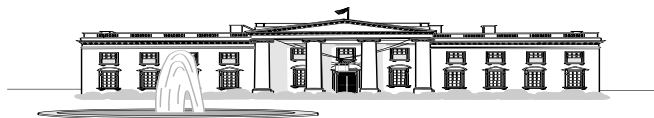


## **"The Aiguillette"**

### **The Society of White House Military Aides**

**December 2023**



### **Chairman's Letter Winter 2023**

**December 8, 2023**

**Good day, Society Members!**

**We are pleased to announce after 3 years in the wilderness that Senator Kelly (AZ) has sponsored us for a tour of the White House, hopefully confirmed for December 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, or 23<sup>rd</sup>. Keep your fingers crossed! In the meantime, we continued with newsletters and a Spring 2022 "Minute Mentoring" event hosted by Obama Aide Paige Young with keynote speaker LtGen (Ret) James Laster (Reagan). I will be happy to say that soon we will have our 30<sup>th</sup> tour!**



**Jim Barry as assisted by Bob Kettle is doing a great job with the newsletter, capturing those members involved with interesting occupations and events. So he has interviewed RADM (Ret) Melissa Bert (Bush '41 / Clinton), former JAG for the US Coast Guard and a permanent member of the Council of Foreign Relations; Christian Huff ( Bush '43 / Clinton) who keeps moving up the ladder at Amazon as Director, Federal Civilian and Health Team; and Julia MacDonough (Clinton), a Vice President at Defense contractor Draper Space Systems, one of the most senior firms in the sector!**

**Bob Kettle (Clinton) has done the most amazing thing by winning a Council Seat in Seattle running as a Democrat on a platform of safety, good schools, and using their taxes effectively. He won the support of many key people including Howard and Sheri Shultz of Starbucks/Shultz Family Foundation.**



We are looking at several events for the Spring: the new Army Museum, a wine tour, and something about the Lincoln Assassination, more on that to come. Stay tuned.

Please share your memories and pictures as others have for this issue.

*God Bless All!*

*Kenn Riordan, Jr.*

## **The Society of White House Military Aides**

**"AN ASSOCIATION OF WHITE HOUSE MILITARY AIDES  
WHO HAVE SERVED OUR NATION'S PRESIDENTS"**



*Kenn Riordan, Jr., USA (Ret)*

*Founder and Chairman (Reagan)*

*(505) 450 4293*

## Social Aide Interviews

### **Julia MacDonough Interview**

By James T. Barry (Reagan/Bush)

*So you don't often get a chance to speak with an executive at Draper Laboratory. You're going to enjoy this treat of a discussion with Julia. She's so darn busy - she was kind to give us time for our discussion - and it was terrific. Enjoy her story - from her limited time as a White House Social Aide (and why!) to the meaningful and important work she's doing today with Draper. It's amazing. On behalf of all of us, thanks Julia!*

*Most of this interview is from a discussion Julia and Jim had together. A few parts are from an interview Julia had with Draper.*

#### **What's one of the bigger differences between the military and civilian worlds?**

The military focuses on leadership first, then addresses the skills required to complete your mission. In industry, it's often the individual contribution that is recognized and promotes you, not the leadership skills of the military. In the military – you get the team that you get and it's what you do as a team is most important. You make the most of that team.

#### **Tell us about Draper and your role at Draper**

Draper Space Systems pioneers mission-essential solutions for Space Navigation, Human Spaceflight and Exploration, Sensing, Space Domain Awareness, Space Control and ISAM to secure our Nations interests in, from, and to space, and explore the secrets of the universe for the benefit of humanity. As Vice President and General Manager of Space Systems, I am responsible for leading our enterprise team, inclusive of all our functional partners, to successfully achieve our mission and corporate objectives. I passionately believe that innovation and performance are fueled by diversity of thought, perspective, and experience enabled by a culture of inclusion.



Julia as an Aide at The White House.

We are now as a nation and as global society pressing further into space, with the Moon once again front and center. Nations around the world are looking to unlock the Moon's economic, scientific and geopolitical value, and as the International Space Station comes to a close, the center of power in space is shifting to the lunar surface. By demonstrating it can reach and land on the Moon, a nation can show it has the technical know-how and motivation to do difficult things. Valuable water in the permanently shadowed craters in Moon's south pole, could be mined and used to create rocket fuel that could carry astronauts deeper into the solar system. NASA, the Space Force, and others want a footprint on the moon for these reasons.

#### **How do you think your service shaped you? What does your service mean to you?**

As a child and an adult, I have had the phenomenal opportunity to travel extensively and live outside of the United States. While our nation is not perfect, we are extremely fortunate to be Americans and live in a nation in which we have a voice. In order to preserve our voices and move us forward as a diverse and unified nation, I believe we have to see through our differences and find ways to work together. Together, we can accomplish more than the sum of our parts. My service taught me the value and importance of leadership, teamwork, respect, and giving back to our community and our nation.

As a teenager, I was the most unlikely candidate for military service. I was a shy, introverted, not-athletic bookworm. I needed to finance my undergraduate education, and ROTC offered that opportunity. I had no idea at the time that simple step would open up a lifetime of incredible mission, service, opportunity, and community. Now as a parent, I am proudly watching my children learn from my experience and take their own steps towards service: my eldest son will be commissioned in the US Space Force in May as a Cyberspace Effects Operations Officer; my daughter is in her second year of Army ROTC for Nursing at Northeastern University; and my younger son will be entering AF ROTC when he starts college next fall.

**Can you tell us about any special White House experiences?**

Well, first, I have to say my White House experience was shorter than others! My soon to be husband was a guest at the Congressional Ball – he was waiting to meet the President when he asked questions about several works of art. We subsequently bumped into each other at Old Ebbetts Grill following the event where we continued talking, and we were married a year later!

What stuck with me at the White House was just how much preparation and work goes into a White House event. The detail, the planning, etc. Casual outside observers don't realize it. Nothing was left to chance.

Also I remember how charismatic a speaker President Clinton was, winning over even the most challenging audiences.

**Tell us what you do in your free time - perhaps a hobby.**

We have horses in New Hampshire. Jumpers. My daughter and I enjoy riding together.

**Who is the best leader you have worked with? Why? What traits?**

My current CEO at Draper. Clear vision. Communicates that vision. Empowers the team to take action and move in direction of achieving that vision. It's up to you to figure out the how.

**So tell us about a book, poem, or work of art (or whatever else) that has most influenced or inspired you - and why?**

During COVID, my team started a book club. Every quarter brought forward suggestions that challenged our thinking. "Range" by David Epstein was one of the books recommended. It states that as we go through history, those most successful have a range of capabilities (generalists) vs. having deep expertise. It's a great tool to bring teams together – those with diverse backgrounds – you can accomplish more as a team vs. a sum of the parts.

**What's one piece of advice you would give to a high schooler?**

Have a plan but write it in pencil. I had no idea that what I'm doing ever existed. I had no idea what life would offer.



Julia with her family at The White House.



## **Christian Huff Interview**

*By James T. Barry (Reagan/Bush)*

*I knew I was going to enjoy speaking with Christian just by the high-energy, pleasant way he engaged me before we spoke. So listen to the special talents and energy Christian brings to his important position at Amazon - and the very cool problems he's working to solve as a member of his great team in an incredible company. Even get to hear about what makes Amazon special. I already ordered one of the books Christian recommends in the interview! On behalf of all of us, thanks Christian!*



Christian in Oval Office behind the Resolute desk during the Clinton Administration - circa 2000.

### **What's it like working at Amazon as the Director, US Federal Civilian & Health Team? What's a big problem in health care that you're working on solving?**

I have been with Amazon Web Services (AWS) a little over five years now, and I literally love going to work every day. I get to work with some of the smartest people and be able to serve in a different way than when in uniform, in helping the government use technology to solve some of the hardest challenges government faces and improve the overall citizen experience. I learn so much every day and realize how much I have yet to learn. In my current role, I lead our Federal Civilian business that also includes military health.

We work with Veteran's Affairs, Defense Health Agency, Health and Human Services and

Operating Divisions such as FDA, CMS, NIH, and CDC as they migrate more workloads to the cloud and thereby benefit from services that help in research, innovation, and customer experience. I am proud of how AWS is enabling improved data sharing capabilities, scalability, and reduced costs. My team is also focused on enabling cloud-based data analytics and AI/ML solutions to empower healthcare researchers and drive scientific discovery, especially as movements towards open science are being implemented to provide a foundation for global scientific collaboration. It's amazing to see machine-learning powered healthcare advances used for things like detecting cancer much earlier. It is still early days in this, but we have seen that machine learning can spot early signs of cancer even in pediatric patients well before a human eye could find it and thereby get earlier treatment in saving lives.

### **Tell us something spectacular about working at Amazon that most people don't know about?**

We are guided everyday in every decision we make and engrained in our culture by our 16 Leadership Principals (LPs). In many ways it is very similar to our ethos in the military by focusing on the mission and obsessing over our customers. A friend of mine that I worked with at my previous company had joined Amazon a few months before I did, and I saw a refreshed energy and passion in him and that is where I first learned about the LPs. I read them and they really resonated with me. I said to myself that I have to come work here. That friend happens to be a former Army Social Aide as well (Thanks Jon)!

### **Tell us a bit more about the LPs. Which stand out to you that you didn't hear about as much in the military?**



Arrival Ceremony with President and Mrs. Bush and President of the Czech Republic on September 18, 2002 in background Christian and Phredd Evans. (Funny story, we weren't supposed to be outside in photo but the doors were left open and ceremony was about to begin, Phredd and I were asked by one of the Ushers to go to close the doors but he couldn't get back inside in time so we stood there like we were supposed to be all along).

I would say, the Leadership Principal of “Think Big” is hard in the military culture. Thinking Big means taking a radical approach and risks when necessary, always questioning traditional assumptions in pursuit of the best idea.

**What’s the single most interesting thing you did in the military that you think would most interest our readers?**

I served seven years active duty and 15 years in the Army Reserves and was able to be part of some incredible things, most notably having the honor to serve as a Military Social Aide during two Administrations (Clinton/Bush). My last job on active duty was a military planner and then military assistant to the Director of Joint Staff, J4. This was from October 2000 thru June 2003, which was a significant time in our history as it was during and after 9/11.

**How about what you’ve done outside of the military?**

I have always felt a call to service. There was a brief time that I wanted to get into politics. I had an opportunity to run for office, which was a fantastic experience that I learned a tremendous amount, but failed miserably. I am glad that I got that out of my system.

**Tell us about your experiences prior to joining Amazon?**

I spent 16 years working for two large Federal System Integrators. During that time, I found opportunities to learn different parts of how the corporate world works from being a Program Manager, to business development/sales, to supporting M&A activities, and running a P&L business unit. It really gave me a grounding into the business world and helped me understand what I wanted to do in my career, and more importantly, what I didn’t want to do.

**Where are you from (hometown) and what brought you to the military?**

I was raised as an Army brat and was born in Germany. I moved to the DC area (Fairfax, VA) when I was little and resided there until my father retired when I was in high school. I always knew I wanted to serve in some capacity, and was commissioned from Virginia Military Institute (VMI). VMI was never on my short list of schools. A friend of mine from high school had a brother that went to Radford and was going down for the weekend, with a stopover to VMI along the way for a prospective cadet day. I decided to tag along. I never had really thought of VMI until I stepped onto Post, and immediately fell in love with it. The rest, as they say, is history.

**You have a lot of leadership experience. Let’s say a friend who is about to become a leader at a commercial company asked you the basics of leadership - what would you say?**

Lead by example. There is a big difference between managers and leaders. In the military, we listened to our NCOs, went out on patrols, and spoke with our soldiers. Much of the same can be seen in the corporate world - we go out and talk with the individual contributors about their pain points =and look at ways where we can help simplify what they do. You will earn trust immediately with them by showing you are not afraid to walk in their shoes and understand their point of view. My guidance is to do the same thing with your managers. Be accessible, lead with empathy, and be genuine. Encourage risk taking – that is where the best ideas come from –

and instill a culture where it is ok to fail. Encourage your teams to learn from those mistakes, and let people know it is safe to experiment and try new things.



Medal of Honor Ceremony on South Lawn awarded posthumously to Captain Ben Salomon, May 2002.

**Tell us what you do in your free time - perhaps a hobby.**

I used to play a lot of golf, not that I was a golfer but enjoyed the game and being outside. Now I am lucky if I play 3-4 rounds a year. Most of my free time now is spent the best way possible, with my family and two daughters – Sophia 10, and Camellia 8. I often work long hours and travel a fair amount, so when I am home I try to be as engaged and present with them as possible. I make it a point to always drive them to school in the morning and never miss a milestone event however small it may seem. Our family is all about “experiences” and trying new things and traveling. Now that they are older we try and plan a few trips a year to explore and learn about new cultures.

**So tell us about a book, poem, or work of art (or whatever else) that has most influenced or inspired you - and why? Any current books you are reading today.**

Being self-critical, I don't read at home as much as I would like. However, a classic is Dale Carnegie, “How to Win Friends and Influence People”. Most often, it isn't what you know, or who you know, but who knows you. Spend time building your network, both inside and outside of the company or organization you are in. This is true if you are still in the military, government, corporate world, or non-profit sectors. It is all about relationships. I have a saying I tell my teams – ‘work with people you know, you like, and you trust’. I buy a lot of books (hey, I work for Amazon), but only often read a few chapters and set them aside to be picked up later. In looking at my stack now, on the top are “The Bomber Mafia”, “Gang Leader for a Day”, and “48 Laws of Power”. I highly recommend the latter for everyone.

**Who is your professional inspiration - dead or alive - and why?**

General George C. Marshall. Not only is he a VMI graduate, but he really embodied selfless service and servant leadership. He served as Army Chief of Staff during WWII, then later as Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Staff, and the President of American Red Cross to name a few. He was the author of the Marshall Plan, the economic recovery program to Western Europe post WWII, which earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.

**What's one piece of advice you would give to a high schooler?**

Don't be afraid to try new things and fail. Learn from those failures and become stronger. In trying new things, you will naturally find things that you really enjoy. Use your findings to ‘build a brand’ for yourself and hone those skills to become the best at that tradecraft. You can and should change your brand over time, and reinvent yourself every few years. Be known in an organization to be the ‘go to’ for 1-2 things that will differentiate you over others.



Christian with his family in Santorini, Greece this past August (L-R: Sophia - 10, Laura, Camellia - 8, Christian).



## **Melissa Bert Interview**

By James T. Barry (Reagan/Bush)

*So you get to hear from the former Judge Advocate General and Chief Counsel of the Coast Guard! - and the entire interview is enjoyable and meaningful. I've always been a great admirer of the Coast Guard - and in Admiral Bert's interview you'll hear many of the reasons it's a special, unique organization. Listen to what she describes as the most powerful 3 WORDS on leadership. Those 3 words may change how many will lead. So impressive - as is Admiral Bert. On behalf of all of us, thanks Admiral Bert!*

### **I loved my last job in the Coast Guard!**

I was the Judge Advocate General and Chief Counsel of the Coast Guard. The Judge Advocate community felt like my home in the service. I liked the people, the issues and my colleagues' sense of humor. It was also a way to be involved in everything the Coast Guard does, and from the get go. I used to joke that CGJAG (Coast Guard Judge Advocate Corps) is the nucleus about which the CG is formed. What I mean is that the Coast Guard evolved in a first responder model, in that our operational missions tend not be orders-based, like our sister services. Each of the missions we execute are derived from a legal authority. And the Coast Guard is an amalgamation of a host of maritime authorities gained through our history. If something touches water, we are involved. We regulate shipping, port security and marine safety, conduct law enforcement, protect fisheries and the marine environment, including the polar regions, conduct search and rescue and respond to maritime disasters; all while simultaneously being members of the defense, intelligence and cyber communities. We are definitely the swiss army knife of the federal government.



Melissa Bert as a White House Aide.

One aspect of being a judge advocate that I've always appreciated is that our lawyers and administrative professionals are engaged before, during, and after a mission. We are rarely an afterthought. Both the operational and support communities rely on CGJAG. You feel like you're on a team - not just advising a team. I think that is why our morale and retention are high.

I've also been grateful that I have had the opportunity to work both as an attorney and leader in the operational Coast Guard. Those experiences left me with some hysterical memories and lifelong friends. They also helped me to be a better judge advocate, because I could understand the missions from personal experience.

### **You've achieved a lot in your life so far - what traits make you special?**

It's nice to be called special in a good way. Thanks! I get most things done because I love working with other people, and implementing their ideas to make anything better. I also don't take myself too seriously, because I always work with folks who have expertise I don't and the energy and patience to help me help them succeed - and subsequently our organization. I also respect and endeavor to support each individual for their unique talents and perspective, regardless of their qualifications, rank, or seniority. For me, this philosophy leads to success, and my team/organization, etc. never lets me down.



Also, early on I learned firsthand that “I trust you” are some of the most powerful words for a leader. When we are trusted, we give everything we do our all. “You can do this” are also key words for a leader, words that propelled me for sure. People believed in me before I believed in myself. Early on - I remember a senior officer on staff who was not a LT Bert fan questioned my boss on the validity of my legal counsel. My boss responded that he had full faith in legal advice provided by LT Bert. It was quite a generous gesture, and probably undeserved, but from that point on, I knew I better live up to his expectations. I also admired this leader, because he would always stay very calm...never letting a crisis ruffle him. He would never interrupt anyone anytime. Instead, he would wait until someone was finished talking, even if that individual was in a rant or rage. And then would ask, “anything else?” He always paused to contemplate their words and then responded in a clear and thoughtful manner. I learned from him that you gain credibility when you really listen to people, and think about their words, rather than assuming what they will say. I’m still a work in progress in this regard.

**What’s the single most interesting thing you’ve done in the military that you think would most interest our readers?**

Most meaningful are the people I met, worked with, and led. That includes those external to the Coast Guard. One of my most heartfelt memories was when I was on an inter-agency team working with El Salvadoran naval, border, and law enforcement leaders to tighten their maritime law enforcement practices. They were getting overrun by Narco traffickers who claimed Naval Forces were unjustly shooting at them and sinking their boats, while they were innocently fishing. The military and law enforcement needed clearer procedures and laws to ensure they did not become the target of criminal investigations while conducting their missions.

One of our students, an El Salvadoran colonel, had spent his entire military service fighting drug smugglers in the jungles. He was a very active and fascinating participant in our classes. One day after class, he asked us to join him for dinner in his home, a rare personal offer from a foreign student in a foreign country. He said he wanted to share the food of the country and the warmth of his family. And we did. We visited his very humble home, of which he was incredibly proud. He had grown up barefoot and poor, and his life was devoted to supporting his son’s future. He said my son will go to medical school if we have to give up everything to do it. I have no doubt his son is a doctor today.

This colonel spent his days battling the scourge of narco-traffickers and corrupt officials, and never gave up. “You have to help us save our country,” were his words that will always stay with me.

I wish everyone could have these experiences - ones that shaped my worldview. It is easy to refer to foreign people from places we have never been as a homogenous “they.” Yet working together with those around the world makes it clear that “they” are individuals who share similar values and goals for their families and countries.

**Where are you from (hometown) and what brought you to the Coast Guard?**

I was born in the East Village of Manhattan - New York City. However, we moved across the country a few times with my father’s career.

Why the Coast Guard: My father was a civil rights lawyer and enlisted in the Coast Guard at the end of WW2. When I was applying to colleges my senior year of high school, he brought home a Coast Guard Academy catalog. The Academy looked different than anything I had ever seen, and the cadets were sailing, rowing crew and doing all the things I had never done or expected to do. It occurred to me that I could lead a totally different life if I attended the Coast Guard Academy. So I just did it, without too much (or really any) thought.

**How did the law attract you?**

We grew up discussing justice a lot, since my Dad was a lawyer. At the Coast Guard Academy, I had a couple of law classes with two exuberant senior Judge Advocate professors. One in particular literally drove a half dozen in one of those white Econoline vans on a road trip to D.C. to attend a Supreme Court argument with the Coast Guard as the appellant. A CGJAG represented the appellant, who thankfully lost. The case expanded

military jurisdiction dramatically, and it felt very meaningful. It was a road trip I will never forget, and I think all of us on that trip eventually became lawyers.

**What do you think you've learned from the Coast Guard that your commercial, non-military peers have yet to learn?**

To "suck it up." One central aspect of military service is that we have missions 24/7, some we would prefer not to perform, and we cannot avoid being uncomfortable at times. We have to stick with it when we are sleep deprived, have issues at home, and are too cold, too wet, and too exhausted to keep going. There is no walking away. But no one wants to hear you whining and complaining (or quitting). These are foreign concepts to my 7 year old daughter, and unfortunately, many adults who have never served.



Duty in Alaska.

And the other cool thing I cherish is that I worked and met a variety of people that I never would have otherwise - people with different accents, backgrounds, social classes, ethnicity, religious and political beliefs. And some of them are my BFFLS to this day - best friends for life. It is a rare place in America where this magic still happens.

**What have you found to be most professionally rewarding in the military?**

For me, I totally lacked confidence when I graduated from the CG Academy. I could not crack the nut of being like the male military officers I worked for and around. Over the years, I realized that being someone you are not is both limiting to each of us and the service, who needs a wide range of perspectives and ideas. As I became more senior, I realized I was not alone. Women in the Coast Guard often lacked "agency" and were not invested in the service. They, like me, needed to believe they can lead and succeed now and beyond, or things would never change. This was my goal starting the Coast Guard Women's Leadership Initiative, which is a grassroots effort to empower and inspire women through networking, mentoring, and exploring leadership opportunities. In the decade plus we have been around, the WLI has accrued over a \$1M endowment and annual operating funds that support 30+ and growing chapters around the Coast Guard. WLI became a professional network that could not be ignored, and in the past few years have assisted the Commandant with a series of policy changes to retain women.

As I observed the magic of the WLI and the lives it impacted, I made it my top priority to support and empower women coming up in our service. Of course, now that it is cool to go to WLI events, they are almost always co-ed these days. Check it out!

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/coastguardwomen/>

**What are you doing in your next career?**

I joined Lexpat Global, LLC ([www.lexpatglobal.com](http://www.lexpatglobal.com)) - a group dedicated to international capacity building and maritime governance to strengthen National Security. We provide public and private consultancy on legal, strategic, operational, and planning efforts worldwide.

**Tell us what you do in your free time - perhaps a hobby.**

I try to stay sane with our home renovation, a 7 year old who never stops, and an addiction to Netflix.

**So tell us about a book, poem, or work of art (or whatever else) that has most influenced or inspired you - and why?**

Richard Wright really resonated with me. I first read “Native Son,” and then his autobiography “Black Boy.” He spent his life searching for a way America could work for all its citizens, and was incredibly insightful. I’m also a fan of everything by Ha Jin, whose novels are somewhat similar in that the protagonist is always someone between worlds - in his case, his Chinese identity as an American.

**Who is your professional or personal inspiration - alive or not - and why?**

Ulysses S Grant - I just finished reading “Grant” by Ron Chernow and was stunned by his courage, intellect, and leadership.



Duty in Columbia.



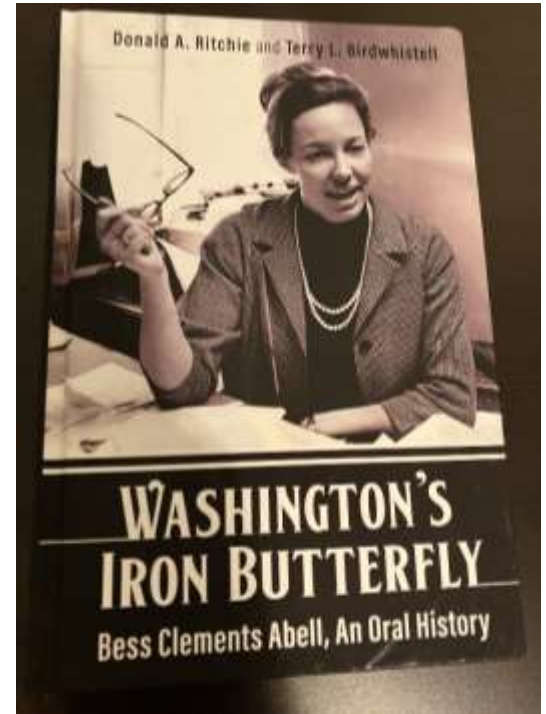
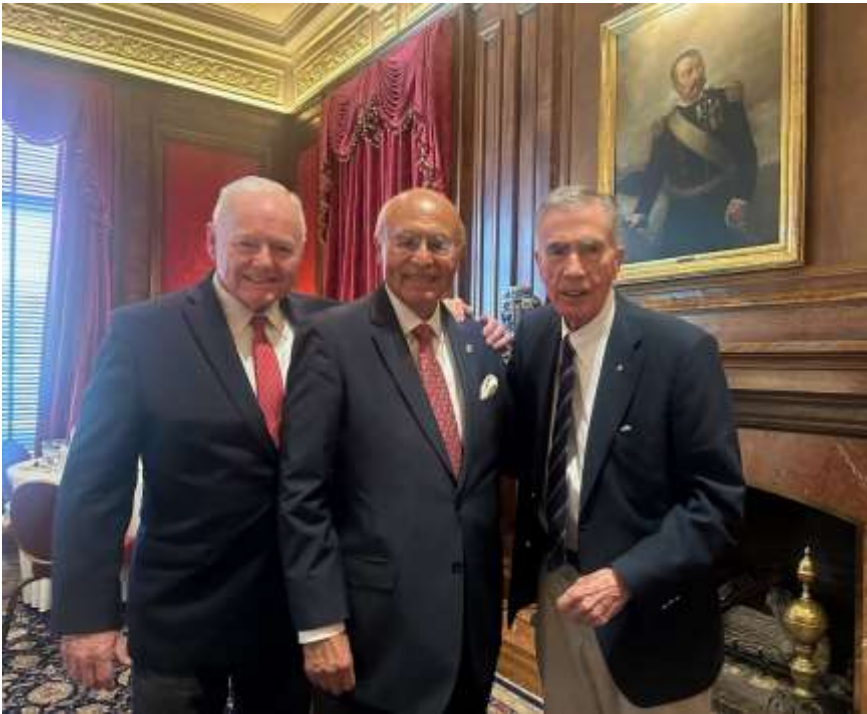
## Members Spotlight

### Robert Kettle With A Great Win



### The Three Johnson Amigos

A literary lunch was held at The Metropolitan Club in DC on September 27, 2023, celebrating a book about Bess Abell, the White House Social Secretary during the Johnson Era. Left to right in the photo: Mike McGowan, Lalo Valdez, and Chuck Robb, White House Social Aides during that era.



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### MOAA Advocacy in Action on the Hill



Pat Williams, Social aide (Clinton) & Carol Hattrup, (Bush 41/ Clinton). Jim Carman and Shelly Kowlalski (Reagan) here too! We had a Hill reunion!!!! Small world!!!



## Daniel Cathell, Biden Aide, Escorts Jennifer Lopez



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## 2 Philadelphia college grads starring in 'Jesus Christ Superstar.'

“Kodiak Thompson, the son of Dr. Paul B. Thompson / Captain (Sel), JAGC, USN (Ret)a Reagan Aide and former member of the Reagan National Security Advisor Staff, and his wife Maria Thompson. Kodiak performed in one of the leading roles in the 50th Anniversary Nationwide Tour of Jesus Christ Super Star. Jude and I saw the show in York, Pennsylvania at the Strand Capitol Performing Arts Center. The performance was exceptionally well done. Philadelphia's Chanel 6 (ABC) report below does a fine job interviewing Kodiak and the star of the show who played Jesus Christ. Both are recent graduates of Philadelphia schools. They are currently performing in Philadelphia.” – Provided by LTC (Ret) William Sinnott (Reagan)

<https://6abc.com/jesus-christ-superstar-kimmel-cultural-campus-jack-hopewell-kodiak-thompson/13201900/>





## Roland Mesnier, White House pastry chef for five presidents, passes away at 78

Roland Mesnier, who served as White House [executive pastry chef](#) for five presidents and their many guests over the years, has died at age 78.

The [White House Historical Association](#) confirmed his death on Saturday; the group said he died on Friday following a short illness, the Associated Press reported.

Mesnier was one of the longest-serving White House chefs.

Then-first lady Rosalynn Carter hired him in 1979 — and he retired during the George W. Bush administration in 2004.

In an online "Ask the White House" forum in 2004, Mesnier explained he was often tasked with preparing thousands of pastries for not just the first family but for parties, receptions and dinners as well.

Mesnier revealed that he planned the number of pastries he created according to those who would be in attendance. "Over the 25 years I've been here, I've noticed that Democrats usually eat more than Republicans," he said in that same forum. "I've also observed that if the guests are mostly ladies, they will usually eat more pastries than men." During the Christmas season, he was known for making the elaborate gingerbread houses that were used to decorate the White House. Mesnier said he always needed to make more pastries than usual for holiday parties since some tended to "disappear into pocketbooks or pockets," often ending up as Christmas tree ornaments in people's homes.

The chef was also known to dish on presidential tendencies in the kitchen, according to Barron's. He admitted that former first lady Nancy Reagan was a "total perfectionist" — while former President Bill Clinton was a major dessert fan, despite the fact that he was allergic to flour, sugar and chocolate.

Administrations in Mesnier's past reacted to his death with sadness and admiration.

The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library mourned Mesnier's passing on Twitter, sharing a photo of the chef surprising some of the Carter family with a "character cake."



French-born American executive pastry chef Roland Mesnier and then-first lady Hillary Clinton pose with the White House Christmas gingerbread house, Washington, D.C., on Dec. 6, 1993. (Mark Reinstein/Corbis via Getty Images)



White House pastry chef Roland Mesnier from Bonnay, France, poses in the State Dining Room of the White House on June, 14, 2004, in Washington, D.C. (TIM SLOAN/AFP via Getty Images)



Then-first lady Laura Bush stands with guest pastry chef Roland Mesnier while talking about the gingerbread White House creation he made for the State Dining Room during a media preview of the 2006 holiday decorations at the White House on Nov. 30, 2006, in Washington, D.C. (TIM SLOAN/AFP via Getty Images)

Mrs. Rosalynn Carter - A Woman who Defined the Words "First Lady"



The Shaw of Iran and Carter Aide Brian Buzzell as Intro Aide. Queen Noor signed the picture.



Carter Aide Janet Southby with President and Mrs. Carter - Thank you Janet!



Carter Aide Bob Page with Mrs. Carter, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and Queen Noor of Iran.

## Former Virginia Governor, Senator Chuck Robb Pens Book About Being A Marine

By Todd South at <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/>

Nov 15, 2021

Chuck Robb was once governor of Virginia and a U.S. senator. But before those high offices, he sought a different title: Marine Corps officer.

It was during that period of his life he served as a White House aide, marrying President Lyndon B. Johnson's daughter and led a company of Marines in combat Vietnam.

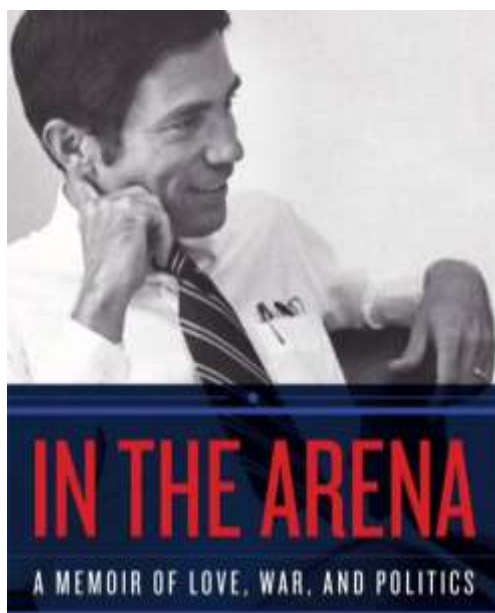
And despite decades of public life and now another life in retirement, the octogenarian starts and ends his new memoir with his time in uniform.

The book, "In the Arena: A memoir of love, war and politics" rolls through Robb's life from childhood to his leaving politics.

He drew the book title from President Theodore Roosevelt, "It is not the critic who counts; not the main how points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena."



Chuck Robb while serving as a Marine Corps company commander in Vietnam. (Chuck Robb)



**CHUCK ROBB** FOREWORD BY **BILL CLINTON**

Chuck Robb, former governor and senator, reflects on his life from Marine lieutenant to U.S. senator in new book.  
(University of Virginia Press)

The former senator served on active duty in the Marine Corps from 1960–1970, rising to the rank of major.

Robb talked recently with Marine Corps Times about his life in service, his new book and what he hopes to share with others, especially Marines, about his experiences.

*\*The following Q&A section has been edited for length and clarity.*

**Q: Will you share with readers why you chose the Marine Corps and how you became a Marine Corps officer?**

**A:** I always expected to go into the service. In college, you were required to sign up for Reserve Officer Training Corps, out of the three services the Navy option looked more squared away but the Marines seemed to take a little extra effort to make sure they got it right and looked as sharp as they could.

I had signed up for the U.S. Naval Academy but wasn't accepted until after my freshman year and I was already in ROTC. I didn't want to start college over at the academy so I opted for the NROTC route. A Marine major in the program had a no-nonsense way of selling the program, 'If you think you're tough enough to join our ranks, then prove it.'

**Q: What are some of your most significant memories from Officer Candidate School and The Basic School?**



**A:** There were a series of tests for small unit training. But the most memorable was the “Hill Trail.” It was a physical test shared by every Marine officer candidate in that era — a grueling march through a heavily wooded area on a rocky trail that tested our strength, endurance and ability to gut it out while struggling up and down steep hills carrying full combat gear: a rifle, helmet, field pack and two full canteens. There were serious injuries in the regiment during training, one death, one critically injured and one who ended up in a coma.

**Q: Early in your officer career you served as an aide to various senior leaders, at the Marine Barracks Washington and as an aide to the president. But you sought a combat tour in Vietnam though you could have avoided it. Why was that important to you?**

**A:** Yes, I was grateful for each of the plum assignments I’d been given in my then-six years on active duty, but I had repeatedly requested a combat assignment and felt like I’d be shirking my responsibility if I let this opportunity pass me by.

Most of the Marines I’d trained and served with had, by then, already been to Vietnam. A few of them were on their second tour of duty. It was my own sense, particularly if I didn’t stay any longer than I was obligated to in the Corps that I do duty with the “muddy boot” Marines in addition to the “spit and polish Marines.”

“Many of those decisions were based on core values that I learned as a young Marine officer. One of the most important was that respect is an essential element of leadership. The key to getting people to follow your orders, whether those orders were to march in a parade or to risk their lives taking a heavily enemy-fortified hill, is to first develop respect.”

— *“In the Arena: A memoir of love, war and politics,”*  
by Chuck Robb

**Q: Your 13 months as a company commander in Vietnam in 1968 surely had its share of experiences. You’re fairly blunt about some of the more personal episodes you faced in the book, do you care to share more with readers?**

**A:** There was a Marine who’d been disciplined for poor behavior only a few days before who deliberately stood up in a firefight, exposing himself to enemy fire to draw attention from the enemy gunner. He was cut down by AK-47 fire. In May 1968, 2nd Lt. Terry Hale, a likable and gung ho University of Texas graduate went with my company on his very first operation in the bush and was killed by a Viet Cong booby trap. Pale and still in an unzipped black rubber bag, Terry Hale was laid out for identification. It is not something one forgets. The astringent smell stayed in my nostrils long after I left the tent.



Marine officer Chuck Robb while on duty as a Marine Corps White House aide to the president. (Chuck Robb)

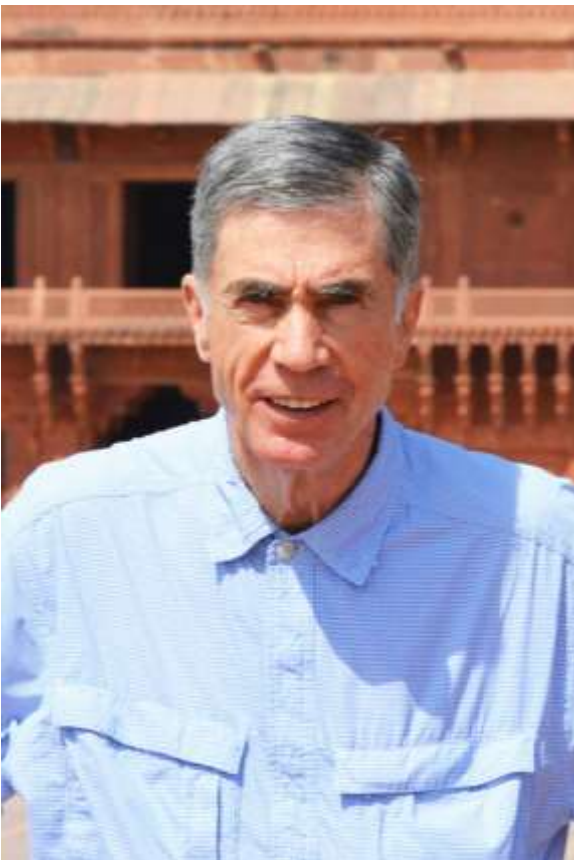
Within a few days, a replacement for Lt. Hill arrived at Hill 65. One staff sergeant, who was then the acting platoon commander, had a malfunctioning M16 rifle. He wrote a letter to the manufacturer who sent him a replacement direct to Vietnam. He was proud of that. A week after he got the rifle we were on a night movement, just a little moonlight in the trees. We were spread out moving through dense vegetation. The staff sergeant hit a tripwire, triggering an unexploded, captured U.S. 105mm round that was hidden in a hedgerow.

I happened to be closest to him when the shell exploded but just far enough to avoid being hit. I called in a medevac helicopter and carried him with another Marine to a cleared road. I could hear the gurgle in his throat as he struggled to breathe. We hurried to the helo but the sounds he made became fainter and fainter. By the time we reached the thumping chopper, he was silent.

The staff sergeant was the first of two Marines who would die in my arms during my thirteen months in Vietnam. There was no fanfare or extraordinary drama to it; the life simply slipped from his body.

**Q: The period during the Vietnam War and its aftermath were some of the most politically contentious times in U.S. history. How did you navigate your service and the war's impact on the nation as you later pursued a political career?**

**A:** At that time the only way most people looked at military service in Vietnam was how to get out of service in Vietnam. Immediately after I returned from Vietnam I served as a representative of the Platoon Leaders Class program, speaking on college campuses about how students could become Marine officers. I could communicate reasonably effectively and always sought to understand any opposition. So, I read an anti-war book, "The Greening of America," by Charles Reich, to better understand the other side of the argument, which is still what I recommend people do.



Chuck Robb, former governor, senator and Marine major. (Chuck Robb)

During one event a student shouted, "You are teaching people to kill. What does that have to do with pacification?" I responded, "Most people know how to kill already. We don't have to teach them that." I also said that I didn't like being engaged in war and found nothing satisfying about it. The dialogue surprised some students. At the very least, I hoped to give them a sense that I, like other returning veterans, was not an automaton or a warmonger but a human being, not so different from any of them and fully capable of developing personal opinions. I don't know if I changed anybody's stance on the war that day, but by the time I finished, the audience gave me a standing ovation.

**Q: During your time as a U.S. senator, you served on various committees and groups with direct links to military and veterans affairs. One included the formation of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy under President Clinton to allow for homosexual people to continue to serve in the military. Looking back on that time, can you share with readers why that was important for you?**

**A:** The first time I became more aware of how acute the problem and the need for DADT was after the military in law school. During a clerkship, I kept officer qualification records for those who'd been disciplined in the Marines. I found two majors, and I was a major by that point, who had performed well in combat but they were accused of being homosexuals and were going to be discharged. Not for their conduct but over the accusations. I said, you know, "This is wrong." That was my first direct experience.

**Q: You served on committees that took you back to Vietnam and to neighboring countries. What was it like to return to Vietnam years later?**

**A:** It's an interesting experience to talk to people on the other side of combat. While I was there I was taken out to some of the areas where I had fought. Then afterward when I met with many of the now-former Viet Cong for the most part, we didn't have many meetings with the North Vietnamese Army officials at that point, but you could talk to them and in effect acknowledge yes we fought on opposite sides of the war and we're now at

peace. It was also clear at that point they were a little reluctant still to talk too much to a foreign dignitary. You can't get that experience any other way than to have been in combat and then to have a chance to talk to some of the people who were trying to kill you.

**Q: Much later in your career you served on the Iraq Study Group and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. How did your military experience help you with that work?**

**A:** There is no question in my mind that you gain an amount of credibility if you've been there. If you're talking about war, if you have been involved in combat, most of your peers will allow you a certain leeway because you've been there on the ground and are willing to put your life on the line. And you know if you're going to suggest certain types of activities you know what else is involved.

**Q: You end the book with a reference to an early challenge in officer training. Why did you make that choice as an author?**

**A:** It made a nice way to close it so that people could understand your visceral feelings, especially the challenge to do your best, particularly when you're being evaluated in direct competition with all of the other peers who are the same rank. And you're able to deliver the goods.

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### Disabled Union Veterans

by Michael D. Visconage • 1st Director, VA History Office, U.S. Department of Veteran

*UNION CIVIL WAR VETERANS AND THE AFTERMATH OF 30,000 AMPUTATIONS. Pensions to Union Veterans for amputated limbs was notable, but 60% of awards were for non-battlefield causes. Laws passed in 1865 and 1866 added 14 other kinds of disabilities. The pension process is Object 63 in The History of VA in 100 Objects series.*

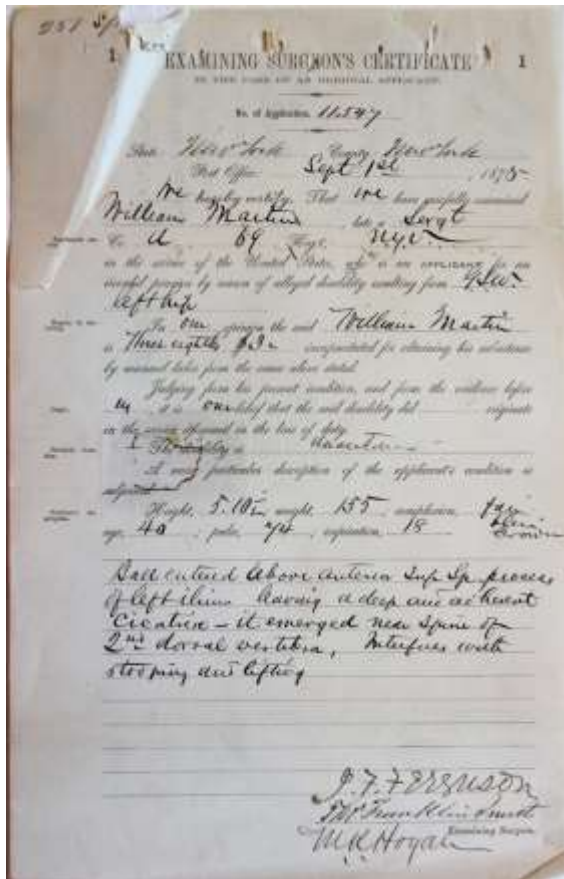
The North's victory in the Civil War came at an enormous cost to the more than two million men who fought for the Union cause. Over 350,000 lost their lives due to battle or disease. Almost as many were wounded in action. Some escaped with minor flesh wounds but others suffered more lasting injuries that left their bodies scarred, damaged, or worse. According to Northern medical records, Union surgeons performed just under 30,000 amputations during the war, although the actual number was almost certainly higher. Roughly 75 percent of the patients survived these operations and returned to civilian life missing one or more limbs or other body parts.

Congress made provisions to provide monetary compensation to the wounded or disabled at the beginning of the war. In July 1861, lawmakers hastily passed a law for recruits who answered President Abraham Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion, making them eligible for the same pension allowances as soldiers in the Regular Army. A year later, after it became apparent that there would be no speedy end to the conflict, Congress enacted a more comprehensive pension act called the General Law. It was modeled on the pension legislation passed for Veterans of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Mexican War, although it was more liberal in one important respect. For the first time, a pension law explicitly granted benefits not just to men wounded in battle but also to those suffering from "disease contracted while in the



Three Union Veterans and left-leg amputees pose for a picture, circa late 1860s. All three were wounded during the fighting in 1863. (Library of Congress)





Surgeon's certificate from 1875 stating that Union Veteran William Martin deserves three-eighths of a full pension for a gunshot wound to his left hip. His 1863 claim for the same injury was denied because the wound was expected to heal in three months. (NBER.org)

service of the United States.” This stipulation vastly increased the pool of eligible claimants, as sickness and disease ran rampant in the ranks during the war. Over the next 36 years, almost 60 percent of the more than 400,000 pensions awarded to Civil War Veterans would be for non-battlefield causes.

Surgeon's certificate from 1875 stating that Union Veteran William Martin deserves three-eighths of a full pension for a gunshot wound to his left hip. His 1863 claim for the same injury was denied because the wound was expected to heal in three months. (NBER.org)

Surgeon's certificate from 1875 stating that Union Veteran William Martin deserves three-eighths of a full pension for a gunshot wound to his left hip. His 1863 claim for the same injury was denied because the wound was expected to heal in three months. (NBER.org)

In other respects, the 1862 act followed the practices of previous pension laws. As had been the case since the American Revolution, payment rates depended on rank (at the time of injury) and the severity of the disability. If fully disabled, privates and non-commissioned officers received \$8 a month, an amount fixed by law back in 1816. At the other end of the payment spectrum, officers at the rank of lieutenant colonel or higher received \$30. Proportionally smaller sums were awarded for injuries that were determined to be less than completely debilitating by examining physicians. In evaluating a Veteran's condition, medical officials used the criteria that had been in place since 1806: they assessed the “nature of such disability, and in what degree it prevents the claimant from obtaining his subsistence”—meaning a living—by manual labor.

Congress diverged from this simple if highly subjective formula for calculating pension rates later in the war as casualties and the carnage on the battlefield mounted. In mid-1864, legislators approved an act establishing fixed rates that applied to all ranks for specific types of severe and permanent disabilities. The new law covered three conditions: the loss of both feet merited a monthly pension of \$20 while the loss of both hands or the sight in both eyes was worth \$25. Two additional laws passed in 1865 and 1866 added 14 other kinds of disabilities that qualified for a pension at a fixed rate of between \$15 and \$25. These rates were periodically increased in a series of later laws enacted between 1872 and 1904.

Compilation of rates for specific disabilities as set forth by laws passed between 1864 and 1904. The table appears in *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (1918) by William Glasson. (Google Books)

Compilation of rates for specific disabilities as set forth by laws passed between 1864 and 1904. The table appears in *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (1918) by William Glasson. (Google Books)

The modifications to the 1862 General Law were intended to provide clarity and consistency to the pension system, while also awarding more generous compensation to enlisted personnel and lower-ranking officers who suffered grievous injuries. But the new statutes introduced their own set of complications and ambiguities. Many of the disabilities covered were straightforward and simple to ascertain—for instance, loss of a leg at the hip joint or an arm at the shoulder joint earned the injured Veteran a monthly pension of \$15. But the 1866 act also awarded \$15—soon after increased to \$18—for a “disability equivalent to the loss of a hand or foot,” a

category of impairment that was open to interpretation. It also specified a payment of \$20 for “incapacity to perform manual labor,” which seemed at odds with the terms of the 1862 law. An attempt to codify all existing pension laws in 1873 added another layer of complexity by empowering the Pension Bureau to establish fixed payment rates of between \$1 and \$17 for specific disabilities that fell short of being equivalent to the loss of a hand or foot.

Despite its shortcomings, the federal government applied the Civil War-era pension regulations to all who served in the U.S. Army and Navy after 1865, including those who fought in the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection (1898-1902). When the United States entered World War I in 1917, however, Congress devised a different methodology for compensating service-connected injuries and placed it under the direction of a new agency in the Treasury Department, the Bureau of War Risk Insurance (BWRI). The BWRI calculated compensation for Great War Veterans according to a published rating schedule based on state workmen’s compensation laws. This process became the basis of the modern compensation system employed by VA today.

## Mission Statement



**Mentors and Mentees, Johnson to Biden Aides,  
Army Navy Country Club**



**Biden Aides under the Watchful Eye of COL Tony Sebo (Bush '43)**

**The Society of White House Military Aides grew from an idea of camaraderie and friendship shared through our unique experiences while serving our nation's Presidents. It is our purpose to continue to renew those friendships through the Society and preserve the history and honor of our service. Our members represent military aides from twelve (12) Administrations, comprising both current and past White House Social and Presidential Aides from the Roosevelt Administration to that of George W. Bush, and five branches of the service: the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and the Coast Guard. Honorary Members include Social Secretaries to the President and those members of the White House Military Office who worked directly with Military Aides.**



**Kenn Riordan (Reagan) Founding Chairman**



**Gloria Williams (Biden) is amused by AMB Abelardo Valdez  
(Johnson) - President Carter's Chief of Protocol**

**Since its founding in 1991 by Chairman Kenn Riordan, Jr. (Reagan), the Society has grown from fifty (50) Aides to over six hundred (600) aides in 2008 and has been incorporated with legal counsel. The two most senior members served as Aides to President Roosevelt; another, White House Curator, Mr. Rex**



**Scouten, served ten Presidents. Included in our ranks are two Presidents of the American Red Cross; members of the Council of Foreign Relations; a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; a CINCPAC; two women who retired as the highest ranking in their services; a U. S. Senator; the Founder of C-SPAN; a Founding Partner of the Carlyle Group; three University presidents; and a CEO of PepsiCo. All were White House Social or Presidential Aides, and members.**



**Mentors Andy Ball and Carol Hattrup (both Bush '41 / Clinton) Mix It Up!**



**Emily Lapp and Gloria Williams (Biden Aides) Mentored by Rusty Johnson (Carter)"**

**The Society enjoys an exceptionally high level of interest with over three hundred (300) paid members and 65% of Aides receiving our mail as dues paying members, with exceptional participation by the youngest Aides from the Bush and Clinton Administrations. The minimal membership dues cover only expenses (there is no profit), and accord the members an Annual Directory of Aides, Newsletter highlighting interesting activities of members, also host an annual White House Christmas Tour and a "Sr. Aides' Luncheon" in the Spring at which we honor one of our members for excellence in his/her professions. A Chairman of PepsiCo; a Founding Partner of the Carlyle Group; the Founder of C-SPAN; and Director of US Citizenship and Immigration (DHS). Other events include periodic sailings aboard the Presidential Yacht, the *Sequoia*, and private functions in and around Washington such as picnics at member's estates and horse farms.**

**We welcome all who share our mission and purpose and whose good character serves as an example of camaraderie to others!**



**"The Pepsi Generation" L-R, MAJ Avis Kinard McAllister, Bush '43; Steven Reinemund, Chairman, PepsiCo, Nixon / Ford; COL Peter Zolper, Bush '41. The Washington Club, 2007.**



**Obama Aides Brooke Robinson and Paige Young Guard Kenn**





## How to Connect

### **LinkedIn:**

Our SWHMA LinkedIn group currently has 142 members. We invite SWHMA members to join us as we look to develop the group as a way to further connect our members. If you're on LinkedIn please join us!

To access our LinkedIn group, please go to [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) and either sign up for an account or log on. Once you are logged on, please search for The Society of White House Military Aides. Once you access the group page, select "Ask to Join". Once confirmed, you will be added to the group.

### **Facebook:**

Our SWHMA Facebook group currently has 237 members. To join the our Facebook group, please search "White House Military and Social Aides" or use the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/923613964355467/> and ask to "Join" the group. Once confirmed, you will be added to the group.

### **Newsletter ideas and suggestions:**

Kenn Riordan, Jr.: [lordstrider@earthlink.net](mailto:lordstrider@earthlink.net)

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Jim Barry: [jtb@celerity05.com](mailto:jtb@celerity05.com)

### **Renew your Membership:**

Here is how:

Please go to <https://www.swhma.org/members/shopping-cart/> and login to your account or create a new registration. Once logged in, you can select which membership type you would like to purchase.