



Though Arlington National Cemetery will remain closed, all national cemeteries managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs will be open Memorial Day weekend. (U.S. ARMY/ELIZABETH FRASER)

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# Honoring the fallen on Memorial Day

**N**ational cemeteries managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs will be open during Memorial Day weekend, but Arlington National Cemetery will remain closed to the public because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arlington cemetery will be open only to family pass holders.

“We are expecting several thousand family pass holders to visit their loved ones’ graves this Memorial Day weekend,” Charles “Ray” Alexander Jr., superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, said in a statement. “Protecting the health of our employees, service members, contractors and our visitors is paramount.”

Each VA national cemetery will conduct a brief wreath-laying ceremony, observe a moment of silence and play taps, according to the VA, whose National Cemeteries Administration manages the country’s 142 national cemeteries.

The ceremonies will not be open to the public, but they will be livestreamed on the National Cemeteries Administration’s Facebook and Twitter pages.

Group placement of flags at gravesites and other public events that have traditionally taken place at the cemeteries on Memorial Day are canceled. However, all VA national cemeteries will be open Memorial Day weekend from dawn to dusk for public visitation.

This year, the U.S. observes Memorial Day on May 25.

“This year, by necessity, will be different from past Memorial Day observances,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in the announcement. “While the department can’t hold large public ceremonies, VA will still honor veterans and service members with the solemn dignity and respect they have earned through their service and sacrifice.”

The public also can pay tribute at

the VA’s Veterans Legacy Memorial website, which contains a memorial page for each veteran interred in a VA national cemetery.

Visitors are asked to adhere to health and safety guidelines and maintain physical distancing.

Families may place flowers and small American flags at their veteran’s gravesite, the VA said.

Officials at Arlington cemetery said family pass holders must wear masks during their visit if they are unable to maintain a 6-foot distance from others, and they are only allowed to visit their loved one’s grave.

Historic locations throughout the cemetery are closed.

Pass holders should use the Memorial Avenue gate at the main entrance of the cemetery from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Throughout the weekend, cemetery staff will produce a multimedia virtual visitation feature on the cemetery’s website or social media sites.



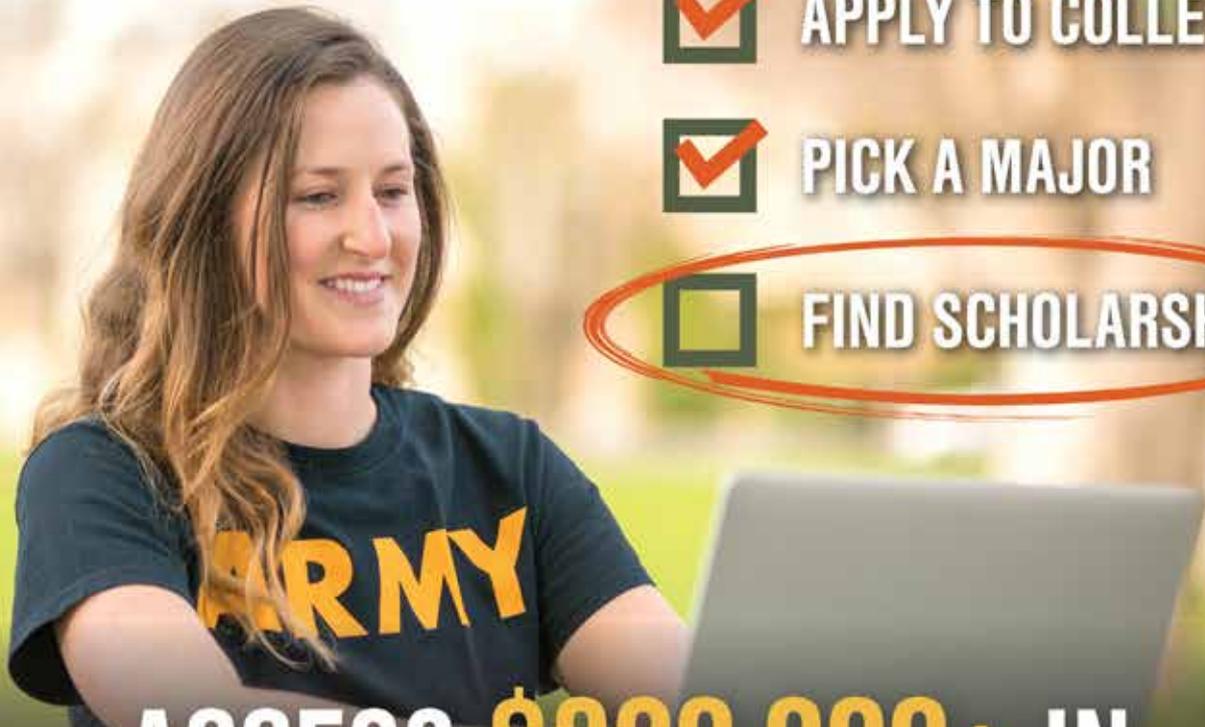
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## Medal of Honor recipient dies after battle with cancer

**M**edal of Honor recipient and former Green Beret Staff Sgt. Ronald Shurer II died May 14 in Washington, D.C., after a long fight with lung cancer. He was 41.

His death was announced by the Army and the Secret Service, where he had worked since leaving the Army in 2009.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville called Shurer his hero.

“Every generation has its heroes and Medal of Honor recipient, SSG (R) Ron Shurer is one of mine,” McConville wrote on Twitter and Facebook. “I’m heartbroken at Ron’s passing. He was a humble warrior who put others before himself.”

Shurer was awarded the Medal of Honor on Oct. 1, 2018, for his actions on April 6, 2008, in Afghanistan to save members of his detachment of Green Berets and Afghan commandos.

Shurer was the only medic with Operational Detachment Alpha 3336, which was assigned a mission to capture or kill members of the Hezb-e-Islami group.

Almost immediately after being dropped off, they were ambushed on a mountainside in Shok Valley by some 200 Islamic militant fighters.

There were casualties, who Shurer treated as he moved up the mountain to where the rest of the American fighters were pinned down.

Shurer “took off through a hail of bullets and began scaling the rock



Staff Sgt. Ronald Shurer II stands with his wife, Miranda, after receiving the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony on Oct. 1, 2018. (U.S. ARMY/SPC. ANNA POL)

face to get to the casualties,” his citation says. He treated one U.S. soldier who had been struck in the neck by shrapnel from a rocket-propelled grenade, then continued several hundred meters more over the next hour, under fire, killing insurgents along the way to reach the site of the ambush.

Shurer is credited with treating four critically wounded American soldiers and 10 Afghan commandos.

He was shot in the helmet and arm but continued moving through heavy fire to provide treatment to casualties over more than five hours.

Wounded himself, Shurer continued to treat others and then directed their evacuation down a steep cliff, President Donald Trump said at the White House

Medal of Honor ceremony that included other survivors of the mission, including two Afghan translators.

“Ron raced to each patient, giving them lifesaving care,” Trump said, noting Shurer did not stop there. “He charged back to the mountain, going all the way up, and then rejoined the fight much more than six hours.”

During the ceremony, Trump also noted that Shurer had been diagnosed with lung cancer the year before.

“He’s been fighting it every single day with courage and with strength, just like he faced every single battle in his life.”

Shurer, who was a member of the Association of the U.S. Army, had been pursuing a master’s degree at Washington State University when 9/11 happened, and he decided to join the military.

After the Army, Shurer worked for the Secret Service as an agent in Phoenix, then became part of a presidential protection tactical team in the Washington, D.C., office in 2014.

In a May 14 tweet, the Secret Service said, “Today, we lost an American Hero: Husband, Father, Son, Medal of Honor Recipient—Special Agent Ronald J. Shurer II. From a grateful Nation and Agency—your memory and legacy will live on forever.”

## Meet the AUSA headquarters staff

### Elvy Roget

*Finance/Administrative Coordinator*

Elvy Roget has been with AUSA since 1983. She currently handles payables and receivables, but she has held many different accounting roles during her 37 years with the association. She enjoys gardening, wine tastings and spending time with all of her grandchildren. She is honored to be AUSA’s longest tenured employee.



## Former Old Guard, Military District of Washington commander dies

**R**etired Maj. Gen. Donald Hilbert, a former commander of the Military District of Washington and a lifetime member of the Association of the U.S. Army, died May 17. He was 86.

Hilbert, a 1955 West Point graduate, served in the Army for more than 35 years, including two tours in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division.

He commanded the 3rd Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) and served in units such as the 25th Infantry Division, 82nd Airborne Division and XVIII Airborne Corps.

Hilbert was the only officer to command both The Old Guard and the Military District of Washington, and he dedicated his life to serving soldiers and families, said Col. James Tuite, commander of The Old Guard.

“He was deeply committed to honoring those who served and protecting the nation’s capital,” Tuite said. “His legacy set the standard of excellence that continues throughout our ranks today. He will be sorely missed.”

Hilbert began his career at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he trained before serving in the 34th Infantry Regiment in Korea and the 8th Cavalry Regiment in Japan.

He spent time with the 1st Battle Group, 3rd Infantry at Fort Myer, Virginia, and was an instructor at the Army Infantry School at Fort Benning and an assistant professor of military science at The Citadel, South Carolina.

Hilbert deployed to Vietnam in July 1964 with 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division.

He served in Vietnam until June 1966, during which time he also was the operations officer for the battalion and then the assistant operations officer for the 101st Airborne Division’s 1st Brigade.

Hilbert spent time in Europe, attending the Ecole d’Etat-Major, the French staff college, and later commanding the 1st Battalion, 48th In-



Maj. Gen. Donald Hilbert. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

fantry, 3rd Armored Division.

He returned to Vietnam in July 1970 and commanded the 101st Airborne’s 1st Battalion, 327th Battalion.

He served in the 82nd Airborne Division and XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, before commanding The Old Guard at Fort Myer from July 1977 to February 1979.

After a stint at the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii, Hilbert served in the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, D.C., and then in the U.S. Embassy in Paris.

He took command of the Military District of Washington in June 1986.

Hilbert retired from the Army in June 1990, but he remained active in the military community and was an advocate for his fellow Vietnam veterans.

“You all went to Vietnam because our nation requested that we do so,” Hilbert said during a February 2018 ceremony honoring Vietnam veterans.

“You did that, and you did it without question and in an outstanding way,” he said, according to the *Daily News-Record* of Harrisonburg, Virginia. “Many lost their lives doing their duty, and the citizens of this country should have welcomed back our troops with honor that you know they deserved. Today, we will honor those patriots.”

# AUSA Extra

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## DoD outlines stages to lifting pandemic restrictions

**D**oD guidance for returning to post-pandemic conditions includes a five-step process for resuming normal and routine activities, based on reductions in infections and increasing ability to treat patients with or without COVID-19 at military medical treatment facilities.

The only timetable in the May 19 plan requires installations to show 14 days of improvement between steps. Normal—or the new normal, since there may be new health precautions—wouldn't happen until the virus is no longer detected or reported in a local area or when a large portion of the population has been vaccinated or has immunity after recovering from an infection.

In a defensewide memorandum, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said he is “extremely proud” of how service members, DoD civilians, contractors and families have managed the restrictions.

Esper empowers local commanders to change “HPCON” levels in consultation with medical authorities as conditions allow but recommends installations within a commuting area coordinate their policies.

“These decisions must be informed



Paratroopers with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, prepare for an airborne operation at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. 1ST CLASS ZACHARY VANDYKE)

by local conditions based on public health surveillance data; guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; collaboration with state, territorial, and local authorities; and advice from the command Public Health Emergency Officer and local military medical treatment facility,” he wrote.

Installations don't have to follow changes in the local civilian commu-

nity. “Commanders may set HPCON levels that are more stringent than surrounding community requirements based on mission and other risk considerations,” Esper said.

Having installation rules more relaxed than the local community is something that “must first be reviewed by the next higher commander in the chain of command.”

Read the full memo here.



In a defensewide memorandum, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said he is ‘extremely proud’ of how service members, DoD civilians, contractors and families have managed the restrictions. (U.S. ARMY/PATRICK ALBRIGHT)

## Army logistics expert leads search for COVID-19 vaccine

**A** top Army commander has been named the chief operating officer of Operation Warp Speed, the U.S. government's effort to find a vaccine for COVID-19 by the beginning of next year, President Donald Trump announced.

Gen. Gus Perna, commander of Army Materiel Command, will spearhead the White House initiative.

The goal is to produce about 300 million vaccines by January.

"We are looking to get [a vaccine] by the end of the year if we can, maybe before," Trump said May 15.

Perna, who called it a "great honor" to be on the team, said developing a vaccine so quickly will be an extremely difficult undertaking, but he promised they will "defeat the enemy."

"It is going to be a herculean task, but the combination of the two main partners—between Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense—their combined strengths, partnered with the other teammates, will ensure our success," Perna said during an event at the White House.

One of the "great advantages" of the military is its ability to conduct logistical and sustainment operations, Perna said.



Gen. Gus Perna said developing a vaccine so quickly will be an extremely difficult undertaking, but he promised the team will 'defeat the enemy.' (AUSA PHOTO)

"We're just going to apply those capabilities to this mission," he said. "This mission is about defeating the enemy. We will defeat the enemy."

The U.S. will also be working with other countries to develop a vaccine, Trump said, adding that the country to develop the first safe one would share it with the world.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said DoD is committed to partnering with government agencies and the private

sector to accomplish the mission.

"Winning matters, and we will deliver by the end of this year a vaccine at scale to treat the American people and our partners abroad," he said.

AMC is the Army's primary logistics and sustainment command.

As commander, Perna oversees about 190,000 military, civilian and contractor employees in every U.S. state and more than 150 foreign countries.

## AUSA Speakers' Bureau available for virtual events

**D**uring the ongoing pandemic, the Association of the U.S. Army remains ready to provide well-informed speakers for virtual events who can educate attendees and readily respond to any questions.

The association's Speakers' Bureau, launched in 2017, consists of experts on a wide range of Army topics, including current and historic operations, military and civilian personnel policies, national security matters, and other issues of interest to AUSA members, chapters and the general public.

"While we understand that many

events have been canceled or postponed due to current circumstances, we remain ready to assist you in planning any virtual events you might have in the near future, as well as events that might have been rescheduled for this fall," said Nzinga Curry, AUSA's director of education and programs.

Speakers can be requested by any AUSA member, including individual and community members, national partners or chapters.

"If you are in need of a keynote speaker and would like help connecting with one of the subject-matter

experts from our Speakers' Bureau, please do not hesitate to reach out by emailing [education@ausa.org](mailto:education@ausa.org). We would be more than happy to facilitate any connections," Curry said.

Retired Col. L. Scott Lingamfelter, author of *Desert Redleg: Artillery Warfare in the First Gulf War*, was recently added to the list of speakers.

His areas of expertise include the First Gulf War, artillery systems in combat, joint and combined operations, and national security policy.

For the full list of speakers and the application to make a speaker request, click [here](#).



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# Army spouses share lessons learned during pandemic

By Patty Barron

**W**here do Army spouses go to get good information? Other Army spouses, of course.

Here at the Association of the U.S. Army's Family Readiness directorate, we are no different. We were proud to connect recently with some outstanding Army spouses to check in, laugh, commiserate and learn.

On May 13, we hosted a virtual session with four women who were Armed Forces Insurance Army Spouses of the Year: Yvonne Coombes, Maria Reed, Krista Simpson Anderson and Corie Weathers.

These ladies had much to share, and they did so with candor, vulnerability and fun.

Weathers said that although military life is full of uncertainty, this pandemic has brought about a whole other level of change.

"This is a really difficult thing that we're going through," she said. "We are resilient, we do have amazing grit among us as military spouses, and when you can have this amazing chat with friends and realize that we're all not perfect ... you need your community to remind you that it's OK to struggle."

Anderson said her faith has sustained her through difficult times. As a Gold Star spouse, she is familiar with grief.

This Memorial Day, she will be celebrating the life of her late husband, Staff Sgt. Michael Simpson, and she hopes others will celebrate and enjoy this special holiday as well.

"It's a blessing to see everyone enjoying their freedom," she said.

The pandemic has not stopped Reed from inspiring her community.

She has been bringing her talents to the Fort Hood, Texas, area in the form of "porchtraits."

"We travel around in a car taking portraits of high school seniors in their cap and gown, in tuxedos and



Maria McConville, center, the wife of Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, speaks with other Army spouses during the 2019 AUSA Annual Meeting. (AUSA PHOTO)

their prom dress, and sports uniforms," Reed said. "Fort Hood saw what we were doing, and now they want it for all the Fort Hood residents that have high school seniors."

Coombes, this year's AFI Army Spouse of the Year, is involved in a balancing act—figuring out how to parent an at-home college senior and a younger son, all while supporting her husband who is in battalion command.

She is making the most of this unexpected time with her oldest by joining him on a physical challenge to run "every hour on the hour for 24 hours straight."

It was difficult, but "when am I going to get another opportunity to do something like that with him again?" she said.

You can hear more from this amazing group by watching the recording here.

## Chief's spouse talks resiliency

This past Monday, AUSA's "Army Matters" podcast featured Maria McConville, a registered dietitian, certified personal trainer, entrepreneur, veteran and the spouse of Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville.

When asked if she could share the

stories she has heard about spouse and family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, McConville replied, "Resilience is a core Army competency, and [Army families] have learned that resilience is a significant protective factor that buffers against vulnerabilities."

She continued, "I know we are resilient. Families have embraced virtual medical appointments and in- and out-processing appointments. Both the medical treatment facilities and the families have realized how efficient and effective this can be."

Families are connecting with each other in creative ways, and Soldier and Family Readiness Groups have taken on a new look, McConville said, adding that SFRG meeting attendance is skyrocketing.

"One battalion shared that they had every company commander and SFRG adviser at their last steering meeting, the first time everyone has attended," she said. "I'm so proud of our Army units and families with their creative and out-of-the-box thinking."

To hear the podcast, click here.

**Patty Barron** is AUSA's Family Readiness Director.

## Army National Guard family honored for volunteer work

**S**taff Sgt. Bill Tolbert and his family have been named the Volunteer Family of the Year by the Association of the U.S. Army's Arsenal of Democracy chapter in Centerline, Michigan.

"The AUSA Volunteer Family of the Year award recognizes an exceptional Army family who has dedicated volunteer service and significantly contributed to improving Army well-being and the well-being of the local community," said retired Brig. Gen. Mark Montjar, the chapter president.

Tolbert, a supply sergeant in the Michigan Army National Guard's 156th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, is the president of the One of Many Veterans Motorcycle Club.

The Flint, Michigan-based club helps local families in need and provides a source of camaraderie for soldiers and veterans.

"It helps the guys in the club because a lot of the guys who are retired out miss the brotherhood, it's a good



Staff Sgt. Bill Tolbert, his wife, Jenna, and their children. (COURTESY PHOTO)

source of therapy for them," Tolbert said. "So, it's not only the help we're doing for outside people, but the club itself is a great support group."

The club conducts fundraisers throughout the year and puts the money to use assisting families.

The group also provides aid when a family experiences an emergency, such as a house fire, and volunteers with local food pantries.

"Staff Sgt. Tolbert is a very voluntary person. He is always there to help

soldiers and veterans alike when they are in need of something," said Maj. Brian Snedden, the battalion operations officer for the 156th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, who nominated Tolbert for the award.

Tolbert's wife, Jenna, and their children help organize many of the motorcycle club's events.

"They continually do things to support soldiers, families and veterans," Snedden said. "I think it's outstanding what they do."

## Chapter members help with shopping, pickup service

**M**embers of the Association of the U.S. Army's Henry Leavenworth chapter are volunteering to help commissary patrons with shopping and curbside pickup service at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The initial group was for high-risk individuals and spouses of deployed service members to call in a grocery order from a list provided online, and volunteers would do the shopping and call the customer if there were questions," said Judith Bauer, chapter secretary.

This service was recently made available to all eligible shoppers, she said.



The curbside shopping service is handled entirely by volunteers. (AUSA PHOTO)

Each order must be for \$20 or more and contain no more than 250 items.

Payment procedures have been set up, and once payment is made, groceries are packed so the customer can simply drive up and have their purchases loaded into their vehicles, all without contact with the public.

The curbside shopping service is handled entirely by volunteers, with the 15th Military Police Brigade and the Fort Leavenworth Sergeant Audie Murphy Club coordinating the volunteer effort. The Henry Leavenworth chapter is a sponsor of the Audie Murphy Club.

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