

**From:** Governor's Press Office [Governor'sPressOffice@eog.myflorida.com]  
**Sent:** 11/28/2017 1:00:06 AM  
**Subject:** PHOTO RELEASE: Governor Scott Announces 20 Inductees to the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame  
**Attachments:** image004.emz; image007.emz; image010.emz; 11-27-2017\_VET HOF-6.jpg; 11-27-2017\_VET HOF-1.jpg; 11-27-2017\_VET HOF-5.jpg



**For Immediate Release**  
November 27, 2017

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## PHOTO RELEASE

### Governor Scott Announces 20 Inductees to the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame



**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** – Today, Governor Rick Scott and First Lady Ann Scott joined the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs to honor 20 inductees to the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame. The Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame recognizes and honors military veterans who have made a significant contribution to the State of Florida through civic, business or public service.

Governor Scott said, "As a Navy Veteran myself, I'm proud to honor these brave veterans for their courageous service to our great nation. These inductees worked to better their communities after their military service. Ann and I join all Floridians as we thank these veterans for their service to our state and country."

Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs Executive Director Glenn Sutphin said, "This year's inductees join a distinguished heritage of patriotic Floridians whose work values and ethics have made a positive impact on the lives of others. Their names will be proudly added to the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Wall in the Florida Capitol."

The following veterans were inducted into the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame today:

**Dr. Harold (Hal) Baumgarten**

The late Dr. Harold (Hal) Baumgarten was a U.S. Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient who landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day and fought in the European Theater during World War II. Following the war, he earned his Doctor of Medicine from the University of Miami and practiced medicine as a Board-Certified Physician in private practice in Florida for more than 40 years, spending six years working at a local VA hospital. He passed away in 2016.

**Joseph J. Celli**

Joseph J. Celli enlisted in the U.S. Army and served as a combat engineer in the China-Burma-India Theater during World War II. Following college and a career in the trucking industry, he turned to serving the citizens of Martin County. From the development of senior housing in Villa Assumpta and annual White Doves Holiday Project to the Big Heart Brigade of the Treasure Coast and service to the VA, he has enriched the lives of thousands.

**Lt. Col. Earle L. Denton**

The late Army Lt. Col. Earle L. Denton served with distinction in both the Korean and Vietnam wars. A Silver Star and Purple Heart recipient, he was a founding member of the Central Florida Veterans, Inc., and instrumental in developing local chapters of the Association of the U.S. Army and Military Order of the Purple Heart. His advocacy led to a new Orlando VA Medical Center and adjacent Central Florida Veterans Memorial Park. He passed away in 2015.

**Captain Dale W. Doss**

Capt. Dale W. Doss is a retired Naval Aviator and one of the most highly decorated combat veterans of the Vietnam War. His aircraft was shot down over North Vietnam in March 1968 and he spent the next five years as a prisoner of war before his release during Operation Homecoming. Following retirement from the Navy, he served thousands of veterans and their families with distinction for 19 years as the Leon County Director of Veterans' Affairs.

**John P. Folsom**

John P. Folsom is a Navy veteran of the Vietnam War. Following a 30-year career as a postal worker in Quincy, he served with distinction as American Legion Post 13 Commander in Tallahassee and District 2 Vice Commander. He is active with the Tallahassee National Cemetery and helped establish the Tallahassee Big Bend Honor Guard to provide rifle salute honors during burial services. Active in numerous civic organizations, he continues to serve.

**Thomas G. Gates**

Thomas G. Gates is an aviator who served two combat tours with the Air Force during the Vietnam War. An Eagle Scout and graduate of the University of South Florida, he spent a distinguished career in the FBI following his active duty service. Returning to his USF roots, he campaigned for institutional and community support for veterans programs at the university, which led to *Military Times* ranking USF as top in the nation in supporting student veterans.

**Leo R. Gray**

The late Leo R. Gray was an aviator who fought in World War II with the famed Tuskegee Airmen, retiring in 1984 as a U.S. Air Force Reserve Lieutenant Colonel. Following the war, he went to college on the GI Bill and achieved a noteworthy 30-year career with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal, he was an award-winning civic and veterans' leader and inspirational speaker. He passed away in 2016.

### **Col. Bruce J. Host**

Retired Air Force Col. Bruce J. Host is a distinguished aviator and Vietnam veteran who has led a life of noteworthy public service. An elected Leon County Commissioner, he worked to complete major infrastructure and public works projects benefitting all citizens. A former president of his local Kiwanis Club and home owners association, he helped create the FSU Student Veterans' Center and establish in perpetuity a Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame.

### **Richard R. Hunt**

Richard R. Hunt is a Marine Corps veteran and Purple Heart recipient who served in the Vietnam War. An engaged leader of several veterans' service organizations, he has been a passionate advocate of veterans' issues while serving as state commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and president of the Purple Heart Veterans of Florida Foundation. His selfless service to veterans has garnered life-saving thanks from many veterans.

### **Brig. Gen. Albin F. Irzyk**

Retired Army Brig. Gen. Albin F. Irzyk is a highly decorated combat veteran of World War II who served with distinction as a tank battalion commander in five European campaigns. The 100-year-old veteran was a founding member of the South Florida Chapter of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. A Vietnam War veteran and prolific book and magazine author, he admirably served in many leadership and academic roles in West Palm Beach.

### **Master Sgt. James L. Lamb**

Retired Air Force Master Sgt. James L. Lamb is a Florida native and Vietnam veteran. After careers as a golf course superintendent and charter boat captain, he served in leadership roles with the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, where in 2005 he was named Veteran Volunteer of the Year and in 2012 was State Elk of the Year. His role in the Army of Hope program helped garner more than \$242K for families of deployed military members.

### **Maj. Albert H. Linden Jr.**

Retired Army Maj. Albert H. Linden Jr. is a distinguished rotary wing aviator and Purple Heart recipient from the Vietnam War. Following a career with the U.S. Department of Energy, he was elected national commander of the Disabled American Veterans. Later as state commander, he mentored hundreds of DAV service officers to help connect veterans with their earned benefits. His advocacy for persons with disabilities has garnered many honors.

### **Col. Francis (Len) Loving**

Retired Marine Corps Col. Francis (Len) Loving is a Vietnam veteran who retired in 1989 after nearly 30 years in uniform. Following a career in business and state government, he served from 2003-2005 as Military Affairs Advisor to Florida's Senate President. An award-winning mentor and spokesperson for Jacksonville's large veteran community, his recent non-profit *Five Star Veterans Center* has helped 200 at-risk veterans regain normal lives.

### **Rodney L. Phillips**

Rodney L. Phillips is a combat wounded Army veteran from the Vietnam War who has lived a life of service to his country as a decorated soldier, distinguished law enforcement officer and prominent veterans' advocate. Active in the Vietnam Veterans of America and Military Order of the Purple Heart,

he's volunteered countless hours over his lifetime to support everything from homeless veteran stand downs to mentoring in Veterans Courts.

### **1st Sgt. Thomas S. Rice**

Retired Army 1st Sgt. Thomas S. Rice has made Okaloosa County a premier destination for veterans of all ages. From establishing the *Fisher House of the Emerald Coast* at Eglin AFB to escorting 900 World War II veterans to the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., his remarkable service to veteran-related causes has garnered him many national honors. A local restaurant owner, he serves on the *Veterans Florida* Board of Directors.

### **George (Ben) Ritter**

George (Ben) Ritter is a Marine Corps veteran who actively serves the interests and needs of others. A Governor's Medal of Merit recipient, his passionate advocacy on behalf of persons with disabilities is highly respected in Florida's veteran community. His tireless efforts to help drivers with disabilities resulted in Florida being the first state in the nation to have gasoline stations display their phone numbers on gas pumps for pumping assistance.

### **John E. Thrasher**

John E. Thrasher is a Vietnam veteran who left the Army in 1970 to continue a distinguished career in public service. From his time as a state representative and Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives to state senator and his current role as President of Florida State University, he has been a prominent advocate for veterans' issues in the Sunshine State. His successful tenure has ensured that FSU is one of the nation's best for student veterans.

### **Donald L. Van Beck**

Donald L. Van Beck is a U.S. Army veteran who went on to become a successful entrepreneur, lecturer and consultant. In retirement, he's been a stellar advocate on behalf of veterans in Central Florida. He was the driving force behind the creation of a Veterans Memorial Park in downtown Leesburg, and its subsequent Korean War and Vietnam War memorials. A recipient of numerous public service awards, he is adding a World War II memorial to the park.

### **Robert N. White**

Robert N. White is a Vietnam veteran who has led a distinguished life of selfless advocacy and mental health counseling to veterans and their families in South Florida for more than 40 years. He helped found the VFW Post 8195 Stone of Hope Outreach Program, providing workshops, group counseling and empowerment for local residents. A former Vet Center director, he continues to lead seminars and counseling sessions to better the lives of others.

### **Bernard E. Wilson**

The late Bernard E. Wilson is an Army Air Corps veteran who flew 14 combat missions as a "Blister Gunner" on B-29 Superfortresses over Japan and Korea during World War II. After a successful career in the utility industry, he proudly served the veterans in Madison County for more than 20 years as their veterans' service officer. A mentor for generations of Boy Scouts, he led chapters of the VFW and American Legion, impacting the lives of thousands.

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