

'I'm Just Getting Started'

The VFWs new national ambassador is a veteran of the Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq wars

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John Wayne Troxell's devotion to veterans did not end in retirement after a 38-year Army career culminating with the role of senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (SEAC) from 2015 to 2019.

The 58-year-old followed such distinction with a familiar second act, flocking to active-duty troops, wounded warriors and veterans across the world as the newly appointed VFW National Ambassador in January 2022.

Far from a traditional retirement with extended periods hunkering down in his residence in Lakewood, Washington, Troxell spends about 20 days on the road each month in support of veterans.

"I didn't want to retire and become an agitator that complained about the state of things," said Troxell, a life member of VFW Post 10281 in Vine Grove, Kentucky. "I wanted to be an enabler, giving back to an institution that gave so much to me. I wanted to help other veterans and their families."

A commodity in high demand, Troxell's infectious personality, wisdom and motivational skills keep him on the go — barring how fast the plane or car can keep up with his relentless motor.

Troxell spends most days visiting active-duty units, military installations and veteran-based organizations for events in which he serves as the guest of honor. At each destination, he bestows tailored speeches focused on leadership, readiness and his obsession with health and fitness.

"If you love what you do, the travel doesn't matter," Troxell said. "When you're driven by purpose and giving back, I look at it as a compliment that people want me to come out and help our fellow veterans."

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

WASHINGTON OFFICE

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

FINDING MOTIVATION

In deciphering what endless fuel goes into the tank of a man like Troxell, the cap comes off to reveal remnants of his hometown, the impact older veterans had on him growing up, as well as the VFW.

A native of Davenport, Iowa, Troxell did not have much drive growing up in a middle-class home. Then, he began to notice his peers going off on active duty and coming back changed men.

“I didn’t feel like I had a lot of purpose and motivation throughout my high school years. I wasn’t the smartest kid or excelled in athletics,” Troxell said. “I was just getting by until I noticed guys like me going off to the military and coming back with their chests puffed out, wiser, sharper and with an air of purpose.”

Troxell enlisted in the Army in 1982 as an armored reconnaissance specialist, graduating from One Station Unit training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He would excel in the Army, eventually serving in most leadership roles within the non-commissioned officer corps. That included command senior enlisted leader at the battalion, brigade, regimental, corps, major command, sub-unified command and combatant command levels.

During his 38 years on active-duty, Troxell also deployed in support of Operation Just Cause in Panama, as well as Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf, Iraqi Freedom in Iraq and Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

For almost four decades of excellence, the once unmotivated kid from Iowa became the top enlisted service member within the Department of Defense in December 2015.

Troxell would serve as the SEAC to the 19th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, now retired Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford Jr., until 2019.

Following his retirement in April 2020, Troxell had no trouble finding an array of post-retirement options to continue using his skill set as a world-class motivator and speaker.

He created his brand, PME Hard Consulting, a family affair he runs alongside his wife, Sandra, and son, Bryan, to provide leadership and human performance solutions for organizational excellence.

Through his consulting brand, Troxell has served as an advisor and brand ambassador for many veteran-based nonprofits, such as Hiring Our Heroes, Allied Forces Foundation and Our Community Salutes.

HELP FROM THE VFW

But it was the opportunity to don the VFW’s brand that most resonated with Troxell after

being asked to join as national ambassador in January.

“It was a real honor to be named national ambassador by one of the truly great organizations for veterans in the world,” Troxell said. “I tell transitioning service members all the time about the VFW service officer that took care of me as I retired. Now to officially represent an organization that helped me to carry the message that truly ‘No One Does More For Veterans’ is such a privilege.”

Though it has been less than a year since being appointed to the position, Troxell, again, moves with haste.

He has since been a presence across training conferences for upcoming VFW commanders, a recurrent guest speaker on VFW’s #StillServing Podcast, as well as a guest speaker at several events held by local Posts across the country.

“My number one purpose is to continue to inspire and encourage our veterans,” Troxell said. “I want to recruit, but I also want our current and older VFW members to get healthier, get our comrades to get busy living and get after wellness and health.”

Troxell’s message resonated during his most recent event in Knoxville, Iowa, in July, where he joined VFW Post 3519 in co-hosting a ‘UFC Fight Night’ event alongside former UFC welterweight and Hall of Famer Pat Miletich.

The event was a sold-out affair that proved a successful recruiting event for the younger veterans as well as a different approach to a weekend event for the older VFW members.

“I’m just getting started,” Troxell said. “Now that we’re getting the boulder rolling, it’ll pick up steam. I’m very excited for the future.”

This article is featured in the 2022 September issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.