

gilchrist

30 Years
Living Every Moment

We Honor Veterans Newsletter



October 2024

Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Celebration 2024

Gilchrist's 7th annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration is on **Sunday, March 30, 2025** at Martin's West.

The Keynote Speaker will be Captain Charlie Plumb.

Captain Charlie Plumb served as a Navy Fighter Pilot and was a Vietnam War POW. He is also an author and a top motivational speaker. During his nearly six years of captivity, Captain Charlie Plumb distinguished himself among his fellow prisoners as a professional in underground communications and served for two of those years as the Chaplain in his camp. Since his return home, more than 4,000 audiences in nearly every industry have been spellbound as Captain Plumb draws parallels between his P.O.W. experience and the challenges of everyday life.

Much more information regarding this important event will be available early in 2025. So, mark your calendars and share this information with other Vietnam Veterans.

You can also periodically check the Welcome Home page of the Gilchrist website for more information:

[Welcome Home Celebration for Vietnam Veterans | Gilchrist \(gilchristcares.org\)](https://www.gilchristcares.org/welcome-home-celebration-for-vietnam-veterans)

Special Forces Major Charles Buckley

Charles “Chuck” Buckley was born in the borough of Manhattan in New York City on June 29, 1940. Chuck grew up in the Bronx. Chuck lost his father suddenly when he was just 13. His mother did her best raising him and his sister, but he felt that his best path forward was to pursue a career in the military.

Chuck enlisted in the Army on July 7, 1958. After completing basic training at Fort Benning in Georgia, Chuck was sent to special forces training. The United States Army Special Forces, known as the "Green Berets" due to their distinctive service headgear, is the special operations branch of the United States Army. Chuck was a paratrooper and made hundreds of jumps with special forces.

Deciding to make a career in the Army, Chuck was promoted and eventually achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant (E6). Chuck then applied for Officer Candidate School (OCS), was accepted, and graduated number one in his class.

Chuck was deployed to Vietnam in 1962 and again in 1965 as an enlisted special forces soldier. Chuck was deployed a third time in 1968, this time as a 1st Lieutenant. Chuck prefers not to talk about what he did during his three tours in Vietnam. Chuck Buckley retired from the Army in 1979 at the rank of Major.

Chuck was first married in 1962 to Florence. They had two sons: Charles and Michael.

When asked about his memories from his time in the Army, Chuck smiles and relates the "Santa Claus" story. At one point, Chuck's unit was based in Germany. The men in the unit adopted a local orphanage spending time there with the children. At Christmas time they had gifts for each of the children and decided that Santa Claus should parachute into the orphanage. The children were thrilled when Santa Claus landed at the orphanage with their gifts. Now, fast forward to 2014. Chuck's family was gathered for Christmas. Someone suggested that each person share their best Christmas memory. When Chuck shared the Santa Claus story, one of the family members was speechless. She shared that only the week before at her company Christmas party that they had done the same thing. Her boss shared that his best Christmas memory was when he was an orphan in Germany and Santa Claus had arrived using a parachute. The world really is a small place.

In 1976 one of Chuck's colleagues set him up on a blind date with Mary Jean. After leaving the Army in 1979, Chuck and Mary Jean were married. Chuck brought a career with special forces to the marriage. Mary Jean brought her six children: Lou, Julie, Michael, Gina, Rick, and Jennifer. Chuck likes to say that becoming a Green Beret was easier than having an instant family with six children.

Chuck went to work with Continental Can as a production manager. Years later, he would leave Continental Can to help the family business (Santoni's Marketplace and Catering) get off the ground. Chuck and Mary Jean then moved to Florida to start his own business, a commercial landscape company before finally retiring. Chuck and Mary Jean moved back to Baltimore in 2022 to be closer to their family and now reside at Oakcrest in Parkville.

Mary Jean and Chuck now have 14 grandchildren and love to play golf and cards.

Chuck Buckley was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by a team of Gilchrist military volunteers. The tribute opened with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Chuck was presented with a certificate from Gilchrist, a We Honor Veterans pin from the Veterans Administration, a Vietnam pin also from the VA, and a handmade patriotic blanket from a Gilchrist volunteer. Mary Jean was presented a Proud Wife of a Veteran pin and a patriotic scarf. The tribute concluded with a prayer, the singing of God Bless America, and a formal salute presented by the military team. Chuck Buckley proudly returned the salute.

Following the tribute, Lou Santoni shared comments about Chuck, including that he was a great man with a strong love of family.

Charles Buckley in Uniform



Chuck and Mary Jean Buckley with the Gilchrist Team

Jack Bonner - Proud Navy Veteran

John “Jack” Bonner was born in 1938 and grew up in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. After graduating from high school in 1956 at the age of 17, he enlisted in the Navy. Jack served his four years on the aircraft carrier USS Wasp, in and around the Mediterranean Sea and Suez Canal.

In July 1958, the USS Wasp was called into action to patrol the waters off Lebanon. President Eisenhower authorized Operation Blue Bat. This was the first operation that Eisenhower authorized to protect regimes the U.S. considered to be threatened by international communism. Operation Blue Bat was in response to threats to Lebanon by a civil war between the Maronite Christians and Muslims. On July 15, 1958, the USS Wasp was one of US ships that arrived to protect Lebanon. On July 20, 1958, The Marine Helicopter Transport Squadron on the USS Wasp left the ship to secure the Beirut International Airport. By July 26, other Marine units were deployed in and around Beirut for assault landings. Jack played a key role, at the age of 19, in transporting injured Marines to a field hospital at the Beirut International Airport. He flew with a Marine helicopter pilot and transported 72 wounded Marines. They flew for 24 hours making 36 trips. When Jack talked about this event, he always referred to it as “the worst day of my life.” Jack was proud of his four years of service for his country.

In the Navy, Jack trained as an electronics technician. After his discharge in 1960, Jack attended Penn State University. He graduated in June 1962 with an associate degree in electrical engineering.

Jack continued to serve the US military branches working at AAI, an aerospace and defense development and manufacturing firm in Cockeysville, Maryland. In his civilian life he continued to work on aircraft carriers, F-14 jet aircraft, Stealth

Bombers, helicopters, and other military related vehicles. Jack would often deploy on maneuvers on the aircraft carriers to identify issues and correct them. Besides working at several Naval stations in Mississippi, Virginia, and California, Jack also spent time at Air Force Bases in Ohio, Delaware, and Nevada and a Marine Base in Virginia. Jack also designed the signaling system for the Maryland Light Rail and went on to work on an electric bus system in Dayton, Ohio.

A week after graduating from Penn State, Jack married his sweetheart from Greensburg, Pennsylvania Margaret "Peggy" Hackley. Jack and Peggy moved to Towson Maryland to find work. He was employed at AAI in Cockeysville for 35 years. Jack and Peggy moved from Towson to Cockeysville, Maryland, as they wanted to live in the country. They had grown up in a rural area outside of Pittsburgh and wanted to raise their family in a rural setting. Jack has two daughters, Karen, and Suzanne; two grandsons, Daniel, and Andrew; and one great-grandson, Camden.

Jack has a love of country music. Jack and Peggy made several trips to Nashville, Tennessee and Branson, Missouri. They attended country music concerts in the Baltimore, MD and Lancaster, PA areas. He enjoyed time spent with his family.

Jack Bonner was recently honored with a salute to service tribute conducted by Gilchrist staff and volunteers. The tribute was held on July 4th, a wonderful day to thank a veteran for serving his country. The tribute began with an opening prayer, the singing of the national Anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Jack was presented with a certificate from Gilchrist, a We Honor Veterans pin from the Veterans Administration, a patriotic blanket made by a Gilchrist volunteer and a thank-you card made by a Cub Scout. Family and friends joined in the singing of several patriotic songs including the Navy song. The veterans then presented Jack Bonner with an honor salute. With some assistance from one of the veterans, Jack proudly returned the salute. The tribute concluded with a closing prayer and the singing of God Bless America.



John "Jack" Bonner proudly wearing his Navy uniform



Jack Bonner with the Gilchrist Team

An Honor Salute for Navy Veteran Ernest Briggs

Gilchrist recently had the honor of celebrating one of its own heroes, Ernest Briggs. On July 2, 2024, Ernest, a 102-year-old Navy veteran, was given a Salute to Service Tribute by Gilchrist Veteran volunteers. This special ceremony was a heartfelt tribute to his remarkable life and service to the country.

A Legacy of Service and Adventure

Ernest Briggs was born and raised in South Baltimore. At the tender age of 16, he was drafted into World War II, where he served in the Navy. His service took him to significant locations in Japan, including Nagasaki and Okinawa, where he witnessed history and contributed to the efforts that shaped the world as we know it today. Reflecting on his service, Ernest recalls the camaraderie and resilience that defined his years in the Navy, which lasted for five formative years.

A Life Well-Lived

Along with raising a family and working at the United States Post Office, after his military service, Ernest continued to lead a life filled with adventure and passion. He is an avid lover of boat rides and has owned boats, horses, and cars throughout his life. His love for the open water and the thrill of riding and driving have been a constant source of joy. In addition to his adventurous spirit, Ernest is a dedicated fan of Baltimore's sports teams. "I like the Orioles and the Ravens," he says with a smile, reflecting his lifelong loyalty to his hometown teams.

A Community of Support

The Salute to Service Tribute organized by the Gilchrist Veteran Volunteer Task Force was a well-earned acknowledgment of Ernest's service and a celebration of

his life. Surrounded by family, his pastor, fellow residents, staff, and volunteers, the event featured a commemorative pin presentation, an honor salute, and special readings and songs.



Navy Veteran Ernest Briggs with the Gilchrist Team

Marine Lewis Edward Ferguson

Lewis Ferguson was born in 1948 in Clifton Forge, Virginia. Lewis graduated from Patterson High School in Baltimore and in 1968 joined the United States Marine Corps. Lewis served in Vietnam and was then stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina until he was discharged in 1970.

After the military, Lewis worked in construction, which he loved, and at the Baltimore Recycling Center for almost 20 years. According to his family, Lewis was a hard worker.

Lewis met Terry Neville in 1976 and they became best friends. In 2000 they became a couple and were married in June of 2001.

Lewis and Terry helped raise their niece Stephanie, and thought of her as their own daughter.

According to Terry, Lewis was a football fanatic, especially his Ravens. Lewis attended church at the Eastern Assembly of God. In his younger years, he liked lifting weights and staying strong and fit. Lewis earned the nickname of “Reds” for his red ponytail, although only his family and close friends called him by that name.

When asked about her husband, Terry replies, “Lewis had a heart of gold. He was the most patient and understanding person I had met in my life. He was someone you could tell anything to.”

Sadly, Lewis passed away earlier this year. The family requested a posthumous tribute which was conducted by a team of Gilchrist volunteers. There was an opening prayer for a deceased veteran, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the singing of the National Anthem. In Lewis’ memory, Terry was presented a certificate from Gilchrist, the We Honor Veterans pin and the Vietnam Veteran pin from the

Veterans Administration, and a patriotic blanket handmade by a Gilchrist volunteer. Terry was presented with a patriotic scarf and a Proud Wife of a Veteran pin. Terry was also presented a folded American Flag. The uniformed veterans then presented an honor salute to Lewis. The tribute concluded with a closing prayer, the playing of Taps, and the singing of God Bless America.



Terry being presented with the folded American Flag by Gilchrist volunteer and Marine Corps Veteran Dan Woolfrey

Washing the Vietnam Memorial

In 1994, members of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 641 in Silver Spring, Maryland noticed the Wall was not as clean as it needed to be and began working with the US Park Service to wash the Wall during the spring, summer and fall months of the year. Over the years, other groups have joined VVA Chapter 641 members to ensure the Vietnam Memorial is clean for the thousands visiting each year.

In July and August of this year, several Vietnam Veterans and Gilchrist volunteers joined the VVA Chapter 641 members to wash the Wall at 6:00 AM on a Saturday morning. Everyone in attendance was surprised and honored when on one of those Saturdays that Jan Scruggs arrived.

Jan Craig Scruggs is a US Army veteran who served in the Vietnam War and later founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, which built the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Scruggs was the President of the foundation until 2015, when he retired.

Jan Scruggs is referred to as “The Founder of the Wall.” Here is a quote from Jan:

"In Vietnam, I was wounded in combat at 19 years old. I could not have imagined ten years later at the age of 29, I would come up with the idea to build a memorial to my fellow Vietnam Veterans. It would include every name of every soldier who gave their life for the USA" - *Jan C. Scruggs*

Jan was asked to address the veterans at the apex of the Wall after the washing was completed. He pointed to the Wall and thanked everyone for maintaining the

Vietnam Memorial in order to honor the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

For more information on Jan Scruggs, go to: [Jan Scruggs - Founder of the Wall](#)



L-R: Bill Gray (VVA Chapter 641), Mike Lachance (Gilchrist), Jan Scruggs, and Tim Price (Gilchrist)



Marine Corps/Vietnam Veteran and Gilchrist volunteer Paul Sullivan washing the Wall



Army/Vietnam Veteran and Gilchrist volunteer Tim Price honoring a veteran from his hometown

Vietnam Veteran Finds Redemption and Recovery Through Therapy

Eldson returned home from the Vietnam War to hostile protests, making him feel angry and betrayed. Rather than cope with his feelings, Eldson went down a destructive path that included self-isolation and drug use, which eventually led to jail time. After his release, a compensated work therapy program through VA

helped him manage his PTSD symptoms, connect with a supportive community, and rebuild his life.

You can watch Eldson share his story here:

[Vietnam Veteran Finds Redemption and Recovery Through Therapy \(maketheconnection.net\)](#)

Uniform Smiles

As a group of soldiers stood in formation at an Army Base, the Drill Sergeant said, “All right! All you idiots fall out.”

As the rest of the squad wandered away, one soldier remained at attention. The drill instructor walked over until he was eye-to-eye with him. The soldier smiled and said, “Sure were a lot of ’em, huh, sir?”

Please Share

If you enjoyed reading this edition, please forward a copy to other veterans that you know so that they can also enjoy the newsletter. If you are reading a shared copy and would like to receive your own copy of future editions, please send an email with your request to kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.

Looking For a Few Good Volunteers

Would you like to be a Gilchrist volunteer? We are always looking for volunteers – especially those who have military experience. Our military veteran volunteers are involved in Salute to Service Tributes for veterans under hospice care, visiting public schools to talk about military service, meeting with veterans to talk about their military service, supporting our annual Welcome Home event for Vietnam Veterans, and many other activities.

If you would like to learn how to become a volunteer, contact Gilchrist at kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.

Gilchrist Cares

You may know Gilchrist best for the care we provide people near the end of life. But we offer so much more than hospice. Today's Gilchrist extends services to individuals with serious illness who need our care and support well in advance of hospice care. We also provide counseling and support before and after the loss of a loved one. Please visit the Gilchrist website to learn more.

[Gilchrist providing care at every stage of serious illness \(gilchristcares.org\)](http://gilchristcares.org)

We Want Your Input

If you have suggestions for content you would like to see in future issues of the Gilchrist We Honor Veterans Newsletter, please contact us at kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.



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