BVA Happenings – May 8

Table of Contents

BVA Happenings – May 8 1

Around BVA 2

Mother's Day Holiday and World Wars I and II 2

Shawntina Gibson Successfully Completes 335-Mile Mid-Atlantic Bike Ride 3

BARD Services and BVA's Book Club Interest Group 5

May is Healthy Vision Month 6

Remembering the Bittersweetness of V-E Day 7

Celebrating Wives and Husbands on National Military Spouse Appreciation Day 8

Newly Released *Visions of BVA* Episode Highlights Meta Ray-Ban Glasses 9

Sight Loss and Tips for Social Connection 9

Virtual National Membership Meeting Scheduled for June 18 10

Ambassadog Scoop Series Courtesy of Waymo 10

May Ambassadog Calvin Debuts and Hits the Links 10

VA Insider 11

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

Move Yourself to Achieve Whole Health in May! 11

Next Week's Events 12

Adaptive Sports and Activities Group 12

VetTech and Educational Series 12

Around BVA

Mother's Day Holiday and World Wars I and II



Happy Mother's Day to all BVA moms nationwide this Sunday, May 10! BVA mothers include not only those of blinded veterans but their spouses and caregivers as well. For those with mothers still living, this holiday offers opportunities to share heartfelt thoughts, feelings, and actions that hopefully extend beyond wishing them a Happy Mother's Day verbally.

Some tips for putting these thoughts into words include being specific when mentioning a particular memory or quality you appreciate about her, thanking her for specific things she has done for you, using language that shows your genuine love and appreciation, acknowledging the impact she has had on your life, and tailoring the message to your unique relationship with your mother.

In a Mother's Day 2019 article, **Time Magazine** reporter Olivia B. Waxman asserted that it is military moms who have had the greatest influence on what Mother's Day is today. When the United States joined World War I in 1917, the war propaganda machine revved up with a burst of patriotism that came with a renewed appreciation for mothers. Women were hailed for both raising the soldiers who were on the front lines as well as for the work they were doing at home, such as raising money for the Red Cross. Mother's Day was a way to thank these women for their service and for the soldiers in battle to reconnect and reaffirm their relationships with their mothers.

"I wish that every officer and soldier of the American Expeditionary Forces would write a letter home on Mother's Day," Gen. John J. Pershing is quoted as saying in the May 8, 1918, **New York Times**. "This is a little thing for each one of you to do, but these letters will point our courage and our affection back to the patriotic women whose love and prayers inspire us and cheer us on to victory."

The war ended in 1918, but to make sure that veterans would keep up the tradition of reaching out to their mothers after the war, Assistant Secretary of the Navy and future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent a reminder about Mother's Day in a May 9, 1919, telegram to the men of the Navy: "I trust that no one who has a mother still living will neglect to write or, if possible, visit her on this occasion. No sacrifices during the war have

been more severe or borne with more bravery and cheerfulness than the sacrifices of the mothers of America."

By Mother's Day 1935, when he was in the White House, Roosevelt said that Mother's Day had "assumed a deep and growing significance," so much so that a Presidential proclamation telling people to write their mothers on Mother's Day would be "unnecessary," as "I prefer to think that the tributes which will be paid to mothers will come simply and spontaneously from our hearts."

By the time World War II arrived, there were more mothers than ever before in U.S. history and more U.S. sons away from home on Mother's Day, thus helping to entrench the holiday into the American calendar forever. According to Hallmark, some 115 million cards are currently sent annually for Mother's Day, making it the third most popular holiday for sending greeting cards in the United States—after Christmas and Valentine's Day.

Shawntina Gibson Successfully Completes 335-Mile Mid-Atlantic Bike Ride

Photo 1 Caption: Shawntina Gibson celebrates the finish of an arduous 335-mile bike ride over five days.

Photo 2 Caption: Nick Resurreccion and Shawntina bask in the satisfaction of a job well done. Note Mile Marker 0 (zero) in lower right corner.



Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group President Shawntina Gibson arrived at mile marker 0.0 in the Washington, DC, neighborhood of Georgetown this past Monday afternoon after riding 335 miles on a tandem bike that she began four days earlier in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Together with her pilot, Nick Resurreccion of Baltimore, Maryland, Shawntina dismounted from her bike like she was ready to begin another 335 miles.



"I feel great!" she said. "Yesterday and the-day-before yesterday were the most difficult, but maybe the excitement of finishing gave me some new energy and adrenaline today." Nick echoed Shawntina's sentiments about the additional energy, emphasizing that the journey was relatively free of adversity. There were no mechanical issues with the tandem bike,

including flat tires, so that all their energy could be dedicated to the ride itself.

“I brought six extra tubes with me, and we didn’t use even one of them—not a single flat tire or any problem whatsoever with the tandem bike,” Nick said.

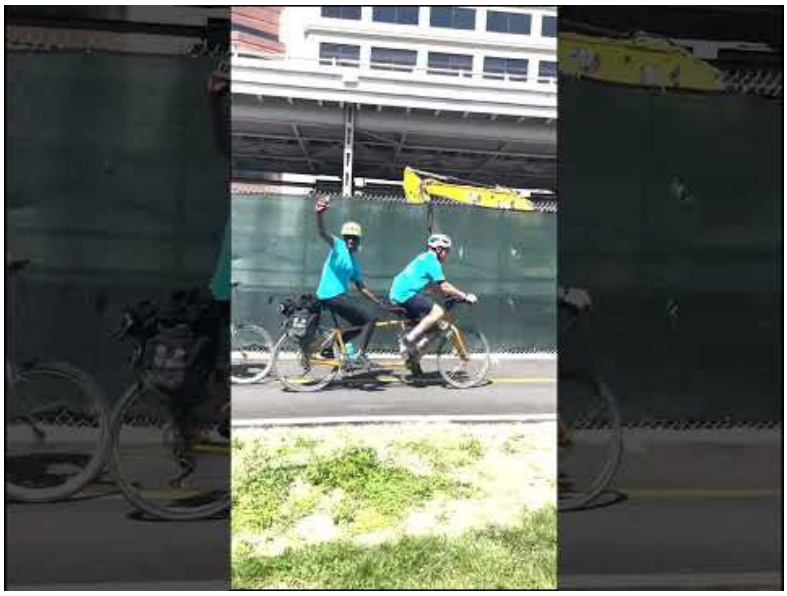
The pair was accompanied on a portion of the journey by Iraqi blinded veteran Joey Martinez and pilot Tim Quigg. They were supported with supplies and encouragement by dedicated helpers from Team River Runner of southern Maryland—Aubre Watrus and Celiann Gonzalez.

“This trip is part of a much larger personal journey that I started a few years ago,” Shawntina said prior to the adventure. “Things come together for me to do things like this when I demonstrate my desire by looking for opportunities and then pursuing them with all the energy and enthusiasm I can muster,” she said.



Shawntina promises to share more details about her experience for a future edition of **BVA Happenings** and the **BVA Bulletin**.

Photo 3 Caption: Left to right Shawntina’s companions and supporting cast: Nick Resurreccion, Aubre Watrus, Joey Martinez, Tim Quigg, Shawntina, Celiann Gonzalez, and guide dog Ollie.



Video Caption: With less than a quarter mile to her final ride destination, Shawntina pauses briefly in the homestretch to greet BVA staff members who were working at National Headquarters less than seven miles away.

Video Link: https://youtube.com/shorts/DKGDJ4YDqCQ?feature=share

BARD Services and BVA's Book Club Interest Group

Most of the subscribers to **BVA Happenings** are likely aware that the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), Library of Congress, administers a free national library program that provides Braille and recorded materials to people who cannot see regular print or handle print materials.

BVA members who have participated in Team BVA's Book Club Interest Group at any point have probably read the selected monthly book using a service knowns as Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD), a free online service to blind and low vision veterans that provides access to hundreds of thousands of special-format books, magazines, and music materials in compressed digital audio and electronic Braille formats available only to NLS patrons. The site is password-protected.

BARD contains 200,000 total items. These include significantly more than 100,000 books in audio, nearly 20,000 books in electronic Braille, 20,000 magazine issues, and nearly 10,000 music collection items. Eligibility for BARD must be preceded by an application to NLS. Any resident of the United States or an American citizen living abroad who is unable to read or use regular materials because of a temporary or permanent visual, physical, perceptual, or reading disability may apply for service.

BVA members can apply for NLS service by requesting an application online or by directly contacting the NLS network library that serves their state or locality. They can also complete a printable application form and send it to their NLS network library. Applications are available in English and Spanish. The application must be signed by a competent authority, one of which could be a staff member at a VA Blind Rehabilitation Center, where many blinded veterans are introduced to the service and end up applying. Other competent authorities are medical doctors, doctors of osteopathy, ophthalmologists, optometrists, registered nurses, and therapists.

BVA Southern California Regional Group President Cheri Owen recently reported that a BVA member requested a refresher course and some directions for BARD Express at one of the group's meetings. Cheri is in the process of creating a streamlined course. However, until she is finished developing the module, she recommends a YouTube video entitled BARD Express Basics, the hyperlink to which is embedded in the last of the buttons below. The video, Cheri said, is extremely useful to anyone interested in securing talking books through NLS.

Request NLS Information and Apply for Services

BARD Individual Application

BARD Express Basics

May is Healthy Vision Month



Credible surveys and educated estimates provided by the National Eye Institute (NEI) and the Prevention of Blindness Society suggest that BVA members are far from being alone in their experience with sight loss. By 2030, in fact, approximately 4.2 million Americans will have glaucoma, 11.5 million people will have diabetic retinopathy, and 2.8 million will have age-related macular degeneration. More than 37 million Americans have age-related eye conditions that can lead to vision loss or even legal blindness.

Healthy Vision Month is now recognized every year in May to stress the importance of eye health. The designation was established by NEI in 2003 and aims to spread awareness and educate people about the risks of ignoring the health of their eyes. It encourages them to go for regular eye checkups and not wait for eye problems to arise before they do.

Another NEI survey brought the estimate to more than 23 million Americans aged 18 and above who have never undergone an eye exam. Most of that large population apparently believes that they do not have an eye problem, an attitude that can result in serious consequences in the future.

The first known record for the treatment of eye diseases dates to the Ebers Papyrus from Egypt in 1550 B.C. Another early medical text that had extensive information about eye treatment was the "Sushruta Samhita," an Indian text that is considered one of the pillars of Ayurveda, dating back to the 6th century B.C. The ancient Greeks also made key advances

in the understanding of the human eye. The Middle Ages saw the use of microscopes and lenses to examine the eye and its structure.

Georg Joseph Beer, an Austrian ophthalmologist and surgeon, was responsible for pioneering the Beer's operation as a treatment for cataracts. In 1931, Vladimir Petrovich Filatov became the first person to perform a successful cornea transplant. Charles Schepens founded the Retina Foundation in 1950 (now known as Schepens Eye Research Institute). Ioannis Pallikaris, a Greek surgeon, performed the first LASIK surgery in 1989.

Healthy Vision Month encourages everyone to schedule comprehensive dilated eye exams, to know their family history, and to adopt protective eye habits to prevent blindness, such as wearing sunglasses or protective glasses when engaging in home repairs or sports. The campaign also encourages eating a healthy diet.

Remembering the Bittersweetness of V-E Day



Because the month of May is Military Appreciation Month, almost by default, it becomes host to several military holidays and observances in the United States and overseas. Just as BVA's founding goes back 81 years to reflect the end of World War II, the 81st anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, or V-E Day, should also be recognized for doing the same. Others include Military Spouses Appreciation Day, Armed Services Day, and Memorial Day. **BVA Happenings** recognizes each of these throughout the month beginning today.

First up is today's 81st anniversary of V-E Day, marking the German surrender and the end of six years of conflict and devastation in Europe. Although the United States and Japan remained at war until August, V-E Day in Europe 81 years ago saw millions throughout the world celebrating in street parties, dancing, and singing. The relief came in realizing that, finally, the intense strain of total war was apparently ending.

V-E Day 80 in the United Kingdom was the name of the four-day 80th anniversary celebrations there last year. It was commemorated with events across the British Isles, including a military procession and fly-past in London, a service at Westminster Abbey, a two-minute national silence, and a concert at Horse Guards Parade (the official entrance to St. James and Buckingham Palace). Local communities and schools also hosted events and activities throughout the week.

Although commemorations are greatly lessened this year, they still recall the magnitude of the events of 1945. As the war essentially ended for the British, a crowd of 50,000 packed

Piccadilly Circus waving flags. A national holiday was declared, and there was dancing in the street and singing. At 3:00pm, Prime Minister Winston Churchill broadcast from the War Cabinet Office to tell the nation war was over. It was the same room Neville Chamberlain had announced that the country was at war in 1939.

King George VI also spoke to the nation on the radio, paying tribute to those who had "laid down their lives" during the war. The Royal Family made eight appearances during the day, waving to crowds on the balcony at Buckingham Palace. The two young princesses – Elizabeth and Margaret – even slipped out of the Palace to join the crowds.

Some had started the celebrations early and didn't wait for the official celebrations on May 8. For those who lost loved ones, it was somewhat different. Despite the relief that the war was over and had been won, many widows and other family members overcome with grief reportedly could still not bring themselves to take part. Those tremendous losses are what made V-E Day a bittersweet day not only in Europe but in all of the Allied nations.

Celebrating Wives and Husbands on National Military Spouse Appreciation Day



Like members of the Marine Corps, there is no such thing as a former military spouse! Once a military spouse, always one. Today, BVA recognizes the spouses of BVA members, now veterans, but who once wore the uniform. Their spouses will forever be worthy of the designation military spouse. Today is National Military Spouse Appreciation Day, appropriately observed annually on the Friday before Mother's Day.

In Proclamation 5184 of April 17, 1984, President Ronald Reagan acknowledged the countless sacrifices and contributions made by military spouses since the days of the Continental Army and Navy in putting aside their personal and professional aspirations for a service member's spouse. In 1999, Congress made National Military Spouse Appreciation Day part of National Military Appreciation Month throughout May.

America's military spouses are the backbone of the families who support the troops during mission deployments, reintegration, reset, not to mention the continuous daily challenges. Military spouses are silent heroes essential to the nation's strength, and they most invariably serve with the same loyalty and determination as their loved ones.

President Barack Obama commonly used the phrase "the force behind the force" to describe military spouses. He highlighted this concept in April 2011 while announcing the "Joining Forces" initiative, emphasizing that the strength of the military depends on the support of their families.

Two longtime dedicated current BVA volunteers, Robert Murphy and Jeanie Murphy, respectively the BVA Auxiliary Reporter and BVA's Heartland Regional Group President, were both military spouses and service members at the same time—and of course spouses of each other!

Newly Released *Visions of BVA* Episode Highlights Meta Ray-Ban Glasses

"Seeing through Sound: Real-World Independence with Meta Ray-Ban Smart Glasses," a fresh episode of **Visions of BVA**, became available on May 1. In the episode, podcast host Steve Baskis shares a real-world, experience-driven look at the Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses from the perspective of a blinded veteran. From everyday use and entertainment to reading, communication, live translation, and object recognition, Steve describes how the glasses perform in actual situations.

During the episode, listeners hear audio demonstrations that highlight how the glasses respond in real time. Steve also explores how the product works alongside tools and apps such as Be My Eyes, Aira, and OOrion, and where they fit into the broader ecosystem of assistive technology. The episode provides an open-minded look at both the strengths and limitations of the glasses and how they can enhance independence when used as part of a larger toolkit.

Visions of BVA is a deep dive into the inspiring stories of the organization and its members, accounts of resilience, and the achievements of blind and low vision veterans. Each episode features interviews, discussions on life-changing technology, and a glimpse into the BVA community. The episodes are all available via **Apple Podcasts**, **Spotify**, and **YouTube**.

Sight Loss and Tips for Social Connection

As Senior Coordinator of Low Vision Programs at the Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington and herself visually impaired, Tara Aziz composes brief but insightful articles that offer suggestions to blind and low vision veterans. BVA is on the receiving end of the Society's publication, **Seeing Hope TODAY**, which runs Tara's articles and illustrates her wisdom and experience.

In the most recent **Seeing Hope TODAY** (May 2026), Tara asserts that one of the most awkward and frustrating aspects of sight loss isn't bumping into furniture but bumping into people socially and hearing their friendly hello, only to think, "Wonderful, but who are you?" While the sighted world is still inept at interacting with blind people, Tara believes that the strategic steps taken by the blind or low vision can compensate for their trepidation and replace it with confidence, humor, and a willingness to leave their comfort zone, at least temporarily.

Social Connection with Low Vision

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.

Ambassadog Scoop Series Courtesy of Waymo

May Ambassadog Calvin Debuts and Hits the Links



My name is Calvin, and I currently guide BVA member Kevin. I am a black labrador retriever, and I trained at the Guide Dog Foundation with some extra sidekick training at America's VetDogs. In darkness I see, and in daylight I lead, forever navigating the perils of daily sight in between naps and collecting balls that escape.

Humans say that my personality shines and that I have "bowlfuls" of nicknames and achievements. I will share those with you in **BVA Happenings** throughout the month of May. But first, some very important news: On May 11, Dad (Kevin) and I will be hitting the links as members of the

Pacific Northwest team participating in the 2026 PGA Hope Secretary's Cup in Philadelphia at Chester Valley Golf Club, following some practice rounds beginning tomorrow.

The adventure starting this weekend will be life-changing for us and will demonstrate what is possible regardless of sight loss. I'm armed and ready with my Oakley Meta AI glasses and promise to deliver a full report when we return!

VA Insider

"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. However, most of the ceremonies are planned for Memorial Day itself, May 25. Start times vary. "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. Read yesterday's VA press release and stay tuned for additional information in **BVA Happenings** on specific locations for the events as details become available during the next two weeks.

VA, Nonprofits Team Up to Honor Veterans during "Memorial May"

Move Yourself to Achieve Whole Health in May!

The Whole Health theme for May is "Moving for Your Whole Health" with a focus on the role that moving the body plays in improving mental and physical well-being. Digital resources, primarily videos and webpages, communicate the benefits of an active lifestyle and some ways in which veterans can get started.

Many activities that include moving the body, including yoga, tai chi, strength training, and aerobics, can be modified for people with limited mobility due to chronic pain or injury. The upcoming VA2K Walk and Roll is a good example.

The VA2K Walk and Roll is a two-kilometer walk that promotes active lifestyles, providing VA employees, veterans, and community members with the opportunity, while participating, to simultaneously support homeless veterans through voluntary donations of food and clothing items. The 16th annual event will be held at VA Medical Centers nationwide during May. Last year's VA2K attracted more than 27,000 participants and raised more than $250,000 in donations. For more details about this year's events, click the button below.

VA2K

Next Week's Events

Adaptive Sports and Activities Group

The link above provides access to the BVA calendar, which in turn offers a link to the meeting.

Date and Time: May 12 (Tuesday), 7:00pm Eastern Time

Meeting ID: 894 8328 4992**, Passcode:** 1945

The virtual session will welcome staff members of Steamboat Adaptive Sports (STARS). They will describe upcoming veteran-specific summer opportunities at the Colorado facility and then field questions from attendees. The meeting presents an opportunity to connect, learn, and discover new adaptive sports opportunities outside of the VA-sponsored events. In addition, all BVA members who signed up to participate in the upcoming Golden Age Games are urged by Interest Group leader Anthony Woodson to attend this session. Anthony will set up a Google chat room, and additional information about the Games will be provided.

VetTech and Educational Series

The link above provides access to the BVA calendar, which in turn offers a link to the meeting.

Date and Time: May 13 (Wednesday), 3:00pm Eastern Time

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

"Notetaking Showcase" is the subject of the virtual session. Discover practical, real-world ways to capture information and stay organized as a blind or low vision notetaker. Attendees will explore simple, low-tech options and work up to powerful high-tech tools. They will leave the session with ideas that they can begin using right away to keep up with

appointments, reminders, lists, and details that are seemingly small but still critically important.