

# VETERANS JOURNAL



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*Summer 2007 Issue*

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The information in this journal is being provided to make the veteran community aware of some current events, activities and veterans issues that are of mutual concern. From time to time, we will include some relevant information important enough to be repeated, to insure that veterans and their families are aware of the full range of benefits and entitlements available to them.

*"Let us not seek the  
Republican answer or the  
Democratic answer but  
the right answer."  
~ John F. Kennedy ~*



## Red Cross Warns of Scam

(Armed Forces Press Service)

The American Red Cross is warning military spouses about a new identity-theft scam that targets family members of deployed troops.

The scam involves a caller telling the military spouse that her husband was hurt in Iraq and was medically evacuated to Germany. The caller, who identifies herself as

a representative of the Red Cross, then says that doctors can't start treatment until paperwork is completed, and that to start the paperwork they need the spouse to verify her husband's social security number and date of birth.

A spokesperson for the Red Cross said it is hard to determine how many spouses have been targeted by this scam, as there are many ways for spouses to report problems like this, but one confirmed report was enough for the Red Cross to act.

American Red Cross representatives typically do not contact military members or dependents directly and almost always go through a commander or first sergeant, according to a Red Cross news release. Military family members are urged not to give out any personal information over the phone if contacted by unknown individuals, including confirmation that their spouse is deployed.

In addition, Red Cross representatives contact military members or dependents directly

only in response to an emergency message initiated by a family member, the news release said. The Red Cross does not report any type of casualty information to family members; the Defense Department will contact families directly about family members' injuries.

It is a federal crime, punishable by up to five years in prison, for a person to fraudulently pretend to be a member of, or an agent for, the American Red Cross for the purpose of soliciting, collecting, or receiving money or material, according to the news release. Any military family member that receives such a call is urged to report it to their local family readiness group or local military personnel office.



## Pro Bono Services Offered to Wounded Warriors

(Air Force Times)

Three national law firms have agreed to provide free legal representation for combat-injured service members at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington and National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., as they try to navigate the complicated military disability rating process.

A formal announcement is expected Wednesday about a partnership between the law firms and Disabled American Veterans to provide the legal help.

"Investigative reports have revealed a significant number of cases where the U.S. military appears to have assigned low disability ratings to service members with serious injuries and thus avoided paying them full military disabled retirement benefits," the DAV said in a prepared statement. "This partnership has been created to help protect the rights of those injured soldiers who have given so much of themselves to protect us."

The three law firms have all done substantial pro bono work on other issues, but have joined DAV after complaints about problems with the military's disability system, which determines such things as whether a service member receiving a one-time separation benefit or monthly payments for life if they must leave the military because of disabilities.

The firms are Foley & Lardner LLP; LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae LLP; and King & Spalding LLP. Each of the firms has offices around the world.

While the free legal aid applies only to those in the Washington area,

DAV officials said they consider this a test of what could become a larger, nationwide program.

The House of Representatives has approved legislation that would require the government to provide legal help for injured service members facing the disability evaluation and ratings process, once as a separate bill and later as part of the 2008 defense authorization bill. The Senate has not taken up similar legislation, although Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), the Senate Armed Services Committee chairman, said he expects a bill to improve benefits for service members injured in combat will be prepared later this year, separate from the annual defense policy bill.

The House-passed plan, called the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act of 2007, requires assignment of an independent advocate to any service member facing the disability evaluation process. The advocate would not be a lawyer but rather a medical professional.



## Survivors and Relatives of MIA's Sought

The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, which conducts recovery missions overseas, has used mitochondrial DNA to help identify remains of soldier since the mid 1990's. The agency needs DNA samples from family members of servicemen who served but did not come home in order to identify discovered remains. The agency maintains a list of servicemen it needs DNA samples for on its Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command website, and family members are encouraged to contact the casualty office of the branch of service to

which their loved one belonged in order to submit a DNA sample. You may also call the JPAC public affairs office at Hickam Air Force Base at 808-448-1934.

## VA to Establish Nursing Academy

(VA Press Release)

To address a shortage of nurses across the nation and ensure that veterans continue to receive personalized, world-class care in Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, VA has announced creation of a new, pilot multi-campus Nursing Academy.

VA has one of the largest nursing staffs of any health care system in the world, with about 61,000 registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, vocational nurses and nursing assistants at the Department's 153 medical centers and nearly 900 clinics.

A five-year, \$40 million pilot program will establish partnerships with 12 nursing schools across the country during the next three years, beginning with four for the 2007-2008 academic year. The VA nursing academy is a virtual organization with central administration in Washington and teaching at competitively selected nursing schools across the country that partner with VA.

VA currently provides clinical education to nearly 100,000 health professional trainees annually, including students from more than 600 schools of nursing.

Despite a nationwide shortage of nurses, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing has reported that more than 42,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in 2006 because of insufficient numbers of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space and clinical mentors.

Further information about the pilot program can be obtained from VA's Office of Academic Affiliations Web site at [www.va.gov/oa](http://www.va.gov/oa).

## Veterans' Ills May Show MS Link to Gulf War (LCJ)

By Laura Ungar  
[Louisville Courier-Journal](#),  
June 3, 2007

Possible connection is subject of studies, legislation Bob Wolz blamed dehydration and the blazing sun for his mysterious blackouts during the first Gulf War.

But he had no idea what to think when his left arm and leg got weaker and thinner than his right limbs. The problems continued after he returned home, and last year, two years after retiring from the military, doctors diagnosed Wolz with multiple sclerosis -- which the Army veteran now considers a lingering wound from his first tour of duty.

"I was exposed to something," he said. Wolz, of Rineyville, Ky., is among a growing number of Gulf War veterans who have developed the chronic neurological disease, suggesting a possible connection to toxic substances or other environmental triggers during wartime.

That possible link, hinted at in a couple of past studies, is the subject of new research, funding efforts and legislation. A Georgetown University doctor who identified more than 5,000 service-connected MS cases is now looking specifically at veterans of the Gulf War in 1991.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is pushing for \$15 million in research funding for the Department of Defense. And a bill before Congress would help veterans with MS get disability benefits more easily.

Backing up such efforts is a study published in 2005 showing that MS among Kuwaitis more than doubled between 1993 and 2000.

So far, there are no firm statistics on the number of Gulf War veterans with MS. But Julie Mock of Washington state, president of an advocacy group called Veterans of Modern Warfare, said she knows of at least 600 nationwide and gets calls and e-mails from new sufferers every day.

"People are coming out of the woodwork," said Mock, a 40-year-old Gulf War veteran with MS. Wolz, 42, is not surprised that other soldiers who served in the Gulf struggle with the illness. Looking back, he recalls several possible triggers, from anthrax vaccinations to chemical exposure. He was a decontamination specialist with a chemical unit, and was in Kuwait when the Iraqi oil wells burned; turning the sky so black he couldn't tell whether it was night or day.

Experts said studying veterans like Wolz could have wide implications for the 400,000 Americans with MS, which has no known cause. Dr. John Richert of the MS society echoed others, saying that finding an environmental trigger "would break new ground," pointing the way toward better treatments or even a cure. MS takes its toll on a recent morning, Wolz sat at the edge of the examining table at the Louisville Veterans Affairs Medical Center as Dr. Manjari Motaparathi checked the strength and feeling on both sides of his body.

She asked him to follow her finger with his eyes, lightly touched his cheeks, then pressed on his left leg and noted, "It's a little bit weak here."

"It hasn't gotten better," he told her. "It hasn't gotten worse, either ... well, maybe a little bit."

Over the years, MS has taken its toll. In addition to losing muscle tissue, Wolz can't stand the heat, is prone to falls and has memory problems that he copes with by

writing notes to himself. Wolz said he hasn't had trouble getting military benefits for his disability, as some vets have. But getting diagnosed wasn't easy, he said. None of the doctors he visited at military bases and in war zones found any serious problems. Then, after Wolz retired from the Army in 2004, his family doctor in Elizabethtown told him he might have suffered a small stroke. He was referred to a physical therapist at the VA, who disagreed and suggested more tests.

A scan confirmed MS, which occurs when a fatty tissue that helps nerve fibers conduct electrical impulses -- called myelin -- is lost. Wolz had the most common type, relapsing-remitting, which is characterized by flare-ups and recoveries.

The main treatment, giving himself shots of interferon beta-1 three times a week, has proved difficult. "It took 45 minutes before I could even do it the first time," said Wolz, who is now working as a military analyst. "I do not like needles." Dr. Stephen Kirzinger, medical director of the University of Louisville's MS Care Center program, said he is intrigued by the research exploring the connection between MS and the Gulf War, since he has treated several veterans at his local clinics. MS is thought to be an autoimmune disease related at least partly to genetics, and is more common among women and people who spent their mid-teenage years in northern climates. While researchers have long suspected a trigger, they have mostly considered infectious agents such as viruses.

42 But the Georgetown study, led by Dr. Mitchell T. Wallin and published in the *Annals of Neurology* in 2003, said the higher than-normal MS rates found among veterans who served from 1960 to 1994 "strongly imply a primary environmental factor in the cause or precipitation of this disease."

Other studies, which looked more generally at the collection of problems dubbed "Gulf War Syndrome," mention the possible dangers of oil-well smoke, vaccines

and sarin from the destruction of weapons. Army Times reported last month that researchers at Boston University have all but determined exposure to sarin gas in 1991 is the cause of Gulf War Syndrome.

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Mock said she thinks scientists will find a link because the anecdotal evidence is undeniable. Among a detachment of 60 people who served with her in southern Iraq, she said, "there were three of us within 100 feet of each other" who now have MS. Benefits and research as research continues, so do efforts to help these veterans.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., reintroduced a bill in March to help them qualify for VA disability benefits. The legislation would remove a seven-year limit veterans now face for connecting their MS to military service after an honorable discharge. The bill would also ensure the condition is presumed to be caused by military service if diagnosed later.

Congress is also expected to decide by August about giving the Defense Department the \$15 million in federal research funding. Shawn O'Neil, associate vice president of federal government relations for the MS society, said the money would go to the department's Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs, which would distribute it using a peer-reviewed application process "with a preference given to combat service" studies.

"It's definitely something that needs to be researched further," O'Neil said. "Whatever the benefits of the research are, they could be applied to everyone with MS."

Meanwhile, Wolz continues his personal battle. Motaparathi called his prognosis "favorable" and said he may be able to keep the disease at current levels if the injections continue working. Nothing is assured, however; half the people

with his type of MS go on to develop another type in which the disease steadily gets worse.

Wolz's wife, Linda, said although her husband is dealing well with the disease, it has changed family dynamics. Their children are gentler toward her husband, she said, more like parents. "I get worried when he's here alone," said daughter Bianca, 16. "I don't want him to fall." Wolz tries not to dwell on the possibility that he may someday need a wheelchair to get around safely, or that MS will compromise his future.

"If I focus on that, I can't focus on fighting it," he said. "I have too many things I want to do in life."

Reporter Laura Ungar can be reached at (502) 582-7190.



**Governor Signs  
Executive Order  
Creating a Council to  
Prepare for Cabinet-  
level Veterans  
Department**

**Columbus, OH** – Governor Ted Strickland today signed an executive order creating a council that will develop a plan to establish a cabinet-level Ohio Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Ohio veterans have bravely and honorably served our nation around the world," Strickland said. "This executive order lays the foundation to ensure Ohio's veterans and their families will always have a strong voice in state government."

The 22-member study council will identify existing state services that are provided to veterans and their

families; examine ways in which state services to veterans and their families can be aligned and reorganized into a new cabinet-level department; and compile these findings in a report of recommendations that the governor will receive by no later than December 31, 2007.

The governor appointed Merle Pratt to serve as chair of the council. Additionally, the council will consist of representatives from a wide spectrum of veterans organizations as well as public officials.

Pratt is currently the director of constituent services and the veterans/military and fraternal liaison for Ohio Attorney General Marc Dann. He chairs the Ohio Attorney General Office Veterans Advisory Council, and is a past chairman and current member of the Governor's Veterans Advisory Committee. Pratt served in the U.S. Navy as a Chief Petty Officer, retiring after 26 years of service.

**Veterans Encouraged  
to Wear Military Medals  
on Memorial Day**

To show pride in military service and help teach younger generations about the value of serving our nation, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson urges veterans across the country to pin on their military medals on Memorial Day, May 28.

"Wearing their medals demonstrates the deep pride our veterans have in their military service," said Nicholson. "It also reminds all American citizens -- especially the young -- about the sacrifices our veterans have made for their freedom." He encouraged veterans to display their medals no matter what they are doing on Memorial Day, but especially when attending public events.

Nicholson said he believes the movement will become a tradition. Nicholson first urged veterans to wear their military decorations last

Veterans Day under a program called "Veterans Pride Initiative." About 24 million living Americans have served in the armed forces, with nearly 18 million wearing the uniforms of the U.S. military during times of war and conflict.

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Nicholson said he hopes veterans will wear their medals on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and Veterans Day, and when attending other patriotic events. NAUS and other major U.S. veterans organizations have endorsed the Veterans Pride Initiative. For more information, go to VA's Web site at <http://www.va.gov/veteranspride/>.

This site also has instructions for veterans seeking to replace lost or mislaid medals, and/or confirm the decorations to which they are entitled.

## Operation Homefront Can Help

Has your spouse recently deployed? Are things just a bit too much to handle right now? The mission of Operation Homefront is to care for deployed servicemembers, the families they leave behind, and wounded troops. The organization offers emergency funding to help cover rent, utilities and everyday expenses, with some exceptions. Goods and services, such as food, baby care items, and vehicle and appliance repair, also are offered. Operation Homefront provides many programs that boost the morale on the home front, which include providing assistance with moving, donating certain appliances, hosting community events, and donating computers and digital cameras to help keep families in touch with deployed servicemembers. For more information, visit the [Operation Homefront website](#).



## Care Package Operation Resumes

Operation Gratitude's fourth "Patriotic Drive" to send care packages to troops serving overseas begins this week. Volunteers began assembling the packages during the Memorial Day weekend and will continue to do through July 1, 2007. The group has shipped more than 210,000 packages in the last four years and expects it will send another 50,000-60,000 packages during this drive. The organization welcomes donations of all items on our wish list and especially would like donations of DVDs, CDs, Beanie Babies, "Bandana Cool-ties" or mini fans, small packages of beef jerky, and personal letters of appreciation.

NAUS encourages anyone who wants to provide support for our troops and is unsure what they can do, to become involved in this worthwhile endeavor. For more information, visit the [Operation Gratitude website](#).



## New Stamps Unveiled

The U.S. Postal Service unveiled two stamps featuring military aircraft at the Joint Service Open House at Andrews Air Force Base, MD, on May 18. Air Force One, the President's Boeing 747 jetliner, appears on the \$4.60 priority mail stamp, while Marine One, the presidential helicopter, is shown on the \$16.25 Express Mail stamp.

The stamps will be available June 13.



## VA Under Secretaries for Health, Congressional and Legislative Affairs Confirmed

After last week's Update had already been sent NAUS learned that the U.S. Senate had confirmed appointments of two experienced veterans' advocates to top jobs at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) where they will serve as VA's senior physician and chief of congressional affairs. The senate confirmed Dr. Michael J. Kussman as Under Secretary for Health and Thomas E. Harvey as Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs.

Dr. Kussman, a native of Troy, N.Y., joined VA in 2000. Among his VA positions, he has served as Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health and since August 2006 as Acting Under Secretary for Health. A graduate of Boston University Medical School, he is a retired Army brigadier general who spent more than 25 years on active duty. He commanded the Walter Reed Health Care System and the European Regional Medical Command.

Harvey, who holds a law degree from the University of Notre Dame, commanded an airborne infantry company during the Vietnam War. He holds the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. He was deputy administrator of VA's predecessor

organization, the Veterans Administration, from 1986 to 1989. A former chief counsel and staff director for the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, he has also been General Counsel for the U.S. Information Agency, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisitions and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Logistics.

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## Avandia in the VA System

As you have heard, a recent study of the diabetes medicine Avandia casts some doubt on its use. The following statement has been issued by the VA in response to the many patient inquiries from those who are on the medicine within the VA system:

**“Issue:** The New England Journal of Medicine report and editorial on the increased risk of heart attacks and death associated with the use of Avandia (rosiglitazone).

**Background:** A recent New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) article regarding the increased risk of heart attack and cardiovascular death is generating inquiries from the media, from VA staff and from VA patients. It is possible that the article raises more questions than it provides answers to in regard to the relative safety of rosiglitazone.

**Discussion:** The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a Safety Alert on the use of rosiglitazone and is

planning an advisory meeting to further explore the issues raised in the NEJM article and likely will issue further information and/or recommendations in this area: <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01636.html>.

Similarly, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will conduct a retrospective review of the use of rosiglitazone within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). VA will use its own review data and any additional information available from the FDA to evaluate whether or not changes to VA's Criteria for Use for rosiglitazone are warranted.

Fortunately, VA has had evidence-based Criteria for Use in place for rosiglitazone for quite some time and the use of this drug within VA has been much less widespread than may be the case in the private sector. In VA, rosiglitazone use has been reserved for patients for whom other therapies are determined to be less clinically appropriate.

**Summary:** Based on VA's judicious use of rosiglitazone, as well as the absence of FDA confirmation of the clinical significance of the findings reported in the NEJM, at this time VA is not recommending system-wide changes on the use of rosiglitazone. Any interactions between veteran patients and their VA physicians about discontinuing the use of rosiglitazone should include a discussion about the limits of the NEJM article as well as the known and unknown risks of alternate therapies under consideration.”

## VA To Open 38 New CBOCs

On Tuesday the VA announced that it would be opening 38 new Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) by October of 2008.

Local VA officials will keep communities and their veterans informed of the openings of the new CBOCs.

The new community clinics were announced for the following:

**Alabama** --Childersburg  
**Arkansas** --Pine Bluff  
**Florida** -- Jackson and Putnam  
**Georgia** -- Camden and Stockbridge  
**Idaho** -- North Idaho  
**Indiana** -- Elkhart County and Knox  
**Iowa** -- Carroll, Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown and Shenandoah  
**Kansas** -- Hutchison  
**Kentucky** -- Berea, Daviess and Grayson County  
**Maryland** -- Andrews Air Force Base and Ft. Detrick  
**Michigan** -- Alpena County and Clare County  
**Missouri** -- Branson and Jefferson City  
**Montana** -- Cut Bank and Lewistown  
**Nebraska** -- Bellevue  
**South Carolina** -- Aiken and Spartanburg  
**South Dakota** -- Wagner and Watertown  
**Ohio** -- Hamilton and Parma  
**Tennessee** -- Hawkins and Madison  
**Utah** -- Western Salt Lake Valley  
**Virginia** -- Charlottesville  
**Washington** -- Northwest  
**West Virginia** -- Monongalia



Dear Friends,

It's amazing what God's Blessings and the support of dedicated people can do in two years. Last Saturday, 21 April 2007, Honor Flight Columbus, Honor Flight Dayton and Honor Flight Michigan took to the skies. By the end of the day, **139** WWII Veterans had visited THEIR memorial and were transported safely back to their families. During the entire first year of Honor Flight, we flew a grand total of 137 veterans.

In about 9 days, we'll be flying 550+ veterans and guardians into Washington DC. This will be about as many as we flew during our entire second year. Jeff Miller and his hard working crew with HonorAir out of Hendersonville, NC and Paul McSweeney's Hero Flight group in Provo Utah have taken this program throughout the United States. As of today, **1,044** WWII Veterans have now visited America's "Thank You" for their service, for NOTHING. That

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is correct -FREE. Our goal for 2007 is that 5000 WWII Veterans can say they personally know how much they are revered and loved by this nation.

So far, the Honor Flight Network is in 10 states and spreading. I am asking for your help to make the dreams of thousands of WWII Veterans come true. Please lend us your support by:

1. Remembering our veterans in your prayers. Please pray for the safe travel of our senior heroes and their guardians, flight crews, flight attendants, etc.
2. Praying for our program. We need more financial, organizational, volunteer, and corporate support as we continue to grow.
3. Supporting those who are as committed as we are. Jeff Miller, Paul McSweeney and other program leaders are sincerely grateful to their local supporters as well. Our program would NOT be were we are today without the help of the following:

The Scooter Store  
<http://www.thescooterstore.com>  
Rotech Healthcare  
[www.rotech.com](http://www.rotech.com)  
MacAulay-Brown  
[www.macb.com/about-us/company-info.php](http://www.macb.com/about-us/company-info.php)  
Ohio VFW [www.ohiovfw.org](http://www.ohiovfw.org)  
Virginia American Legion  
[www.valegion.org](http://www.valegion.org)

Please visit our web site [www.honorflight.org](http://www.honorflight.org) for more information about programs across the country. We need everyone's help.

Earl Morse, Captain, USAF Retired  
Physician Assistant - Certified,  
MPAS  
Founder of Honor Flight Inc  
Office: 937 521-2400  
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## Connect with wounded warriors

Messenger  
By: Dianne Schultz

While sifting through everyday e-mails, I came across a message that stopped me in my tracks.

It was one of those e-mails that's been forwarded umpteen times asking recipients to do something to aid someone else. Unlike many such e-mails, this one didn't promise a miracle if I followed its instructions.

Instead, it simply asked me to write a letter, or 10 or 20 to our wounded American military personnel who are recuperating from injuries suffered on battlefields overseas. The letters are to be sent in care of any soldier and mailed to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Over the past decade, I've been involved in many letter writing campaigns for our military personnel. In fact, I headed up Christmas card campaigns for soldiers years before Sept. 11, 2001, brought the fall of the World

Trade Towers and changed the method we use to offer morale and material support to our military. But not once in all those years had I thought about our wounded and recovering military in hospitals here at home.

To say the least, I felt embarrassed by the message, realizing I had forgotten to acknowledge and support those who have come back to the USA wounded in body or in soul.

To say more, I felt a bit suspicious about the message. Not knowing who initiated the message, I decided to find out on my own what I can do to help.

A quick call to Walter Reed Hospital turned into several phone calls to various offices. I eventually ended up talking to someone in Walter Reed's American Red Cross service area. It took awhile, but I finally learned that it is possible to send a card of support to an unnamed soldier at the hospital, but that it must be done a specific way.

The woman on the line explained that patients at Walter Reed look forward to letters of support and encouragement, but she said such mail should be sent to them in care of the Red Cross at Walter Reed.

From there, I looked for more information on the hospital's Web site. I read that the hospital has been inundated with letters of support for "wounded warriors" returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. The hospital is also treating military personnel injured in the other fields of military, work, including from Korea to Bosnia and beyond. Additionally, some are injured in training accidents right here in the U.S. All of them could use a word from people who care.

So, here's the scoop. All letters to wounded military should be sent to the following address:

"A Recovering American Soldier"  
c/o American Red Cross

Walter Reed Army Medical Center,  
5900 Georgia Ave. NW,  
Washington, D.C. 20307-5001.

Please don't send packages. A simple letter or card of thanks will do.

Your letters of support and encouragement could mean the world to a soldier recuperating from an injury. Whether that injury is life-threatening or one that will heal in time, your letter could be the hope a soldier clings to. It could be the very letter that means the most to someone who gave all so we have the right to say, "Thanks."



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