BVA Happenings – May 15

Table of Contents

BVA Happenings – May 15 1

Around BVA 2

A “Hole-in-One” for Kevin Wilson, Ambassadog Calvin, and Pacific Northwest Team! . 2

Resource Spotlight: Writing and Recording Tools from this Week’s VetTech Session 4

AFB Seeks Older Adults for Research Study, Compensation Offered 5

Join BVA Board of Directors Monthly Town Hall Next Thursday, May 21 6

Bronze Braille American Flag Update from Louisiana/Mississippi RG 6

Honoring Past and Present Service Members from All Branches 7

Virtual National Membership Meeting Scheduled for June 18 8

Save the Date! TRR, PAIRnc, Partner for Summer Kayaking Activity in North Carolina .. 9

Ambassadog Scoop Series Courtesy of Waymo 9

Calvin Tees Off at Chester Valley Golf Club 9

VA Insider 10

Record-Setting VA Infrastructure Improvements Announced 10

“Freedom 250” Theme Underlies Memorial Day Events at VA National Cemeteries ... 11

Next Week’s Events 11

Dog Handlers Meeting 11

VetTech and Educational Series 12

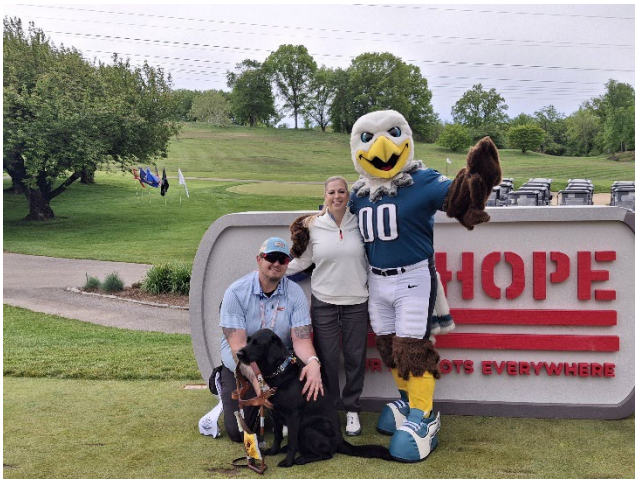
Town Hall and Educational Series (Board of Directors) 12

Around BVA

A “Hole-in-One” for Kevin Wilson, Ambassadog Calvin, and Pacific Northwest Team!

Photo 1 Caption: Kevin Wilson and Ambassadog Calvin “Cal” with Meredith Buono-DaGrossa and PGA HOPE Eagle Mascot.

Photo 2 Caption: Left to right: Clinton Stayton, Christopher Houle, Josh Cantrell, John Hupp (PGA HOPE Ambassador for Pacific Northwest), Ralph Brown, Kevin Wilson, Ambassadog Cal, and Eric Jones.



This past Monday, May 11, BVA Member Kevin Wilson, alongside his Ambassadog Calvin and four other veteran teammates, teed off and scored impressively as part of the PGA (Professional Golfers’ Association) Foundation’s Pacific Northwest Team in the 2026 PGA HOPE (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere) Secretary’s Cup.

The event honored military veterans from across the country at the Chester Valley Golf Club in Malvern, Pennsylvania, ahead of this week’s 108th PGA Championship at nearby Aronimink Golf Club. The Team and Kevin’s efforts, supported by BVA and Meta, finished one under par for sixth place out of 12 teams.

More than a golf tournament, the Secretary’s Cup celebrates veterans and the PGA Professionals who positively impact their lives. Kevin was joined on his team by PGA professional and veteran Josh Cantrell, who also manages Moose Run Golf Course in Alaska, and three other PGA HOPE graduates—Army veteran Clinton Stayton, Coast Guard veteran Christopher Houle, and Navy veteran Ralph Brown.

BVA National Director of Development Meredith Buono-DaGrossa, an eyewitness to the entire event, said the Team was honored and humbled to wear branded apparel supported by Meta.

“After receiving the apparel, they commented that ‘it was better than Christmas!’” she reported.

“Additionally, Meta provided Kevin with the Oakley Meta Vanguard glasses to provide accessible play,” she continued. “For Kevin specifically, being part of the team allowed him to feel a sense of camaraderie, normalcy, and what is still possible after sight loss.”



Meredith also said that those in attendance couldn’t help but feel inspired by the Pacific Northwest Team.

“Of course, Ambassadog Calvin stole the show riding in the cart, fetching golf balls, and holding the golf club in his mouth for photo shoots!”



BVA expresses a special thank you to Eric Jones, Pacific Northwest Section PGA Foundation Director who also served as Kevin’s “support” caddy (known to some in BVA circles who attend other events as a “golf buddy”), and volunteer ambassadors John Hupp and Jeff Bojanowski who put the team together, along with Pacific Northwest Foundation Player Development Coordinator Paul Russo.

The event began with an opening ceremony that included remarks from PGA of America Secretary Eric Eshleman and The Honorable Samuel B. Brown, Department of Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. The Pennsylvania Veterans of Foreign Wars District 16 presented the Colors while the National Anthem was performed by U.S. Army Veteran Tiffany McKeaney. A parachute demonstration was given by All Veteran Group.

Photo 3 Caption: Golf Towel, courtesy of the Blinded Veterans Association

Resource Spotlight: Writing and Recording Tools from this Week's VetTech Session

BVA National Program Director Domonique Lawless shares the following with this week's **BVA Happenings** readers:

Thank you to everyone who joined the VetTech and Educational Series session on May 13. We had a strong turnout and shared a variety of tools and strategies for capturing important information and keeping it organized. Below is a curated list of the products demonstrated during the session. Please note that this list is provided for convenience and does not serve as an endorsement of any specific vendor. If you have questions, please contact Domonique Lawless at dlawless@bva.org or 202-371-8880, Ext. 308.

Featured Products

Bold-Lined Paper

This dark-lined paper features lines spaced 9/16 of an inch apart and can be helpful for individuals who benefit from stronger visual contrast when writing. This paper can be purchased **here**. Independent Living Aids and other vendors also offer notebooks and notepads in a variety of styles, including bright yellow options for those who need additional contrast.

Tactile Writing Paper

This heavy-duty notepad features tactile lines spaced 3/8 inch apart. While I have not personally used this specific brand, it may be a useful option for people looking for raised-line writing paper. To purchase this paper, click **here**.

Vis-a-Vis Pens

These wet-erase markers were commonly used on transparency paper with overhead projectors, but they can also be a great writing tool for people with low vision. They are available in multiple colors as well as black-only packs. To purchase Vis-a-Vis pens, click **here**.

20/20 Pens

20/20 Pens are designed with low-vision users in mind and may be a good option for those who prefer a bolder, easier-to-see writing instrument. To purchase 20/20 pens, click **here**.

Sharpie Pens

These are popular for routine, everyday writing. They are lighter than a 20/20 Pen but thicker than a standard ballpoint pen, and they do not smear easily, which can be especially helpful for left-handed writers. To purchase sharpie pens, click **here**.

Janus Index Card Slate

This is a slate mentioned during the VetTech session for taking notes on-the-go with index cards. It is an interline slate, which means users can Braille on both sides of the card. To purchase Janus Index Card Slate, click **here**.

Micro-Speak 3 Digital Recorder

This easy-to-use digital recorder offers a simple option for capturing notes and spoken information. To purchase this digital recorder, click **here**.

Victor Reader Stream

The Victor Reader Stream is a versatile tool for playing audiobooks, DAISY talking books, podcasts, and more. It also includes a strong recording function and easy playback navigation. To purchase Victor Reader Stream, click **here**.

Brailliant BI 20x

This Braille display was mentioned near the end of the VetTech session. It can be used for reading documents and books, and for connecting to Bluetooth-enabled devices to expand access to braille. To purchase Brilliant BI 20x, click **here**.

Bee Pioneer

Sheldon shared during the session that he uses an AI wristband called Bee Pioneer to record important information. The device also includes an accessible app for iOS and Android. To purchase Bee Pioneer, click **here**.

AFB Seeks Older Adults for Research Study, Compensation Offered

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is conducting a research study seeking U.S.-based adults 55 and older who are experiencing changes to their sight. The aim of the study is to understand what it is like for older adults to adjust to vision changes and what services can help them.

Participants can choose between a 60-minute interview and a 90-minute focus group, either in person or virtually. They will be paid $20 for an interview or $25 for a focus group and will receive transportation support for in-person sessions if needed.

If interested, please call AFB researcher Angie Whistler, 202-469-6834, to sign up. For questions or concerns about the study, please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Arielle Silverman, at asilverman@afb.org.

Join BVA Board of Directors Monthly Town Hall Next Thursday, May 21

The BVA Board of Directors monthly virtual Town Hall, an opportunity to speak with and ask questions of the BVA national leadership, will be webcast via Zoom this Thursday, May 21, at 3:00pm Eastern Time. The session will be the eighth of this fiscal year since the current National Officers were elected in July 2025. Similar Town Halls will continue in the same time slot on the third Thursday of every month, the exception being in June when the slot will be used for a National Membership Meeting.

“The Town Halls are for you, our membership, to have access to the Board of Directors in order to ask questions,” National President Wade Davis has emphasized to BVA members.

To access the Town Hall, please use either the link below or the accompanying joining information—or a link to the meeting via the BVA Online Calendar.

The Blinded Veterans Association is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Blinded Veterans Association's Board of Directors Town Hall Zoom Meeting

Date and Time: May 21, 2026, 3:00pm Eastern Time

Join Zoom Meeting

https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88644750288?pwd=2SOoouJBvwLd77ro8iFyMjQ7vDrYcZ.1

Bronze Braille American Flag Update from Louisiana/Mississippi RG

The BVA Louisiana/Mississippi (LA/MS) Regional Group joined with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) on April 24 to dedicate a Bronze Braille American Flag and Plaque to the Edith Garland Dupre Library, located on the campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

The ceremony was well attended by several LA/MS BVA members, their friends, the regent, and several members of the Galvez Chapter of DAR, the President and members of the SAR Attakapa Chapter, the Dupre Library Staff, University President Ramesh Kolluru, and several library patrons.

Regional Group Secretary Leigh Mitchell led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. Each group represented was then called upon to direct their comments to the celebration of “America 250” and what it means to them and their organization.

Group President Shawntina Gibson spoke about BVA and what it has done for her, while Gary Schoelerman presented information about the tactile Braille American Flag and how the library is the perfect place for its placement, representing equality for the blind, the low vision, and the deaf-blind, with reading materials for all. These include Braille books and magazines, large print for those with low vision, and audio-recorded books.

President Kolluru spoke of coming from India to the U.S. and specifically to Lafayette as a student 33 years ago. He had just $250 in cash in his pocket and is now the president of a major university.

The ceremony was followed by cake supplied by DAR. BVA members in attendance were Shawntina, Leigh, Francis Arceneaux, Cary Grant, and Gary Schoelerman.

The group still had one more scheduled presentation on April 30 at Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School in the city of Jennings, Louisiana. Details will follow about one more donation and presentation scheduled for earlier today (May 15). Although the presentation took place in Rockland, Maine, it was nevertheless arranged and coordinated by the LA/MS Regional Group. Gary Schoelerman made the trip to appear in person and make the presentation.

Honoring Past and Present Service Members from All Branches



Armed Forces Day is tomorrow, May 16, the next in the series of holidays that have become part of Military Appreciation Month. The day will bring public celebrations within the United States and commemorations at bases worldwide of all six branches of the U.S. Military: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy, and Space Force.

The day is recognized on the third Saturday in May and honors all currently serving or who have served in the Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserve components.

Originally, there were single day celebrations for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. This format changed on August 21, 1949, when Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson announced the creation of Armed Forces Day. Stemming from the unification of the Armed Forces under the Department of Defense, the annual commemoration includes all branches of the military and takes place on a single day.

The first official Armed Forces Day was May 20, 1950, and was themed “Teamed for Defense.” In honor of the special day, B-36 Bombers flew over state capital cities, a march

was led by more than 10,000 veterans and troops in Washington, D.C., and more than 33,000 people participated in a New York City parade.

In addition, the first Armed Forces Day also played an essential part in educating society and expanding public knowledge of the military and the role it plays in the community. The holiday was not only a means to honor those who serve or who have served, but also a way to showcase its top-of- the-line equipment and abilities used to protect the American people.

Service members, veterans, and their families are being honored by national chain restaurants and other establishments during the month of May with a variety of discounts. Outback Steakhouse, for example, has a 20 percent Heroes' discount for veterans as well as those serving on active duty and reserve today, May 15, through Sunday, May 17. Some of the discounts are offered tomorrow only, others through Memorial Day, and still others until May 31. A listing is provided by **Military.com**. Click the button below to get there.

Military Appreciation Month/Armed Forces Day Discounts

Virtual National Membership Meeting Scheduled for June 18

Pursuant to a provision of the BVA Congressional Charter requiring an annual meeting of the BVA membership, the Association's National Board of Directors and National Headquarters will host a virtual National Membership Meeting on Thursday, June 18, 2026. All BVA members are invited to attend. The meeting via Zoom will occur in the current time slot of the National Board of Directors Town Hall at 3:00pm Eastern Time (third Thursday) using the same Zoom link and other joining information.

Stay tuned and be on the lookout in the next few weeks for additional details in **BVA Happenings**, the **BVA Bulletin**, and standalone Constant Contact email blasts to all BVA members.

Save the Date! TRR, PAIRnc, Partner for Summer Kayaking Activity in North Carolina



Blind and low vision veterans able to reach Fayetteville, North Carolina, on Saturday, July 11, are invited to experience adaptive paddling designed for individuals with physical disabilities at an Adaptive Paddling Demo. The event will begin at 10:00am at the John E. Pechmann Fishing Education Center, 7489 Raeford Road, in Fayetteville.

Hosted by the staff of Team River Runner (TRR) and PAIRnc, the activity is open to all but will focus on people with little or no kayaking experience. It will include hands-on equipment demonstrations, adaptive kayak customization to fit individual needs, and a supportive, inclusive environment. TRR and PAIRnc will provide all the gear. Participants will need only water, snacks, and sunscreen.

Registration information is currently not available, but will be provided in an upcoming issue of **BVA Happenings** if registration is indeed required.

TRR has served BVA and individual blinded veterans in countless adaptive sports activities dating back to its early beginnings at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in 2004.

View a larger version of the flyer here

Ambassadog Scoop Series Courtesy of Waymo

Calvin Tees Off at Chester Valley Golf Club

On Monday, May 11, Kevin (my dad) and I teed off at the 2026 PGA Hope Secretary's Cup Golf Tournament at Chester Valley Golf Club. Dad said being part of the team allowed him to feel a sense of camaraderie, independence, and what he can still accomplish after sight loss.

Thank you to Eric Jones, Pacific Northwest Section PGA's Foundation Director, who served alongside me as Daddy's support caddy. As I was driving the golf cart and fetching golf balls, I was inspired as I watched Daddy use his Meta Oakley Vanguard AI glasses and other accessible tools, allowing him to hit some "pawsome" shots. Meta and



BVA graciously provided our team with apparel that made us look like real pros! As usual, I was the star of the show posing with cheerleaders, holding Dad's club in my mouth, and planting lots of kisses.

A special "bark out" to my veteran teammates Josh, Clinton, Christopher, and Ralph, who made me feel like a true member of the Team. Even my friends from America's VetDogs showed up to cheer us on. Two paws up for volunteer ambassadors John Hupp and Jeff Bojanowski, who put the team together, along with Paul Russo from the Pacific Northwest Foundation. This was a day this dog will never forget. We were all winners!

Graphic Photo Collage Captions: See Immediately Below

Photo 1: Left to right, except for Calvin, who is front and center: Eric Jones, Christopher Houle, John Hupp, Ralph Brown, Clinton Stayton, Kevin Wilson, and Josh Cantrell.

Photo 2: Eagle Mascot Cheerleaders

Photo 3: Kevin Wilson and Ambassadog Calvin

Photos 4 and 5: Calvin, content sitting back but always prepared to serve

VA Insider

Record-Setting VA Infrastructure Improvements Announced

VA approved a total of $596 million in infrastructure improvements in the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2026, part of a record 4.8 billion in non-recurring maintenance funds that VA will deploy this year. The funds will be used for vital maintenance, replacements, and upgrades needed to improve operational capability and healthcare delivery. Read the May 11 press release containing additional details, related comments by VA Secretary Doug Collins, and a list of the second quarter projects.

VA Announces Nearly $600M in Improvements to

Infrastructure in FY Second Quarter

“Freedom 250” Theme Underlies Memorial Day Events at VA National Cemeteries



Memorial Day ceremonies will take place during the May 23-25 weekend at more than 130 VA National Cemeteries across the country. Most of the ceremonies are planned for Memorial Day itself, May 25. Start times vary widely.

“Memorial May” is the tagline for the series of events this year. The theme at the front and center of the activities is “Freedom 250” with a focus on the known 20 Revolutionary War veterans interred in VA National Cemeteries and an additional 24 for whom there are existing “In Memory of” markers. More than 4,000 Revolutionary War veterans are buried in private cemeteries.

VA’s National Cemetery Administration is once again collaborating with the Carry the Load initiative, the Travis Manion Foundation, and Victory for Veterans in making the local events possible. Refer to the May 7 VA press release (button below) and check out the appropriate links for additional details about specific locations for the events. A state-by-state list of many of the events has also been compiled by Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA).

VA, Nonprofits Team Up to Honor Veterans during “Memorial May”

VVA State-by-State Listing of Memorial Day Events

Next Week’s Events

Dog Handlers Meeting

Date and Time: May 19 (Tuesday), 4:00pm Eastern Time

Meeting ID: 899 4856 6589**, Passcode:** 1945

The session will center on the appropriate timing for retiring a God Dog and Guide Dog, delving into the challenges and considerations involved in this process. Additionally, attendees will discuss the potential benefits of pursuing further education to prepare for the arrival of a successor dog. To enhance the session, there will be a dog trivia question-and-answer period.

VetTech and Educational Series

Date and Time: May 20 (Wednesday), 3:00pm Eastern Time

Meeting ID: 873 9159 8202**, Passcode:** 1958

The session will engage attendees in a comprehensive discussion about the novel features of the Meta glasses. It will also touch on other smart glasses currently available in the market and compare their characteristics with those of the Meta glasses.

Town Hall and Educational Series (Board of Directors)

Date and Time: May 21 (Thursday), 3:00pm Eastern Time

Meeting ID: 886 4475 0288**, Passcode:** 1945

The session will be an open forum for BVA members to direct questions to members of the National Board of Directors.