

HOLIDAY
SALUTE



Support a Children's Charity

A number of charitable organizations have emerged over the past 20 years in support of children of fallen U.S. soldiers serving the Middle East.

They work in harmony with local communities to fill in for a lost parent, mentor and the giant gap in lost financial security. One in particular has done very hard, good and valuable work. Consider lending a hand this holiday season.

THE SNOWBALL EXPRESS

Gary Sinise might be best known for his Oscar-nominated role as Lt. Dan in 1994's "Forrest Gump," but he's made an impact through the Gary Sinise Foundation's Snowball Express. Snowball Express is a community-based initiative defined by its annual four-day event uniting 2,000 Gold Star families. The organization's website describes it as "a therapeutic retreat with a blend of fun and inspiring programs." Activities include sports competitions, dances and amusement park rides, all designed to provide new and happier moments for children of fallen service members.

THE FOUNDATION

Snowball Express is a branch of the Gary Sinise Foundation. Sinise has deep family history in the armed forces. His family



MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 2ND CLASS CHRISTOPHER J. CHURCH, U.S. NAVY/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

includes veterans who served in every major conflict since World War I, and he credits talking to his wife's siblings about their service in Vietnam as the inspiration for starting his foundation. "They came back to a nation that turned its back on them," Sinise told the

Hollywood Reporter.

He began volunteering with disabled veterans after portraying Lt. Dan but said 9/11 set his plans to spend more time volunteering in motion.

HOW TO LEND SUPPORT

There are a number of ways

to give financial support through www.garysinisefoundation.org, including online and mail-in donations as well as a gift through your will. A donation is a good Christmas gift as well. Giving in the name of a friend or relative is trending.

Event fundraising is a good way to get the community involved and fraternize and meet people. A Snowball Express Benefit 5K, for example.

There are also volunteer opportunities for the actual event.

Write a Service Member

Service members can feel extreme loneliness on deployment, particularly during the holiday season.

When everyone else is gathering with friends and family for revelry, soldiers remain on duty doing their jobs. A letter from a citizen of a thankful nation can brighten their day. Share your heart this holiday season. Get the kids involved for a great lesson in civics and empathy.

WRITING TIPS

Writer's block — that condition of being unable to think of what to write or how to proceed with writing — is a real thing. Even Stephen King as had to step away from the word processor to clear his thinking.

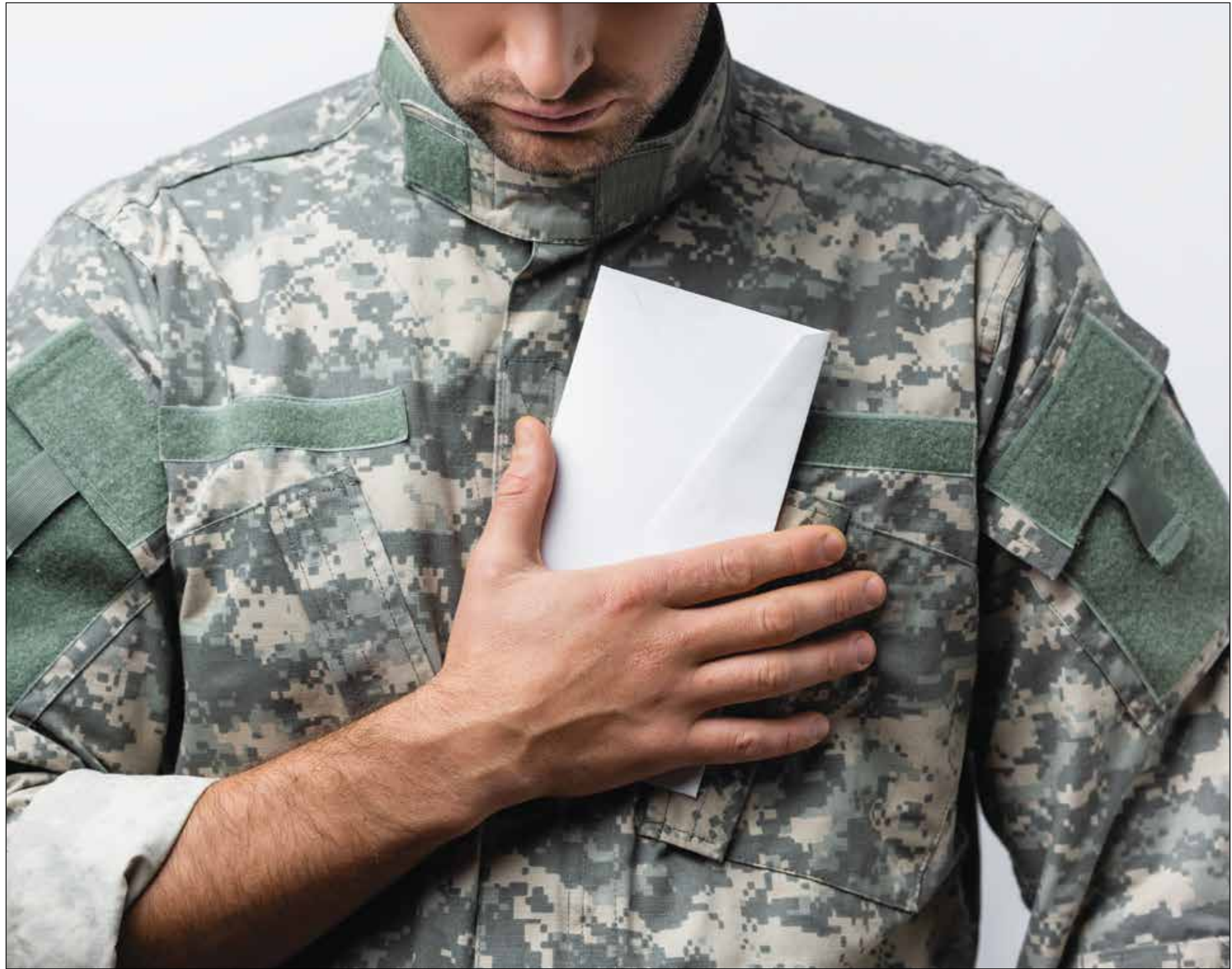
The first rule of thumb is there are no wrong ways to write a letter, as long as the sentiments are genuine. Soldiers' Angels provides some tips to get started.

- Be positive. The letter is meant to uplift and encourage. Don't share any personal problems.

- Be thankful. Be sure to communicate your appreciation for the soldiers' sacrifices and dedication to us and our country.

- Be respectful. These women and men have earned it more than most of us.

- Be kind. Remember most



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of us have never and will probably never have to endure the difficulties that these soldiers have experienced.

- Be encouraging.

Motivational quotes are always good.

- Do not include your email or mailing address

- Do not use your last name.
- If it is a classroom or workplace or group project, you can include a group photo.

- Leave them unsealed for inspection or they won't be delivered.

Mail to Support Our Troops,

13791 N. Nebraska Ave.,
Tampa, FL 33613.

TESTIMONIALS FROM WRITERS

These exercises might be of benefit to you, as well. Consider this testimonial from Lisa, per Soldiers' Angels: "I

thanked him, let him know how proud I was of his service. Asked if there was anything I could do for him and his family. Turns out we are both pastry chefs and have rescue animals. So now we have so much to write back and forth about."

Presidential Holiday Greetings

What's more patriotic than Christmas messages from the commander-in-chief?

Share them this holiday season as part of dinner at night during Advent or at the Christmas Eve dinner table. This is also a great gift idea for lovers of politics and history. Patriotism has a place in holiday celebrations.

SILENT CAL WAS PROFOUND

History instructs that President Calvin Coolidge delivered the first Christmas message from the White House in 1927.

Said Cal, short and sweet:

“Christmas is not a time or a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.

“If we think on these things, there will be born in us a Savior and over us will shine a star sending its gleam of hope to the world.”

Every year since then, presidents have sent out holiday greetings to the people of the United States. Each generally includes a glimpse into the history unfolding that holiday season. What Franklin Roosevelt said at Christmas 1941, mere weeks after Pearl Harbor, was particularly poignant for that reason. The same for President Reagan's address in 1988 as the Cold War thawed and the Iron Curtain cracked.



THE GIFT FROM PRESIDENTS

Holiday messages from the presidents have been compiled and published into a book called, “Christmas Greetings

from the Presidents.” It includes every message from every chief executive from Coolidge to our current day.

It's perfect for every lover of history or even for those who

collect Christmas books.

Each Christmas message is prefaced with a historical note to give some context to the message and the era. Each is illustrated with presidential

photographs of the time, along with anecdotes that help give a sense of history to each message. The book is a quick, easy read at just under 90 pages, or a valuable resource.

Decorate Patriotically

Who says holiday decorations have to be Santa, elves, Rudolph and Frosty? Step out of the box and combine your holiday festive creative streak with your strong sense of patriotism.

THE PATRIOTIC 'BIG GUY'

Blossom Inflatables will make you the envy of your red-white-and-blue neighbors with a 6-foot tall lighted patriotic Santa Claus holding an eagle and American flag. A perfect piece of art for the Christmas season and your holiday parties. It's yours for a mere \$143 and change.

This Santa might even make an appearance for a jalapeno bacon cheeseburger at the Fourth of July picnic this year in the backyard.

ORNAMENTS AND ACCESSORIES

Wear your patriotism on your sleeve by covering your Christmas tree with ornaments that wear the colors. Stars and stripes ornaments add a great dimension to your Christmas decor. You can buy balls in a pack of 12.

There also are patriotic versions of other common holiday decoration classics, such as angels, soldiers, stuffed animals, tree skirts and more. Look for red, white and blue color schemes, stars and



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stripes prints or even solid red, white and blue pieces to curate your own design.

A patriotic Santa Claus figurine makes a nice centerpiece for a Christmas decoration.

Add flags of various branches of the military, and of course the stars and stripes, to a fresh or faux strand of garland and place it on the mantle, stairway or front porch.

ALL YEAR LONG

Just because the season ends doesn't mean your patriotic decor has to spend the rest of the year in the attic.

All of these decorations can

do double duty as decor for patriotic holidays such as the Fourth of July and Memorial day. It's always a good time to show your pride in your country.

Clean or Decorate a Cemetery

Many of our veterans are resting peacefully at national cemeteries, heroes who died in service to country or after having lived long lives after their service.

Christmas is a perfect time to donate your time cleaning headstones of those who lie in sacred ground.

FIND AN ORGANIZATION TO HELP

The first step to being a steward for the graves of deceased heroes is to find an organization that does this kind of work.

NPR found Floridian Andrew Lumish a few years back scrubbing grime from the headstone of a World War I veteran.

Lumish, who had cleaned about 600 veterans' headstones at that point, said he restores them out of respect for those who died and to learn about how they lived.

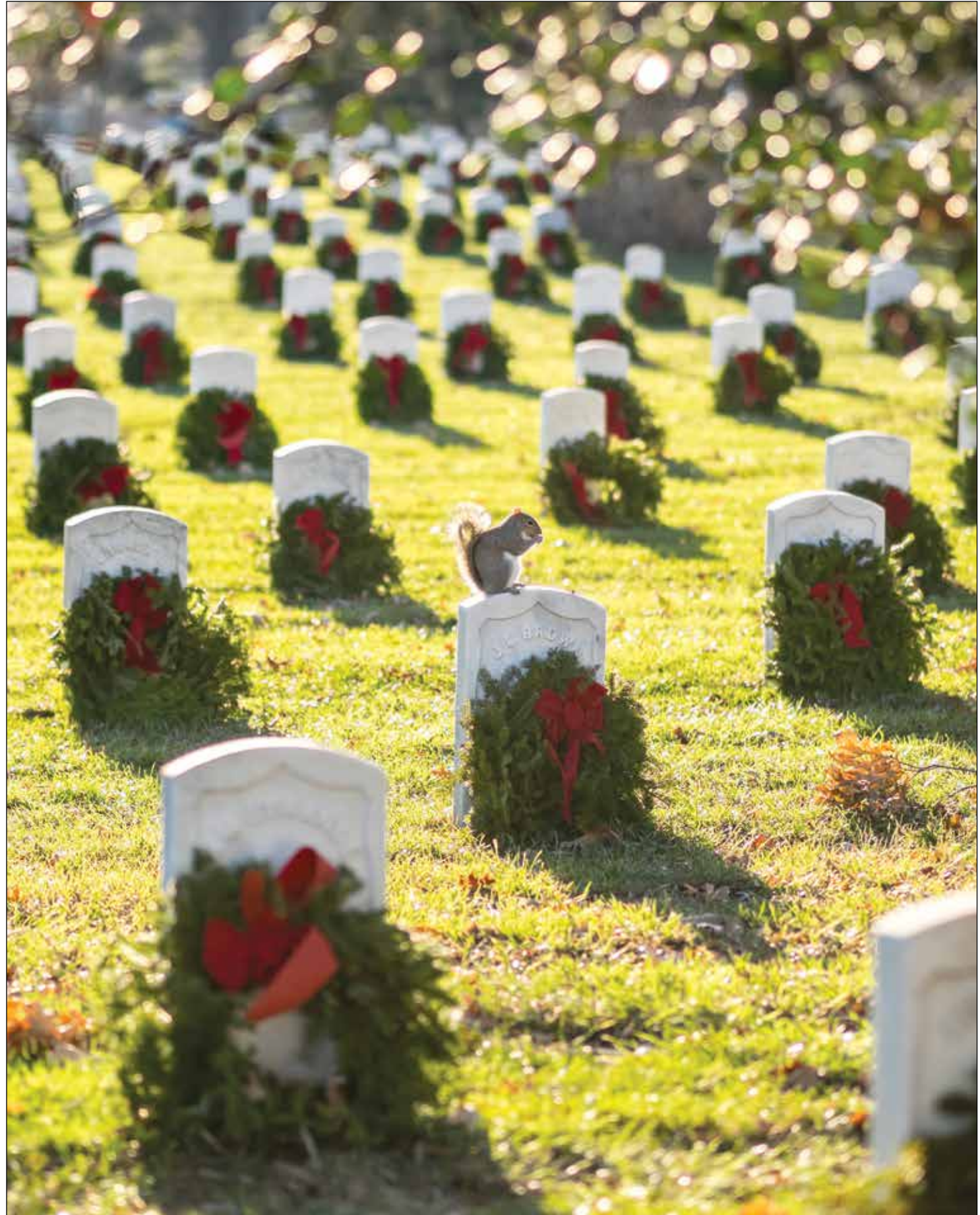
Among the stories he's discovered: A veteran born in 1840 who was shot and returned to combat with a bullet in his lower back, a Civil War veteran wounded at the Battle of Shiloh and a 21-year-old whose headstone reads, "You have died for the world, but not for your parents."

INSPIRING OTHERS

Lumish's Facebook page, "Good Cemeterian," has caught notice, having received thousands of hits, according to NPR. One of those scanning the page was Paul Heimel, a county commissioner of Pennsylvania's Potter County. Using Lumish as a consultant, the county began a project to clean the tombstones of veterans buried there.

"To have a veteran's stone fall apart and then have his name covered by moss and lichens just isn't right," Heimel says. "But the part that we really need to restore and permanently save is the record of who that person was. This is an opportunity to restore some of the dignity and honor that they have earned."

Said Lumish: "We uncover heroes. They were not considered heroes of their day, so I hope that some of the stories that I tell make people appreciate the men and women that serve currently. There are heroes today that surround us on a daily basis."



Volunteer at the VA

When our valiant soldiers return home, they oftentimes need us.

There is no better time for altruism than the holiday season. Volunteering at a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital is a great way to express thanks.

A NEED FOR VOLUNTEERS

Like all medical facilities, Veterans Affairs hospitals, nursing homes and clinics need volunteers to perform a wide range of duties. Some work directly with patients, participating in recreational programs and other activities on the wards. Others assist the VA's professional staff or escort patients, serve coffee or simply provide companionship to veteran patients.

In Fiscal Year 2019, more than 61,000 volunteers served more than 9.2 million volunteer hours. Individuals and partnering organizations gave more than \$99 million in gifts and donations, saving the VA more than \$332 million

Visit www.volunteer.va.gov to see how to offer your services and fill out paperwork.

SERVE VETERANS IN OTHER WAYS

There is also the Local Veterans Assistance Program. It might be just what you're looking for. Whether it's grocery shopping or running errands for veterans in your community, doing yard work or painting



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a veteran's home, there's a need you can help fill.

Go to the Disabled Veterans website, www.dav.org, to see where you might be a fit.

Since the end of World War I, DAV has helped more than 1 million veterans each year in positive, life-changing ways, at

no cost to them. However, they need your help with veterans' support programs and veteran services. This is ideal for the season of giving.

HOW TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER

The first thing one needs to

do is find their local VA hospital. You can access a list at www.va.gov. You'll need to then fill out an application. Once accepted, you'll attend a volunteer orientation session and go through a health screening.

If you have a criminal

record, you'll need to declare it.

You might have to attend a short informal meeting with health care staff, and depending on the work you will be doing, you might have to complete a short training before you can get started volunteering.



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Watch a Military Movie

Movie watching with the family is as much a part of Christmas as a stocking hung by the chimney with care.

Movie makers found an intersection with the holidays and patriotism with military-themed music. Check these out these Hallmark holiday talkies of the past. They all have in common one theme: love. Summations provided by Entertainment Weekly

‘CHRISTMAS HOMECOMING’

Starring Julie Benz and Michael Shanks. A military widow rents an

apartment to an Army Captain recovering from an injury in battle. As they team up to save the town’s military museum with a Christmas fundraising event, these two “wounded birds” find themselves – you guessed it — falling in love, and being healed by the magic of Christmas.

‘HOLIDAY FOR HEROES’

In this caffeinated romance film starring Melissa Claire Egan, Audrey and First Sergeant Matt have been writing each other since last Christmas, when her brother Devin shared some fresh roasted coffee from the care package she’d sent. When Matt unexpectedly shows up in

her small-town coffee shop, Audrey is delighted to see him. Soon, Matt helps Audrey with the annual Holiday for Heroes event, which honors local service members. As they work to save this important event from being canceled, will the spirit of the season bring Matt and Audrey’s love beyond their letters?

‘OPERATION CHRISTMAS’

Starring Tricia Helfer, Marc Blucas and Lisa Durupt. As her new romance blossoms, a single mother is dismayed when her boyfriend, a military sergeant, is deployed right before Christmas. Determined to not let it ruin the holidays for her and her chil-

dren, they decide to give back to the struggling military families on his base and, as their efforts go viral, they are rewarded in ways they never imagined.

‘HOME FOR CHRISTMAS DAY’

Starring Catherine Bell, Victor Webster and Matreya Fedor. When a young woman develops a long-distance relationship with a soldier on active duty, her protective mother tries to steer her daughter away from heartache. Little do they know they are about to learn lessons of the heart and that taking chances can make this Christmas one they will cherish forever.