

‘It’s a Battle I’ll Always Fight’

An Iraq War veteran takes on new role after service: VFW Accredited Service Officer

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Jaime Santiago, 35, and his wife, Carleen, live in Mount Royal, New Jersey, with their children, Arthur and Lilliana. Like others in his family, the father felt a calling to serve.

“My father was my inspiration to join the military, along with several of my uncles who were in the Marine Corps and Army,” he said.

In 2021, Santiago, a proud Iraq War Army veteran, took on a new role: VFW Accredited Service Officer.

“The position was announced during my VFW Post meeting, and without hesitation, I inquired for more information, which led me here,” Santiago said. “My job is to assist veterans and their families to get the benefits they have earned and deserve.”

A typical day for Santiago begins when he arrives at his office around 7:30 a.m. Throughout the day, he answers emails, prepares claims and meets with several veterans.

“Listening to veterans’ stories is just amazing. When you picture them so many years ago, you can’t help but be in awe of their bravery in service to our nation,” he said. “I don’t see this job as work. Helping my brothers and sisters is my personal mission.”

Some days, that mission is more challenging than others. For instance, Santiago has assisted several veterans whose records were lost in the 1973 National Personnel Records Center fire in St. Louis.

“Most of their files were destroyed,” he said. “Trying to reestablish their credibility is a massive and time-consuming responsibility, but it must be done.”

Santiago insists that the victories and words of gratitude from his clients more than make up for the hard days.

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“There is no better feeling than when I hear from veterans and families who have gotten a disability decision letter. It warms my heart knowing I helped change their lives for the better,” he said. “It can be such a difficult task, but it’s a battle I’ll always fight. This is a fulfilling job — the best position I’ve ever held, and I’m humbled to have it.”

Learn more about the [VFW's National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).