

A Real Opportunity to Help Make History

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Park University's Chief Advancement Officer Nathan Marticke says the school's dedication to veterans runs deeply.

"It's in the DNA of our university," Marticke said.

It's evident in the number of service members who earn degrees from the private, non-profit university located in Parkville, Mo., about 15 miles northwest of Kansas City. According to Marticke, some 67 percent of students at Park are service members, veterans or family members.

That dedication to veterans extends to the work being done by the George S. Robb Centre (British spelling) for the Study of the Great War.

In November 2019, VFW National Headquarters gave the Centre a \$70,000 grant to assist with the Valor Medals Project, a re-evaluation and possible upgrade of valor medals presented to Doughboys during and after WWI.

"The VFW is proud to support this important initiative," said VFW Commander-in-Chief William J. "Doc" Schmitz. "These men served their country unequivocally and so their recognition should also come without condition or exception. We have a real opportunity to help make history right here."

Marticke said Park University and VFW share a strong commitment to improving the lives of veterans.

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“This grant is a demonstration of a true partnership in support of veterans, no matter how long ago the service and valor occurred,” Marticke said. “The Robb Centre cannot do this alone, and we absolutely need strong partners like the VFW.”

Reviewing Minority Veterans’ Records

The project, which officially started in 2018 as a collaborative task force in conjunction with the WWI Centennial Commission, is spearheaded by Timothy Westcott. He is the director of the Centre and a Marine Corps veteran, who served with the 3rd Bn., 3rd Marines, 9th Marine Div., from 1980-88. The aim of the project as it stands today is identifying WWI veterans who may have qualified for the Medal of Honor, but were passed over for commendation due to race or ethnicity.

“The task force includes a team of historians and researchers to begin a systematic examination of service members who were not recommended for the Medal of Honor during World War I, despite seemingly deserving acts,” Westcott said. “The Valor Medals Review Project is reviewing records of African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Jewish American, and Native American service members.”

Westcott says the review initiative is slated to run for seven to 10 years, and that it is funded by donations from individuals and organizations to “maintain flexibility” in research.

Researchers at the Centre work to locate living descendants of the veterans to gather more data about service histories and military engagements that might qualify the vets for further commendation. Researchers also work with groups and organizations to identify life beyond service for these veterans — including their jobs following military service and degrees earned.

“This work ... becomes highly emotional as we look into each man’s personal life,” said Ashlyn Weber, senior research analyst with the Centre. “As we slowly begin to find out who they were, it is harder to let them go at the end [of their research]. In many cases, we are the first in 75-100 years to look through their service records, and in the course of the weeks or months dedicated to them, they become alive again.”

Once the team has compiled this data, they compare it to current standards for receiving the Medal of Honor.

For senior military analyst and Army veteran Josh Weston, his participation in this project is both a professional passion and a personal endeavor.

“I plan to see this project through to the end and hope to not only honor these service members, but raise awareness of how past injustices continue to affect the present in ways that we don’t often notice and show that it is never too late to bring justification for those who are deserving,” said Weston.

He served with the 551st MP Co., and the 561st MP Co., 716th MP Bn., 16th MP Bde., 101st Abn. Div. Weston was medically discharged prior to his unit's deployment to Baghdad in 2008-09.

"It is important to do what I can to continue to support my military brethren no matter how long ago they served, because veteran support has no expiration date," Weston said.

This article is featured in the February 2020 issue of [VFW magazine](#).