

POLK COUNTY VETERANS FALL NEWSLETTER 2022

Hello to all:

It is that time of the year that we all start getting ready for the cold months ahead. It hard to believe it is that time of the year again though.

With that said if you are a Veteran who has never used the once in a lifetime grant for Veterans through the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and are in need of a new heating system. This is a great grant to use if you are qualified to get a more reliable/efficient heating system for the cold months to come. If you are interested in this Grant please call our office to find out what is all involved to be approved.

There has been a lot of changes going on in the V.A. with the passing of the Pact Act. If you served around burn pits or was presumed to exposed to agent orange. There is a lot of extended benefits that the V.A. has added for those Veterans

Within the next month we are scheduled to receive a brand new DAV transportation vehicle and we are still looking for more volunteer drivers for the Van. If you are interested in driving please call our office at 218-281-3066 and if you are a Veteran in need of a ride to a VA approved appointment please call **1-855-277-9787**.



Please don't hesitate to call us for any question or concerns you may have, We are here to help the best we can! Phone# 218-281-3066

Take Care,

Polk C.V.S.O. Kurtis Ellefson and Polk A.C.V.S.O. Kelly Loewen

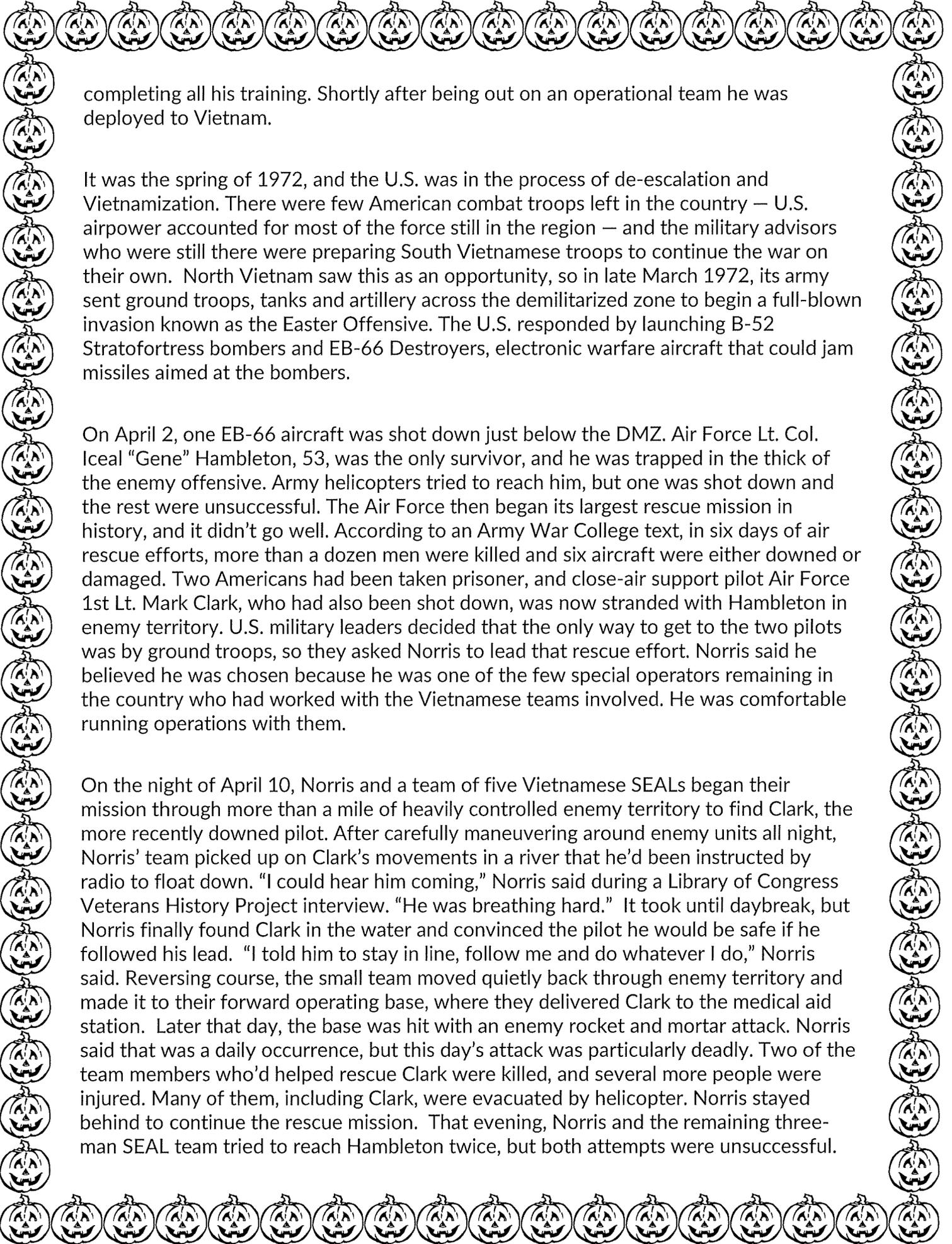


This month I would like to share the story of Vietnam Navy veteran by the name of Thomas R. Morris.

Norris was born on Jan. 14, 1944, in Jacksonville, Florida, to Rolland and Irene Norris. He had two brothers, James and Kenneth. Since their dad was in the Navy, the family didn't stay put for long. They moved to Michigan, Wisconsin and then to the Washington, D.C., area, where Norris graduated high school in 1963. Growing up, Norris became an Eagle Scout, ran track and wrestled — a talent that served him well when he went to the University of Maryland and became the Atlantic Coast Conference's 1965 and 1966 wrestling champ. Norris graduated college in 1967 with a bachelor's degree in criminology and sociology. Not long after that, when his student deferment from the Vietnam War draft wasn't extended, he enlisted in the Navy and was commissioned as an officer.



Norris said in an interview later in life that he'd wanted to be a Navy pilot since he was a child. He joined the program to become one, but vision issues forced him to drop out. Instead, he volunteered for a newly created naval special warfare unit that became known as the SEALs. He struggled early in BUD/S training, his instructors were very close to removing him the program. They decided to give him another chance and he graduated becoming a Navy SEAL. He was later placed on SEAL Team Two after



completing all his training. Shortly after being out on an operational team he was deployed to Vietnam.

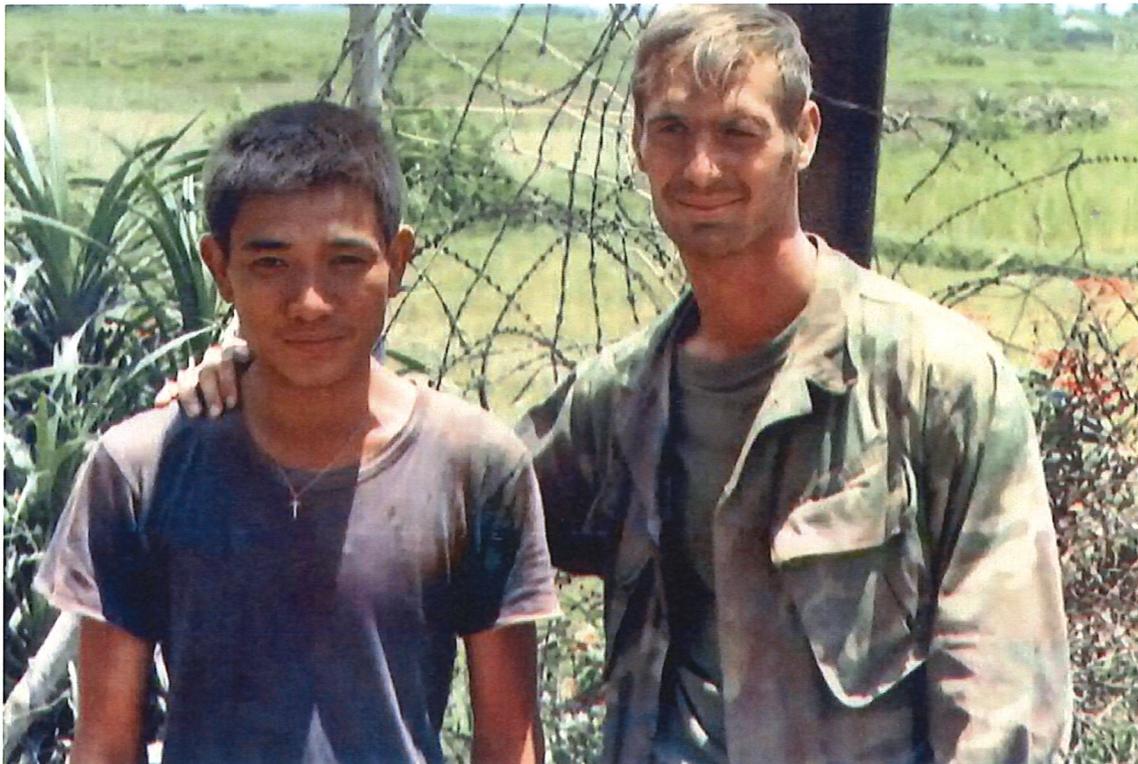
It was the spring of 1972, and the U.S. was in the process of de-escalation and Vietnamization. There were few American combat troops left in the country — U.S. airpower accounted for most of the force still in the region — and the military advisors who were still there were preparing South Vietnamese troops to continue the war on their own. North Vietnam saw this as an opportunity, so in late March 1972, its army sent ground troops, tanks and artillery across the demilitarized zone to begin a full-blown invasion known as the Easter Offensive. The U.S. responded by launching B-52 Stratofortress bombers and EB-66 Destroyers, electronic warfare aircraft that could jam missiles aimed at the bombers.

On April 2, one EB-66 aircraft was shot down just below the DMZ. Air Force Lt. Col. Icel "Gene" Hambleton, 53, was the only survivor, and he was trapped in the thick of the enemy offensive. Army helicopters tried to reach him, but one was shot down and the rest were unsuccessful. The Air Force then began its largest rescue mission in history, and it didn't go well. According to an Army War College text, in six days of air rescue efforts, more than a dozen men were killed and six aircraft were either downed or damaged. Two Americans had been taken prisoner, and close-air support pilot Air Force 1st Lt. Mark Clark, who had also been shot down, was now stranded with Hambleton in enemy territory. U.S. military leaders decided that the only way to get to the two pilots was by ground troops, so they asked Norris to lead that rescue effort. Norris said he believed he was chosen because he was one of the few special operators remaining in the country who had worked with the Vietnamese teams involved. He was comfortable running operations with them.

On the night of April 10, Norris and a team of five Vietnamese SEALs began their mission through more than a mile of heavily controlled enemy territory to find Clark, the more recently downed pilot. After carefully maneuvering around enemy units all night, Norris' team picked up on Clark's movements in a river that he'd been instructed by radio to float down. "I could hear him coming," Norris said during a Library of Congress Veterans History Project interview. "He was breathing hard." It took until daybreak, but Norris finally found Clark in the water and convinced the pilot he would be safe if he followed his lead. "I told him to stay in line, follow me and do whatever I do," Norris said. Reversing course, the small team moved quietly back through enemy territory and made it to their forward operating base, where they delivered Clark to the medical aid station. Later that day, the base was hit with an enemy rocket and mortar attack. Norris said that was a daily occurrence, but this day's attack was particularly deadly. Two of the team members who'd helped rescue Clark were killed, and several more people were injured. Many of them, including Clark, were evacuated by helicopter. Norris stayed behind to continue the rescue mission. That evening, Norris and the remaining three-man SEAL team tried to reach Hambleton twice, but both attempts were unsuccessful.

For five days since the failed aircraft rescue attempts, Hambleton had been communicating on and off with Air Force forward air controllers via radio. They were helping him move from hiding spot to hiding spot in hopes of getting him to a nearby river so Norris could get to him.

On the afternoon of April 12, a forward air controller located Hambleton and notified Norris. Because Hambleton hadn't gotten survival packages that had been airdropped for him, he was really struggling, and the FAC stressed to Norris the urgency of finding the pilot as soon as possible. By this point, only one of the Vietnamese SEALs, Nguyễn Văn Kiệt, wanted to continue helping Norris with the rescue mission. So, dressed as fishermen, the pair floated all night in a sampan — a small canoe-like Vietnamese vessel — down the river, passing numerous enemy encampments along the way. At dawn, they found Hambleton where he was expected to be. "I parked right about where he was sitting," Norris said. "That was luck." Norris and Kiệt put the injured pilot in the bottom of the sampan, covered him with life vests, bamboo and vegetation, and began their return journey. Along the way, they successfully sneaked past enemy rocket positions and even evaded a North Vietnamese patrol that tried to stop them. As they approached the relative safety of their forward operating base, the small craft was attacked by heavy machine gun fire from a North Vietnamese bunker. The trio quickly beached the sampan and hid. After checking for enemy ground forces, Norris then called in an air strike, which fired at the enemy bunker and provided a smoke screen that gave the trio a chance to get back into the sampan and safely reach the base.



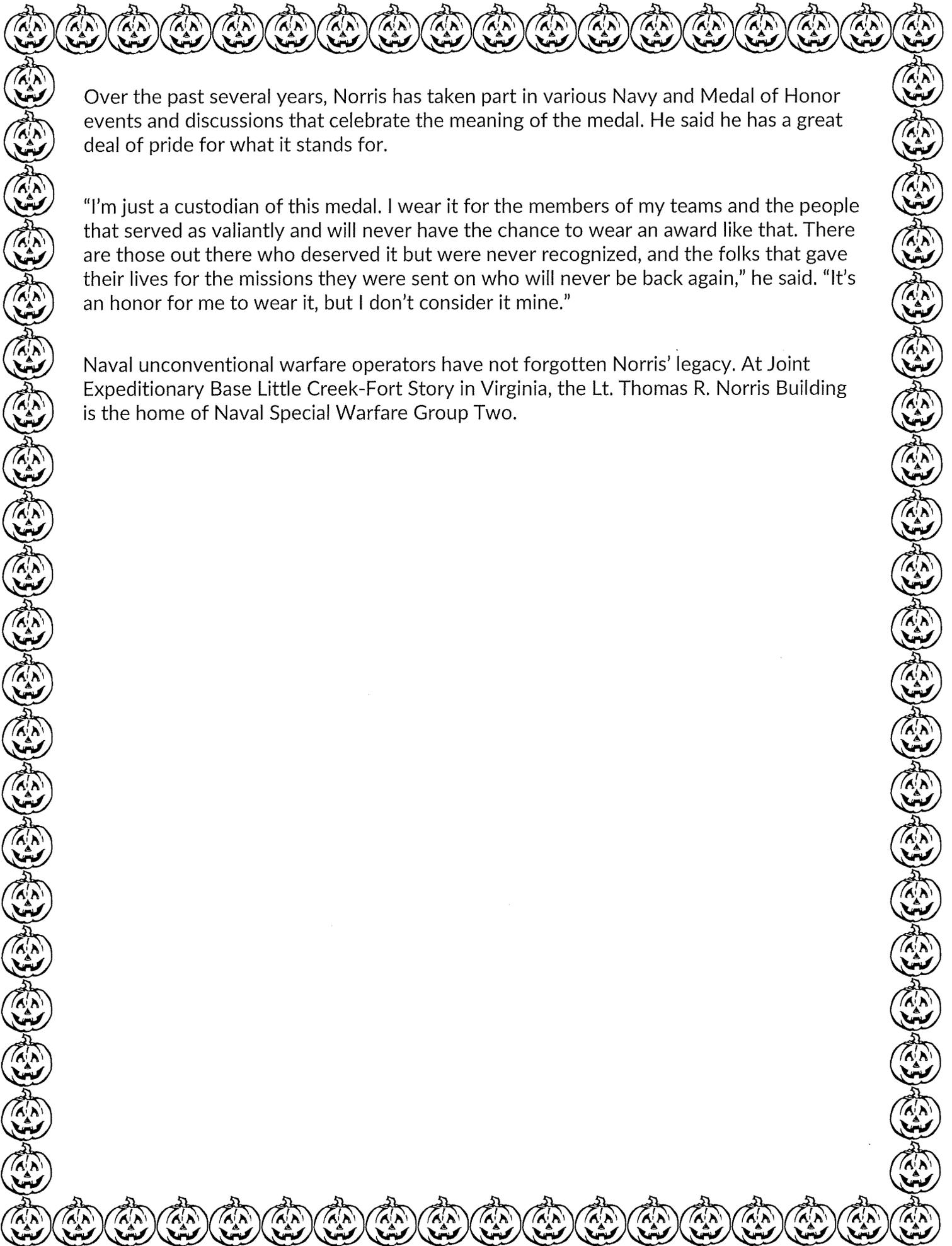
Hambleton was treated for his injuries and eventually recovered. If it weren't for Norris' undaunted courage and dedication to the cause, he and Clark may have never made it home.

Six months later, during another combat mission, Norris was shot in the face and suffered severe head injuries. He was saved by Lt. Michael Thornton, a fellow Navy SEAL who earned the Medal of Honor for that rescue mission. Norris medically retired due to his injuries, which included the loss of his left eye. His rehabilitation required numerous surgeries over the span of several years.

Norris learned he would receive the Medal of Honor sometime in 1974, but he didn't get it until March 6, 1976. President Gerald R. Ford presented the nation's highest honor for valor to the SEAL during a White House ceremony. His parents and both brothers were present for it, as was Thornton. Norris had attended Thornton's Medal of Honor ceremony prior to his own.



In 1979, after getting a disability waiver, Norris became an FBI agent, which is what he'd hoped to do when he entered college more than 15 years earlier. He worked at the agency for 20 years and was an original member of its hostage rescue team as an assault team leader.



Over the past several years, Norris has taken part in various Navy and Medal of Honor events and discussions that celebrate the meaning of the medal. He said he has a great deal of pride for what it stands for.

"I'm just a custodian of this medal. I wear it for the members of my teams and the people that served as valiantly and will never have the chance to wear an award like that. There are those out there who deserved it but were never recognized, and the folks that gave their lives for the missions they were sent on who will never be back again," he said. "It's an honor for me to wear it, but I don't consider it mine."

Naval unconventional warfare operators have not forgotten Norris' legacy. At Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia, the Lt. Thomas R. Norris Building is the home of Naval Special Warfare Group Two.

POLK COUNTY, MN MEDIA NOTICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Polk County, MN TO LAUNCH 'OPERATION GREEN LIGHT' IN SUPPORT OF LOCAL VETERANS

Polk County – In advance of the upcoming Veterans Day holiday, **Polk County** announced that the county buildings would be illuminating their flag poles green November 7th through the 13th as part of *Operation Green Light*, a new national collaborative initiative of the National Association of Counties (NACo) to support military veterans, as well as raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by many veterans and the resources that are available at the county, state, and federal level to assist veterans and their families.

The new national collaborative is spearheaded by the National Association of Counties and the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers, building upon the successful efforts of the New York State Association of Counties and the NYS County Veteran Service Officers' Association in 2021.

"Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, our nation's voluntary military force members, and their families, have made immense sacrifices for our safety and security over a two-decade period," said Polk County Veterans Service Officer, Kurtis Ellefson. "Similar to the sacrifices of previous generations of our armed forces, this service to country also often results in significant stress to many of the veterans who served in times of war and conflict. We want to make sure our veterans and their families know that their service mattered, that we are grateful for their sacrifices, and that it is now our turn to make sure they are served by their county government and our community."

In addition to lighting county buildings flag poles green, residents and businesses are encouraged to participate by simply changing one light bulb in their house to a green bulb. This can be an exterior light that neighbors and passersby see, or an interior light that sparks a conversation with friends.

By shining a green light, we let our veterans know that they are seen, appreciated, and supported. While this event is focused around the week of Veterans Day (November 7th -13th), participants are encouraged to continue shining the light year-round. Residents can share their participation on social media using the hashtag #OperationGreenLight.

"Operation Green Light is a simple way to express our collective appreciation for the public service of our veterans," said NACo President Denise Winfrey. "We encourage everyone to join us in displaying a green light for our veterans and to also reflect on how we, as a nation and at the county level, assist our military service personal back into civilian life upon completion of their service to our country."

Visit naco.org/operationgreenlight and/or www.co.polk.mn.us/370/veterans-services for more information and links to resources available to veterans.

Post-9/11 Veteran Service Bonus Available

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs has a long history of awarding service bonuses to Minnesota Veterans who served in America's wars. Starting in 1919 after World War I, through World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, and now the Global War on Terrorism, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes the sacrifices and courage Minnesotans demonstrated to defend our country.

The 2022 Legislature passed and Governor Walz signed the first-ever Veterans Omnibus Bill that included funding for a service bonus payable to eligible Veterans who served from 9/11/01 to 8/30/21. The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is honored to facilitate this program for eligible Veterans, currently serving service members, or Veterans beneficiaries.

For more information, visit
MinnesotaVeteran.org/ServiceBonus

To contact your local County Veterans Service Officer, visit
MACVSO.org





STATE OF MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
STATE BENEFITS DIVISION

Veterans Service Building, 20 West 12th Street, 2nd Floor
St. Paul, MN 55155

Phone: 651-296-2562 Fax: 651-797-1784

SPECIAL NEEDS GRANT OVERVIEW

Benefit Provided

The purpose of the Special Needs Grant is to provide one-time financial assistance to a Veteran or surviving spouse to assist in their financial crisis and to promote stability and prevent homelessness.

Eligibility Period

Special Needs Grants are open year round.

Eligible Applicant

1. A veteran as defined by [MN Statute 197.447](#), or the surviving spouse (who has not remarried) of a deceased veteran, **and**
2. A Minnesota Resident, **and**
3. Can demonstrate a financial need that cannot be met with existing income and assets

Note: Two veterans married to each other are entitled to their own separate Special Needs Grants

Assistance Can Be Requested For

Financial assistance is paid directly to the creditor or vendor providing services. Financial assistance is not reimbursed to the applicant or an applicant's family member. Assistance may be provided for the items listed below; items not listed below will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Assistance can be requested for more than one item.

Rent/Mortgage	Security Deposits	Property Taxes	Home Repairs
Utility Bills	Medical Bills	Hearing Aides	Auto Repairs
Auto Insurance	Auto Loan Payments	Major Appliances	Books for college
Furnace/AC Unit	Medical Insurance	Property Tax	Storage Units
Storage Units	Tools for work/school	Wells/Septic Systems	Wheelchair Ramps

Demonstrating a Financial Need

One of the most important aspects of a Special Needs Grant is the applicant's letter that informs us of their situation, their financial need, and how if assistance is granted, they will be able to sustain themselves moving forward. This includes substantiating their financial need with documentation.

All income and assets are factored when assessing your financial need.

Examples of supporting documentation may include but is not limited to:

1. A letter from an employer stating a reduction in hours, salary, being furloughed, or laid off.
2. Confirmation of receipt of Unemployment Insurance
3. History of pay stubs showing a reduction in hours



2022 PACT ACT: UNDERSTANDING HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY AND BENEFITS



PACT ACT OVERVIEW

What is the PACT Act? Why is it important?

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. **This law helps us provide generations of Veterans—and their survivors—with the care and benefits they've earned and deserve.**

The Act (1) expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era, and (2) expands eligibility for benefits for Veterans exposed to toxic substances.

What does the acronym, PACT, stand for?

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our **Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics** (PACT) Act of 2022.

When does the law go into effect?

While some provisions take effect at different times, VA considers the presumptive conditions established in the PACT Act to be applicable on the date the PACT is signed into law. **All Veterans and survivors who believe they may be entitled to benefits are encouraged to apply today.**

What are the PACT act key components?

- » The Act **expands and extends eligibility for VA health care** for Veterans with toxic-exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era.
- » VA **will improve the decision-making process** for determining what medical conditions will be considered for presumptive status.
- » Every enrolled Veteran will receive an initial **toxic exposure screening** and a follow-up screening every five years. Veterans who are not enrolled, but who are eligible to enroll, will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.
- » VA health care staff and claims processors will receive **toxic exposure-related education and training**.
- » The Act requires **research studies** on mortality of Veterans who served in Southwest Asia during the Gulf War, Post-9/11 Veteran health trends, and Veteran cancer rates.
- » The Act will help VA **build a stronger, more skilled workforce** to meet the growing demand for benefits and services.
- » The Act authorizes **31 new medical facilities** across the country, providing greater access to VA health care.

PACT ACT KEY DATES



VHA



VBA



AUGUST 10, 2022:

PACT Act signed into law.



EFFECTIVE ON ENACTMENT:

Adds 20+ new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures and more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation.



OCTOBER 1, 2022:

Presumptions of service connection take effect for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, certain provinces in Cambodia, Guam, or American Samoa (or their territorial waters), or the Johnston Atoll (or a ship that called there) during specific time periods. Applies for health care eligibility.

Note: This will go into effect immediately for eligible Veterans who are terminally ill, homeless, under extreme financial hardship, are over 85 years old, or otherwise can demonstrate sufficient cause.



OCTOBER 1, 2022 - OCTOBER 1, 2023:

1-year period for care and enrollment for Veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after 11/11/98, and who were discharged or released between 9/11/01–10/1/13.



NOVEMBER 8, 2022:

Begin incorporating toxic exposure screening for enrolled Veterans.



OCTOBER 1, 2024:

Phase in enrollment for health care for Veterans identified in Categories 1 and 2 who were discharged or released August 2, 1990 - September 11, 2001.



OCTOBER 1, 2026:

Phase in enrollment for health care for Veterans identified in Categories 1 and 2 who were discharged or released September 12, 2001 - December 31, 2006.



OCTOBER 1, 2028:

Phase in enrollment for health care for Veterans identified in Categories 1 and 2 who were discharged or released January 1, 2007 - December 31, 2012.



OCTOBER 1, 2030:

Phase in enrollment for health care for Veterans identified in Categories 1 and 2 who were discharged or released January 1, 2013 - December 31, 2018.

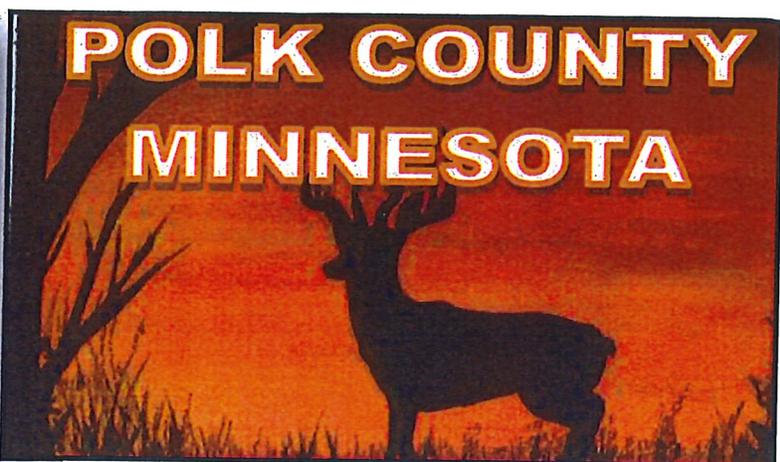


OCTOBER 1, 2032:

Phase in enrollment for health care for Veterans identified in Category 3.



VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE



POLK COUNTY MINNESOTA

SERVICES AVAILABLE AT THE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

Recently Discharged Veterans:

- ◆ Recording DD-214's
- ◆ Help with VA Medical/Dental Care Applications
- ◆ SGLI Conversion
- ◆ Information and Referral

Education Benefits:

- ◆ GI Bills (all Types)
- ◆ Part-time Study Grants
- ◆ Education Loans
- ◆ Retraining Grants
- ◆ Tuition and Fee Reimbursement
- ◆ Work-Study Job

Other Services:

- ◆ Obtaining Military Awards
- ◆ Obtaining Military Records
- ◆ Speaking to Organizations
- ◆ Home and Hospital Visits
- ◆ Liaison Among Vets Groups

Health Benefits:

- ◆ VA Medical Care for Veterans and Dependents
- ◆ Subsistence Grants
- ◆ Non-Service-Connected Disability Pension

Death and Burial Benefits:

- ◆ Dependency Compensation for Survivors
- ◆ Death Pension
- ◆ Burial Allowance
- ◆ Burial Markers and Flag Holders
- ◆ Survivors Benefits
- ◆ Burial Flag
- ◆ Presidential Memorial Certificate
- ◆ Burial Information/Assistance

Disabled Veterans:

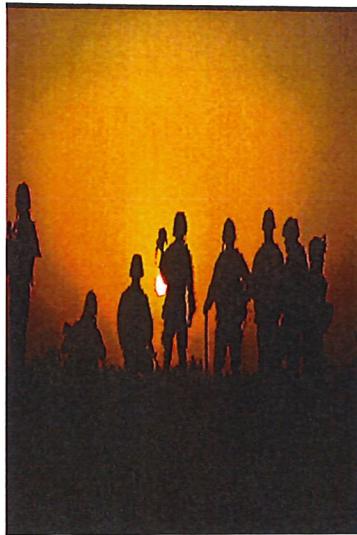
- ◆ Compensation Claims
- ◆ Filing appeals
- ◆ Vocational Rehabilitation

KURTIS R. ELLEFSON

POLK COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

218-281-3066-MAIN OFFICE

BUSINESS HOURS



DAYS	TIME	PLACE
Monday-Friday	8:00 AM to 4:30 PM	612 N Broadway-Room 241, Crookston
Wednesday	9:00 AM to 12:00 PM	215 1st St E, Fosston Civic Center
	1:00 PM TO 3:30 PM	240 Cleveland Ave SW, McIntosh (Bjella Bldg)
Thursday	9:00 AM to 1:00 PM	1424 Central Ave Ne, East Grand Forks (Formally the Maury's Building)