Two Great Passions: Vets & Golf

Here are VFW Life member Rob Riggle's thoughts on what it means to be a Marine in Hollywood, VFW award recipient and how he plans to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill

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VFW Life member Rob Riggle hit the green with the VFW magazine staff in June during a visit to Kansas City, Mo., for the annual charity event, Big Slick Celebrity Weekend.

Riggle, originally from Overland Park, Kan., posed for photos along the Oakwood Country Club Golf Course, shared his favorite Kansas City restaurants and chatted casually with magazine and country club
staffers.

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Itching to get a couple swings in over the course of the photo shoot, Riggle is no stranger to the golf game. He joined forces with We Are the Mighty, a military media and entertainment brand, and the Semper Fi Fund to create the Rob Riggle InVETational Golf Classic, which supports wounded, critically ill and injured service members. Riggle says the tournament "celebrates two of my greatest passions — veterans and golf." The Marine Corps veteran retired from the military in 2013.

VFW: What did you learn about yourself during your time in the Marine Corps?
Riggle: There were several reasons I decided to join the Marine Corps. Yes, I did want to know if I had what it took to become a Marine. Was I physically tough enough, was I mentally tough enough? These are questions that I believe every young man or woman wants answers to. I wanted to know if I had what it took to lead Marines. I discovered a lot about myself by being a Marine. I wouldn't change a thing about my journey.

VFW: How did you earn your Combat Action Ribbon in Kosovo?
Riggle: I was shot at on more than one occasion while out patrolling our AOR (area of responsibility) with various elements of the MEU/SOC (Marine Expeditionary Unit/Special Operations Capable).

VFW: What is your most vivid memory of Afghanistan?
Riggle: I remember how rugged and beautiful the landscape was in Afghanistan. I remember moving prisoners and looking directly into the eyes of our enemies and realizing this was no training exercise.

VFW: How did your military service help you in your civilian career?
Riggle: There was no direct link between my military experience and my civilian career. However, there were some intangibles that carried over. The Marines gave me a thick skin and a "can do" attitude that didn't allow me to get defeated when the going got tough. Show business is a brutal business of judgment and rejection. It takes a real sense of self and fortitude to keep chasing your dreams. The Marines gave those skills and mindset to me in abundance.

VFW: What do you believe is the most pressing concern for Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans?
Riggle: Connection and a sense of purpose. Too many of our veterans end up isolated and without purpose. This leads to bad things like drugs, alcohol and suicide. We need to stick together. Stay connected to your military friends and find your next mission in life. Connection and purpose.

VFW: Why did you select the Semper Fi Fund to be the recipient of proceeds from your charity golf tournament, The InVETational?
Riggle: I had the privilege of getting to meet and work with the volunteers of the Semper Fi Fund, and I saw first-hand their passion and their willingness to serve those who have served us. They do amazing work. Over 90 percent of the money raised goes directly to those who need it. They have the highest marks possible by several charity watchdog groups. It's an honor to contribute to the Semper Fi Fund.

VFW: What did it mean to you to receive VFW's Hall of Fame award at the organization's 2016 national convention in Charlotte, N.C.?
Riggle: It meant a lot to me. My grandfather was a World War II veteran and a proud member of the VFW. I wish he was still alive so he could have seen this. I think he would have been proud.

VFW: How do you plan to use your Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit?
Riggle: Honestly, it's too confusing. I don't know if I qualify, nor do I wish to spend several months trying to track down the necessary paperwork in order to "maybe" get the benefits. It feels like the government's/DoD's favorite word is "No." If it was easier, I might pursue an MBA.

VFW: Who are some of your friends in Hollywood who also served in the military?
Riggle: Harvey Keitel is an outstanding actor and was an outstanding Marine. He's always been very gracious toward me with his time and advice.

This article is featured in the September 2017 issue of VFW magazine and was written by Kari Williams, senior writer, VFW magazine. Photo provided courtesy of Susan McSpadden.