyes and determination in their steps; just as I imagine they do when they go on a mission. I made eye contact with the lead SEAL, nodded my head in respect and he nodded back.

Finishing my walk-around, I stopped at the bottom of the stairs. I looked up into the cargo compartment; two American Flags and one SEAL Team Six flag hung from the top of the cargo

compartment. Three of the twenty transfer cases were visible; one with an American Flag and two with Afghan flags. I looked up at my aircraft and saw, "United States Air Force" painted on the side and I stood trying to take it all in. I wanted to make certain that I never forget these images. That I never forget the faces of the SEALs, the smell of the cargo compartment or the sun slowly rising over the landscape. It's important that I don't forget. We need to honor the dead, honor the sacrifice of the fallen.

I understand my role in getting these fallen soldiers home is insignificant compared to the lives they lived and the things they did for our country. Most of it we will never know. All I know is every American should see what I've seen. Every American should see the bus loads of families as they exit the freeway headed for Dover AFB to reunite with their fallen or witness the amount of time, effort, people and equipment that go into ensuring our fallen have an honorable return.

The very next day we took the same aircraft back overseas. We had leveled the aircraft at our cruise altitude and I walked down to the cargo compartment. No more American Flags hung from the ceiling. All the transfer cases were gone. Instead I watched a father lay with his son, cradled on his chest, on the same spot that only yesterday held a fallen soldier. I watched a young girl, clutching a teddy bear, sleeping quietly where the fallen had lain. I realized so many Americans have no idea where the fallen lay.

I'm honored to be one that does.

Our next meeting is Thursday September 8, 6:00 PM, Valdosta – Lowndes
Conference Center on Norman Drive

Please welcome our guests and ask them to join you for dinner.
Dinner is served at 6:30 PM

Please make your reservations through chapter Secretary Buddy Johnson 229-
561-0690 or email buddy1612@bellsouth.net. We are required to provide an
accurate meal count two work days prior to the event.
Cost is \$20 per person.

Sorry, we must bill no-shows and late cancellations

President Ron Borders Former USA CWO	Vice President Bill Piper Former USAF Captain
Secretary Alton “Buddy” Johnson Lt Col USAF, Ret.	Treasurer John Salter Former USAF Captain
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Public Affairs Jack Sinnott, Col, AUS, Ret.	Programs Dr. Hugh Bassham Former USA Captain
Remembrances and Memorials Mrs Jacque Clark	Membership Don McArthur Maj. USAF, Ret
	Auxiliary Advisory Chair Mrs. Rose Marie Sinnott
	Chaplain Rev. John McGowan, Lt Col, USAF, Ret.

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