

## VSC NAACP VETERANS NEWSLETTER Issue 7 April 2021

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### Biden Signs Sweeping New Law Allowing VA to Vaccinate All Veterans, Spouses

President Joe Biden on March 24 signed into law a sweeping new measure that supercharges the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#)' ability to vaccinate millions of Americans.

The Save Lives Act will allow the VA to vaccinate all veterans, veteran [spouses](#), caregivers and Civilian Health and Medical Program recipients, regardless of their VA eligibility. Under the law, "veteran" means any person who served in the Armed Forces and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

However, patients enrolled in VA care will get priority. About half of all 18 million living U.S. veterans are enrolled in VA care, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"This new law expands options for where veterans and their families can receive the COVID-19 vaccine, ensuring that every veteran, spouse, and caregiver will have access to the protection they need from VA," Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee said in a statement. "This bipartisan bill follows through on our shared goal of getting more shots into the arms of as many veterans as possible."

As of March 24, the VA has fully vaccinated more than 1.5 million people, including veterans and employees. Previously, only veterans enrolled in VA could get vaccinated.

The bill's signing comes during a massive concerted effort from the Biden administration to give vaccine access to as many Americans as possible, with the goal of the country starting to return to relative normalcy by Independence Day.

The legislation stipulates that veterans enrolled into VA health care will still receive priority, and the VA will offer vaccinations to the other groups only when and where the vaccine supply is available.

Veterans of all ages now may schedule vaccination appointments at Richmond and Emporia clinics operated by the Central Virginia Veterans Affairs Health Care System, officials announced March 23.

Veterans may complete a short survey located at [www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed/form](http://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed/form) to express their interest in scheduling vaccinations and receiving the vaccine.

Similar clinics in Fredericksburg (50 and older) and Charlottesville (40 and older) also are open to veterans but have age restrictions.

The system has administered more than 29,000 doses to veterans, staff and volunteers since vaccinations started in December last year.



**Brig. Gen. Mark C. Quander, Commandant of the U.S. Army Engineer School, U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, has been selected to be the 79th Commandant of Cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York announced by the Chief of Staff of the Army on Jan. 25.**

## Veteran's Home Front



Antione D. Hines, Founder and CEO, Veterans Home Front

VISION - To bridge the gap for homeless, at-risk, and transitioning veterans by connecting them to the full continuum of resources and support available to them including vet to vet programs, housing placements, employment opportunities, recreational activities, and other essential human services while ensuring that there is a cohesive

strategic plan for the delivery of the relevant services through community collaborations.

To create a systemic solution to veteran homelessness and veteran suicides through a community collaborative model of grassroots community process management, community empowerment, and veteran peer support relationships.

OVERVIEW - Veteran's Home Front (VHF) is a Virginia-based 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization established with the aim of organizing a positive, enriching environment that will lead to an improved quality of life for homeless, at-risk, and transitioning veterans in Hampton Roads, Virginia and beyond. The organization's initiatives, through partnerships with local churches and organizations, are implemented by a team of passionate volunteers, connects the veterans with the necessary resources and support with the core goals being:

- To end veteran homelessness.
- To reduce the number of veteran suicides.
- To create a collaborative, supportive, embracing community ready to accept the homeless and hurting veterans during their life transitions.

Homelessness in Hampton Roads has over the years become a serious problem both socially and economically. With the high number of organizations that cater to the needs of homeless people, the situation has not improved as it should mainly because the homeless are not informed of the organization's' existence and the

organizations are not able to efficiently deliver their services to achieve long term outcomes. Homelessness can be brought out by natural disasters, job loss, eviction, divorce, domestic violence, mental illness, medical bills, or most often as a result of substance abuse.

Antione D. Hines, Founder and CEO, Veterans Home Front

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## Air Force selects Alabama's Redstone Arsenal to house US Space Command headquarters

The Air Force has chosen Huntsville, Alabama's Redstone Arsenal to house the 1,400-member U.S. Space Command Headquarters, service and state officials said on Jan. 13.

The decision is contingent on a required environmental impact study and could be finalized by 2023, the Air Force said in a statement.

Huntsville is known as Rocket City, largely because Wernher von Braun and other rocketeers settled in the city in the 1950s to help develop the U.S. space and rockets program, according to a 2018 report by The Associated Press.

The city is still home to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center on Redstone Arsenal, responsible for civilian rocketry and spacecraft propulsion research. Huntsville is also home to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, a space exploration museum, perhaps best known as the home of Space Camp.

Space Command's establishment in 2019 was actually a re-establishment of the combatant command, after the Pentagon shuttered it in 2002 as part of the post-9/11 government restructuring. It was established just months before the newest military branch, U.S. Space Force, was founded.

Under Defense Department structure, the military services — in this case, the Space Force — are responsible for training and equipping troops who then operate under

the leadership and control of a combatant command— in this case, the Space Command. Space Force, as it grows, is expected to provide the bulk of the troops assigned to Space Command, but the other military services will also provide some troops to the command, officials have said.

Space Command is led by four-star Army Gen. James Dickinson.

Space Force, like all military services, is headquartered at the Pentagon, where it will remain. It is led by Gen. Jay Raymond, the chief of space operations.

### **SPECIAL NOTICE!**

Veterans Affairs offers the [COVID Coach](#) mobile app for veterans to support self-care and overall mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. It features education about coping during the pandemic; tools for self-care and emotional well-being; and more. The app can also help create personal support networks. For more information, visit <https://mobile.va.gov/app/covid-coach> .

### **MILITARY OFFICERS GROUP**



*Concern, Dedication, Professionalism*

The Rocks Incorporated, was founded October 9, 1974 by sixty-five United States Army officers in Washington, D.C. Headquartered in Forestville, Maryland and with over 1,100 members, it is the largest professional military officers' organization with a majority African-American membership.

Virginia chapters:

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The ROCKS, Inc. holds Leadership & Training Conferences, galas and award scholarships.

## Army makes 'Harlem Hellfighters' nickname official after more than a century



In this National Guard historic painting by H. Charles McBarron, soldiers of the 369th Infantry Regiment go into action near Sechault, France, on September 29, 1918 during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The unit was dubbed the Hellfighters by the Germans, and while the nickname has been used for more than 100 years, it was only officially recognized by the Army in September 2020.

They called themselves the “Black Rattlers” and the French dubbed them “Men of Bronze,” but the Army now officially recognizes a historic Harlem unit by what the enemy called them in World War I — the “Hellfighters.”

The “Harlem Hellfighters” is now the official special designation for the 369th Sustainment Brigade, the New York National Guard said on Jan. 30.. The unit traces its lineage to the all-Black 369th Infantry Regiment, which earned the moniker over a century ago in fierce fighting that’s been credited with helping to break down racial barriers.

The regiment was the first unit of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I that allowed Blacks to serve.

But they were denied a send-off parade with the 42nd Infantry Division, known as the “Rainbow Division,” after their commander was told they couldn’t participate because “black is not a color in the rainbow.” The soldiers fought under the French army because white American troops refused to fight alongside them.

They proved themselves in 191 days of continuous combat, suffering 1,500 dead and wounded. They outpaced their French counterparts by 7 miles in at least one offensive, and were the first French, British or American soldiers to reach the Rhine River at the end of the war.

On their return home, the unit's 3,000 soldiers were honored by throngs of New Yorkers who turned up for a victory parade up 5th Avenue in February 1919

Headquartered in the Manhattan neighborhood of Harlem, the regiment had earned 11 French citations and a unit Croix de Guerre, France’s highest military honor, which was also awarded to some 170 Hellfighters for individual acts of gallantry.

## First all-Black crew flies JSTARS surveillance mission



For the first time, an all-Black crew of 33 flew a JSTARS surveillance training mission at Robins Air Force Base, Ga., on February 19, 2021. Photo by Sgt. Nancy Goldberger/U.S. Air Force

Feb. 22 (UPI) -- An E-8C Joint Surveillance and

Target Attack Radar System exercise included a 33-person, all-Black flight crew for the first time, the U.S. Air Force said.

U.S. Air Force and Army personnel from the Georgia Air National Guard's 116th Air Control Wing, the active-duty 461st Air Control Wing and the Army's 138th Military Intelligence Company, a group known as Team JSTARS, flew from [Robins Air Force Base, Ga.](#), on a [training mission](#) on Feb. 19.

The flight was piloted by the first Black female pilot in the Georgia Air National Guard, Capt. Andrea Lewis.

Team JSTARS has been deployed since 2002, and uses a modified Boeing 707-300 commercial aircraft as an airborne battle management, command and control, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platform.

The aircraft is equipped with radar and special communications equipment, notably a 27-foot long, canoe-shaped radome hanging below the fuselage and carrying side-looking phased array antennae.

JSTARS' primary mission involves ground surveillance over land and water. [Click Here](#)

## **WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH - MARCH**

**LT. CMDR. LA'SHANDRA HOLMES, USCG**, the Coast Guard's first black woman helicopter pilot



Holmes is a helicopter pilot flying the MC-65 Dolphin who helps rescue people stranded at sea. Her other assignments have included drug and migrant interdiction as well as intercepting aircraft that pose a threat to the White House or other critical infrastructure in Washington, D. C. She is currently a congressional fellow on Capitol Hill. Today, Holmes is one of five Black Woman Coast Guard pilots who call themselves the "Fab Five". She is the second Black woman Coast Guard pilot. "Nothing trumps being able to save a human life," said Lt. Cmdr. Holmes.

### **CBS-TV Story of Race in the Ranks**

Watch the 60 Minutes interview of March 21, 2021 for a discussion of race in the military with Four star General Charles Quinton Brown Jr. who currently serves as the 22nd chief of staff of the Air Force. He is the first African-American to be appointed as Chief of Staff and the first African-American to lead any branch of the United States Armed Forces. Also featured is Lloyd James Austin III, a former United States Army four-star general currently serving as the 28th United States secretary of defense since January 22, 2021. He is the first African American to serve as the United States secretary of defense. [Click Here](#)



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