

Air Force Retiree Relies on ‘Passion and Compassion’

A vet of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars runs VFW’s service office in Michigan and calls the work “a natural progression” from his days in the military

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Joe Greene retired from the Air Force in 2012. Two years later, his wife landed a job interview that ultimately led to his new career path as a VFW-accredited service officer.

Greene, a life member of VFW Post 1370 in Pontiac, Mich., said his wife, Karen, also a veteran, initially applied for a veteran service officer position with VFW’s Department of Michigan.

During her interview, she noted Joe’s multiple deployments.

She then sent in Greene’s resume and DD-214, and both were hired — Greene to the VSO role and his wife, who is not VFW-eligible, to a claims consultant position with the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit. In October, Greene was named the director of the service office for VFW’s Department of Michigan.

“When I retired, I was a senior master sergeant,” said Greene, who has been a service officer since 2014. “Every time I deployed, I was just used to taking care of those in my charge, and this just seemed like a natural progression to that.”

Greene is only the sixth state veteran service director for Michigan in its nearly 100-year history.

“This blew me away,” Greene said.

One of Greene’s biggest monetary victories also was one of his first. A widow was in the midst of an eight-year struggle to secure benefits for her husband, who served in Thailand with the Air Force during the Vietnam War. She sought compensation on his behalf for

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Agent Orange exposure he received at Royal Thai Air Base Takhli. She ultimately collected roughly \$180,000 as a surviving spouse under the dependency indemnity compensation program.

“He was a retired Air Force guy just like myself, just a generation before me,” Greene said. “He had their house that he had built, as well as cars. He was set up, but through that process after he [died], she could not maintain it. She lost everything. So this was a real overwhelming deal because she was staying with her sister, and was able to secure her own residence and get her own vehicle.”

Those instances, for Greene, make the job rewarding.

“[It’s] moments like that — when you see somebody’s life be so derailed, and you’re able to get them back on track,” Greene said.

The most challenging aspect, he said, is dealing with the laws themselves and how they can be interpreted.

“Not everything’s black and white, especially in combat situations,” said Greene, who served in the Air Force from 1985 to 2012, with 12 total deployments during Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom and to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The most common case he works on is related to “blue water” Navy veterans and Air Force vets who served during the Vietnam War. Annually, he said, his office handles about 3,000 cases among its 18 service officers.

Greene, who was in the process of hiring a new employee in late March, said what he looks for in potential service officers is that they have the “passion and compassion” for the line of work.

“It can be very easily jading at times,” Greene said. “And that’s the one thing that nobody can teach you. We can teach you the rules and regulations... What I can’t teach you is how to care and how to do that unequivocally.

Editor’s note: This is the fifth in a series of feature articles on VFW’s accredited veteran service officers. In 2019, VFW is commemorating the 100th anniversary of its National Veteran Service and National Legislative Service offices in Washington, D.C.

This article is featured in the 2019 June/July issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Kari Williams](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.