



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY WHITLOCK

As the cabinet secretary for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, I travel across this great state and visit with veterans in every county. These trips also afford me the opportunity to stop and view all the veteran’s memorials in South Dakota.

Memorials are not about war – they are about people. They are about paying tribute to all the military service personnel who honorably served their country. Their bravery, their resourcefulness, and their patriotism mark them as America’s finest citizens. These proud Americans stepped out of the crowd and swore an oath to support and defend the constitution of the United States of America against all enemies.

Veterans’ memorials provide a connection from the past to the present. They encourage people to remember and honor those who have served our great country. They also teach younger generations about the sacrifices made by our nation’s heroes.

There are over 200 veteran’s memorials in South Dakota, and this is a testament to their significance. Veterans service organizations, community leaders, and civic organizations have designed these historical touchstones. Each of them has a specific message and includes symbolisms such as peaceful waters, raging waters, crosses, dog tags, eagles, soldiers, pillars, eternal lights, and flags.

Whether you are traveling through Geddes, Armour, Viborg, Tyndall, Kennebec, Pine Ridge, Sisseton, Gettysburg, Wall, Belle Fourche, or any other community in this state, I encourage you to take the time to find these memorials. We even have a resource tool that will help you –

<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Veterans%20Memorials.pdf>

These memorials play a vital role in ensuring the sacrifices made by so many for freedom are remembered.

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JOHNSON APPOINTED SDNG CHAPLAIN

Christian Johnson was promoted to the rank of Captain and appointed as the newest Chaplain in the South Dakota Army National Guard in a ceremony held at the Joint Force Headquarters at Camp Rapid on March 27, 2024.

“This is a very special day for Christian, his family, and the South Dakota Army National Guard’s Chaplain Corps. Seeing him get pinned with the cross and receiving his chaplain’s kit that included his stole was very exciting. Chaplain Johnson has done everything we have asked of him and gained substantial experience

on his journey of becoming a chaplain. We look forward to seeing him do great things for God and country with the soldier’s and families of the Guard now that he is official,” said SDARNG Chaplain, MAJ David Stimes.

CPT Johnson enlisted in the South Dakota Army National Guard in October 2001 as a chaplain assistant. He deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from April 2004 through June 2005. Christian attained the rank of staff sergeant and later reclassified as a Human Resources NCO. In 2009, Christian completed Warrant Officer Candidate School and was appointed as a human resources technician. In 2019, Christian was appointed as a 2LT in the Army’s Chaplain Candidate Program.



CPT Johnson has served in the 109th Engineer Group, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, JFHQ-SD, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), and the 881st Troop Command. Christian is a certified Army instructor and regularly instructs both Officer and Warrant Officer Candidate School.

Johnson holds an undergraduate degree from Thomas Edison State University, a graduate degree in administration, with a specialization in organiza-

tional leadership, from the University of South Dakota and a Master of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary. He is ordained and endorsed as a licensed minister in a Wesleyan Denomination, the Church of the Nazarene. He previously worked full time for the SDARNG in various roles and is currently an associate pastor at Real Life Church and an English teacher at Rapid City Christian School.

SDNG SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT: SFC MCGHEE

Alyssa McGhee was promoted to the rank of Sergeant First Class in the South Dakota Army National Guard's 235th Military Police Company in a ceremony held at the Range Road Armory, in Rapid City, on March 3, 2024.

Roughly two percent of all soldiers in the 235th make it to the rank of SFC while in the unit, and SFC McGhee is the first female to achieve this.

"Growing up I always wanted to join the military but was unsure if active duty or guard service was right for me, but I knew I was interested in a career in law enforcement," said SFC McGhee.

SFC McGhee follows in her father's footsteps of service. He served in the Army on active duty for a few years and then joined the SDNG as an engineer.

"Being in the SDNG and having the opportunity to serve is important because I can give back to my community," said SFC McGhee.

SFC McGhee enlisted in the SDNG in 2005 with the 235th as a

31B, military police, and has served through three deployments. Twice in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2013 and most recently in 2022 in Guantanamo Bay.

"They have always supported my military career in law enforcement and help me take care of property and pets when I leave for training, schools, and deployments," said SFC McGhee to the support of her family.

She is a member of the local VFW Post 1273 where she volunteers as staff to facilitate events throughout the year. When she isn't volunteering, she is active in the Black Hills with a local sailing club, mountain biking, and is a lover of all things outdoors.



SFVA CAREGIVER SUPPORT SUMMIT

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System is hosting their 5th Annual VA Caregiver Support Summit on Thursday, May 23rd, from 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 pm. This year's theme is "Beyond the Caregiver Role: Seeing the 'Whole' Caregiver". The event will be held virtually via Webex and will be offering Social Work CEUs!

The Summit is intended for VA community partners only. No caregivers will be present, only VA and community professionals. The Summit is an opportunity for the VA to share some of their many resources and to network with community partners.

The VA intends to share information on the VA's programming and discuss how these intersect with their efforts to improve their caregivers' wellbeing: the Caregiver Support Program, Geriatric Evaluation Clinic, their contracted Adult Day Health Care agency and a VA enrolled caregiver will discuss efforts being made to improve veterans' and caregivers' health by acknowledging that caregivers perform many roles and duties outside of caregiving.

As they launch their fifth Annual Caregiver Summit, they continue to build partnerships with VHA staff and the community, increasing awareness about the many services and supports available to caregivers. These summits assist the VA in building a stronger community that benefits our caregivers and families.

If you would like to participate in this year's summit, please RSVP to Nic Brokenleg, at nicholas.brokenleg@va.gov.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Sioux Falls VA Health Care System



The 5th Annual Caregiver Support Summit

When: Thursday, May 23rd, from 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Theme: "Beyond the Caregiver Role: Seeing the 'Whole' Caregiver"
Information on VA programs and the VA's efforts to help caregivers maintain their health and wellbeing.

Where: The event will be held virtually via Webex.

Who is it for: For community partners only. No caregivers will be present, only VA and community professionals.

Social Work CEUs will be offered!

Topics Will Include:

- Caregiver Support Program
- Geriatric Evaluation Clinic
- Adult Day Health Care
- A Caregiver's Experience

RSVP: Nic Brokenleg, CSW-PIP
605-336-3230 EXT 5018
Nicholas.Brokenleg@va.gov



Live Whole Health.
va.gov/wholehealth



**VA
Caregiver
Support**

MELISSA STOCKWELL

Veteran. Paralympian. Author. Mom.

FRIDAY **VETAID**
April 5, 2024

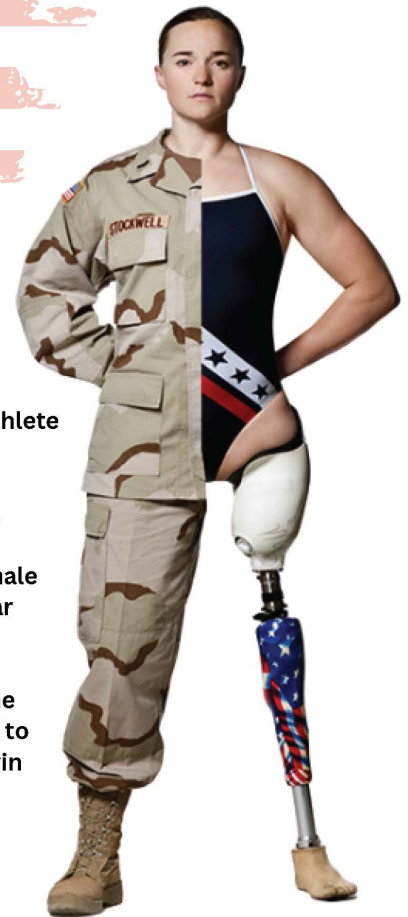
DOORS OPEN AT 5PM
EVENT STARTS AT 6PM

HELD AT: THE ALLIANCE,
1600 W. RUSSELL ST., SIOUX FALLS, SD 57104

The Power of Choice

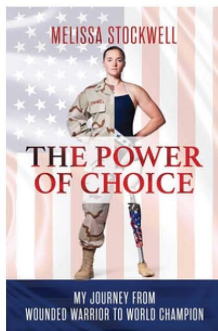
The Inspiring Story of Melissa Stockwell, an Army Veteran and Paralympic Athlete
Melissa Stockwell served as a Second Lieutenant in the US Army, and was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq in March 2004. Sadly, just three weeks into her deployment, a roadside bomb hit her Humvee causing the loss of her left leg above the knee. After undergoing several surgeries to recover from multiple infections, Melissa was honorably discharged from the Army. As the first female soldier to lose a limb in active combat, she was awarded both The Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart.

Despite the tragic incident, Melissa turned to sports for recovery. She made history in April 2008 by becoming the first Iraqi War Veteran to qualify for the Beijing Paralympics. She then shifted her focus to Paratriathlon and went on to become a three-time World Champion. Her talent and hard work led her to win the Paralympic Bronze Medal at the Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro on September 11, 2016.



TICKETS:

GENERAL SEATING: \$20
GENERAL SEATING with Pre-signed Book: \$45



Pre-Signed Books
Available for Purchase at the event
for \$30 (Limited Quantity)



SCAN THE QR CODE FOR
TICKETS OR GO TO
www.vfw628.org



John M. Bliss Post 628

the **ALLIANCE**
South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance, Inc.



Proceeds benefit local Veterans Support Programs



Sioux Falls VA Health Care System
East River Legal Services

FINANCIAL & MEDICAL DIRECTIVES VETERAN ADVANCE CARE PLANNING CLINIC

2nd Wednesday of the month at
the **ALLIANCE**

South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance, Inc.

1600 W. Russell Street, Sioux Falls

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

★ It's always too early ★
until it's too late

Contact for questions:

rebekkah@erlservices.org

susan.morgan1@va.gov



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Sioux Falls VA Health Care System

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Apr 5—Melissa Stockwell Program—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls
- Apr 8—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Drive to Fly @ Great Shots—(2505 W. Benson Road)—Sioux Falls—
1:30 pm—5:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 12—Day County What's Brewing—VFW Post—(521 First St West)—Webster—5:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 12—Purple Up for Military Kids**
- Apr 16—McPherson County What's Brewing—School Multi Purpose Room—(805 10th St)—Eureka—1:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 19—Mogen's Heroes Dance—El Riad Shrine—(510 S. Phillips)—Sioux Falls—6:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 23—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room—(321 Kansas City St)—Rapid City—10:00
am—2:00 pm (MT)
- Apr 24—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 AL Cabin—(520 S. Pierre St)—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 24—Operation Chow Line—Vermillion Eagles Club—(114 W. Main St)—Vermillion—4:00—7:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 25—SDDVA Mini Conference—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00
pm (CT)
- Apr 26-27—DAV State Convention—Deadwood Lodge
- Apr 27—Operation Chow Line—Vern Eide Marine—(4501 E. Arrowhead Pkwy)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—1:00 pm (CT)
- May 6-18—Fareway Round Up Campaign at participating stores
- May 7—Corson County What's Brewing—Pavilion—(Main and First Ave)—McIntosh—10:00 am (MT)
- May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N.
West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- May 9—Gregory County What's Brewing—American Legion Post 6—(223 Main Street)—Gregory—5:00 pm (CT)
- May 21—Yankton County What's Brewing—VFW Post 791—(209 Cedar St)—Yankton—10:00 am (CT)
- May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19—Welcome Home Ceremony—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—
Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- May 27—SDDVA Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20—Welcome Home Ceremony—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—
Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- Jun 7—8—VFW State Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
- Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Day of Sweetness—Chick-fil-A—(4005 W. 41st St)—Sioux Falls—7:00 am —
10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre
- Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—
Registration—1:00 pm/Ride Begins at 2:30 pm (CT)
- Jul 15—6th Annual Tee it up for the Troops Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Arrowhead Country Club—(3675
Sheridan Lake Road)—Rapid City—7:15 am (MT)
- Jul 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Aberdeen

(Continued)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls

Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton

Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)

Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron

Aug 29—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron

Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls

Sep 18—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City

Oct 12—Midwest Honor Flight Third Annual Elvis Night—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls

Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Brookings

Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We've Got Your Six—Sturgis

Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)

Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls

Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls

Nov 21—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown

Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City

Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Pierre

Dec 3—Governor's Budget Address—1:00 pm

Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

2025 Events

Jan 14—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm

Jan 14—Legislative Session starts

Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre

Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma

Jun 12—15—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre

Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron

Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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