VFW Leaders Address Veteran Issues at Convention

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By Paul Srubas

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Vastly improved medical care is saving lives on the battlefield but ironically is challenging the nation's ability to care for the veterans who come back from war, VFW Commander-in-Chief George Lisicki said.

"More veterans are coming back alive with injuries that we would've died from back in our day," Lisicki said Friday. "So there'll be more need for providing care for those veterans."

Lisicki, the Veterans of Foreign Wars' highest-ranking member, was in the Green Bay area this weekend for the state VFW's mid-winter convention.

It was being held Friday night and today at Radisson Hotel & Conference Center, 2040 Airport Drive, Ashwaubenon. The organization's third-highest-ranking national member, Junior Vice Commander Tommy Tradewell of Sussex, Wis., was also on hand at the convention, which was expected to draw about 200 VFW members and spouses from around the state.

The VFW makes it its business to fight for financial, medical and emotional support for returning veterans, Lisicki said. That fight has changed over the last 100-plus years of the VFW's existence.

In the Vietnam War and earlier in U.S. history, soldiers typically relied on medics to treat their injured comrades, Lisicki said. But now, all soldiers are being trained, and their training and equipment is superior to those that the old medics had, he said.

That means more wounded soldiers are receiving better treatment and sooner, and they therefore are surviving more than ever before, and the nation will feel the pressure of having to provide care for more of them, Lisicki said.

Another major change: There are more female veterans, and many are veterans of active

combat.

"They're coming back with different problems, different levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and psychological effects," Lisicki said.

Veterans of recent and current U.S. conflicts are largely National Guardsmen or reservists, and that presents the VFW with different challenges, Lisicki said. Compensation for battle injuries is different for them than it is for regular enlisted soldiers, and the VFW has been fighting for parity for them, he said.
Also, reservists and guardsmen typically had to leave jobs when called into active service, and the VFW needs to keep a close eye to make sure they're not losing their jobs or salary levels when they return, Lisicki said.

The VFW also has been pushing for a newer, better GI bill for veterans, he said. The bill, established to fund education for veterans, has remained unchanged for years and no longer covers the cost of education, Lisicki said.

Tradewell said Wisconsin is one of the best states for supporting returning veterans, who are allowed free access to its state university system.

The state has about 49,000 VFW members, compared with about 1.7 million nationally. Brown County has about 1,500 members.