



South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs  
Soldiers and Sailors Building  
425 E. Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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**For more information, contact:** DJ Montreal (South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs) at 605-204-9241 or [dj.montreal@state.sd.us](mailto:dj.montreal@state.sd.us)

**SDDVA Secretary Schneider's June Column – Remembering, Supporting, and Moving Forward**

June has arrived with a whirlwind of activities for our department, as we've had the privilege of hosting our "What's Brewing Events" throughout the state. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers, whose dedication and hard work have made this invaluable venture possible. You are the heart and hands behind these gatherings, and I am truly thankful.

To every Veteran in South Dakota: your voice matters, your story is essential, and these events exist because you deserve to be heard. Thank you to all who have attended and to those who will join us in the days to come. Your willingness to share, your thoughtful questions, and the camaraderie you bring are what make these events so meaningful. It is an honor to listen, learn, and connect with each of you.

On June 6th, we paused to remember D-Day—a day that forever changed the course of history. For our WWII Veterans and their families, Omaha Beach was "The Longest Day," a day of unimaginable courage and sacrifice. Let us continue to honor the memory of the 2,000 to 4,000 US casualties. Their actions on that fateful day were pivotal in the fight for freedom and a testament to America's enduring spirit.

June 14th marked the birthday of the world's greatest Army. Happy Birthday to all Soldiers in South Dakota, past and present! From its founding in 1775 under the leadership of George Washington to its proud legacy today, the U.S. Army has stood as a guardian of the nation's freedom. Your service and dedication continue to inspire us all.

I want to acknowledge all the fathers out there, especially those who have served or are currently serving in the military. Your sacrifices and your unwavering commitment to your families, your units, our state, and our nation do not go unnoticed. You are the pillars upon which our communities and our country are built. Your legacy of strength and devotion is woven into the very fabric of our history.

June 19<sup>th</sup>, also known as Juneteenth, serves as a reminder of the ongoing journey toward justice and equality. Known by many names, including Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, and Emancipation Day, this day commemorates the liberation of 250,000 enslaved people in Texas in 1865. It serves as a profound reminder of our nation's progress and the work that remains to be done. Let's honor this day by reflecting on the importance of freedom and dignity for all.

June is Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) Awareness Month, with June 27th designated as PTSI Day. Too many of our brothers and sisters return from service carrying invisible wounds. This silent battle can have lasting effects on our families and communities. Please know that if you or a loved one is struggling, you are not alone. Reach out to family, to fellow Veterans, to mental health professionals. There is help, and there is hope; together, we can walk the path toward healing.

Thank you, once again, to everyone who makes our community strong, compassionate, and resilient. Together, we honor the past, support one another in the present, and look forward with hope to the future.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Jeremiah J. Schneider, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs