

## **DAV Battle Buddy program:**

Battle Buddies Oklahoma is a DAV sponsored program for incarcerated veterans . It was started in 2012 by Maj Gen (ret) Rita Aragon, former State Secretary of Veteran Affairs.

The program is composed of all veteran volunteers and the program is designed to:

- File claims for veterans and file for apportionment if requested
- Enroll veterans for health care.
- Request copies of discharge papers, medical records, personnel files, awards and decorations and file for discharge upgrades if applicable
- Assisting the veteran in making a successful transition to the “outside” by
  - Assigning a veteran mentor to help the veteran cope with the “outside”
  - Providing information regarding employers who will hire felons
  - Providing information regarding eligible housing
  - Helping the veteran obtain specific needs, *e.g.* therapy or service dogs

Buddies will not be a taxi service for the released veterans, nor will they be a bank and lend money to the released veteran.

Representatives from Battle Buddies visit the prisons several times during the year and we encourage the formation of veteran groups inside the prison, with the approval of the warden, who meet at least monthly and decide on projects that will help themselves and the community. We currently have veteran groups in fourteen of the seventeen prisons and some of the projects by the various groups are:

- Crocheting a flag Afghan (See photo) for the families of fallen soldiers in Oklahoma (it needs to be noted that the veterans in this group use their funds for purchasing materials and they pay the shipping costs of the items). They also crochet bears and beanies for the children of our fallen soldiers
- Crocheting lap blankets for veterans in wheelchairs
- Repairing wheelchairs and making canes for veterans
- Growing vegetables for the homeless (last year this group grew 1,800 lbs. for the homeless)
- Assisting a local high school with decorations for their high school prom. This group made a city out of cardboard and potato chip bags!!
- Another group makes cards for the elderly in nursing homes and they have developed a program whereby they communicate with elderly veterans in our nursing homes.
- Another veterans group sold Lil Debbies and raised over two thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) for veterans homes.

There are approximately one thousand (1,000) incarcerated veterans in the program and the recidivism rate for the program is less than 1% so far!!!

If you are interested in becoming a Battle Buddy to help incarcerated veterans, please contact Ron Pandos at [rondo1339@yahoo.com](mailto:rondo1339@yahoo.com). They can use more members to grow this wonderful program