

# 'There Was Great Trust in His Leadership'

## The surgeon general at a VFW Post in Texas notes that his father was a founding member after World War II, and the Post's first African-American member

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In the quiet rural town of Fredericksburg, in the Hill Country of central Texas, a respected and trusted African-American family in the community had three sons who all enlisted to serve in World War II. Lee Roy Phillips served as a Navy Seabee and John Phillips served in the Air Force.

Another son, Paul Phillips Jr., served with the Army's 278th Quartermaster Battalion. Paul Jr.'s service would take him from the United States to the Pacific and eventually to the Philippines, where he would serve as his company's first sergeant. The officers were white, but there was great trust in his leadership and devotion to those with whom he served.

Paul Jr. served his time in the Army from 1942 to 1945 when he was discharged from the Army after a serious malaria infection. But he would eventually carry the skills he learned in the Army to a higher calling in the field of veterinary medicine. His service allowed him to use the GI Bill to continue his dream of becoming a veterinarian.

He used the educational benefit to attend Tuskegee University in Alabama and entered the class of 1948. He graduated in 1952 along with four other classmates and returned to his hometown of Fredericksburg. There, Paul Jr. joined his father, Paul Phillips Sr., a well-known, self-taught veterinarian for the county, to help treat all types of animals.

### **A FOUNDING MEMBER OF POST 7105**

After passing the Texas Veterinary Board, Paul Jr. began his practice. But as a WWII veteran, he wanted to associate with other veterans who had served. In September 1955, a group of veterans who lived in Fredericksburg applied and were granted a charter in the

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Veterans of Foreign Wars. That was the beginning of Frantzen-Ahrens VFW Post 7105.

The charter listed the original commander, vice commander and other officers. The position of Post surgeon general was given to an African-American veteran who served in the Pacific and the Philippines, my father, Dr. Paul Phillips Jr., the first and only serviceman of African-American descent to be a member of Post 7105.

That legacy continued for 64 years until I, Paul Phillips III, a retired colonel in the Army Medical Corps and an African-American Army officer, would join that same organization in January 2019. Unfortunately, my father did not have the opportunity to see my induction into Post 7105 because he passed away in 2002.

That legacy information was not known by any of the current Post members. The search for this information began when I asked current Post 7105 Commander James Bisson, a Vietnam veteran who served in the 25th Inf. Div., and retired as a brigadier general, if the Post had ever had an African-American veteran join its ranks.

Commander Bisson's search began in October 2020, and he was able to find the original request to the national VFW organization asking that a VFW Post be allowed to organize in Fredericksburg. With this official document in hand at the November 2020 membership meeting, Commander Bisson read the list of officers who were selected in 1955. It was noted that the position of Post surgeon general was assigned to my father. All members were surprised by the announcement, but none more than me, a newly joined VFW member.

### **SERVING AS A LEGACY MEMBER**

As an orthopedic surgeon in the U.S. Army Reserve Medical Corps for 24 years, which includes multiple overseas deployments from 2002 to 2018, as well as a practicing orthopedic surgeon in Fredericksburg, I have had the honor of serving as Post 7105 surgeon general since 2020.

The position has much more meaning for me as a legacy member of Post 7105. This Post has looked at the merit and service of all its members and accepted their service as honorable and deserving of membership in this great organization. The color of their skin or their race does not define the men and women who served in their country's time of conflict.

I am honored to now serve in VFW Frantzen-Ahrens Post 7105 as one of the many who have heard the call and responded with an affirmative. I now continue in my mission to serve my community in my practice of medicine and in the service and mission of the VFW.

I write this to thank all VFW Posts that have invited all races and colors into their ranks to meet VFW's mission as it continues into the 21st century.

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