



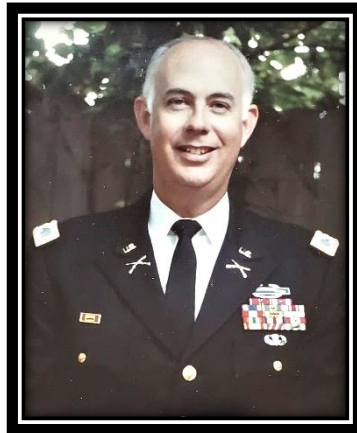
Houston Area  
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[www.moahahoustonarea.com](http://www.moahahoustonarea.com)

April 2021 Issue – Newsletter to Members

## President's Message...

Dear MOAA HA Members,

Greetings, I trust that everyone had a great March and I certainly wish that everyone had a joyous Easter/Passover. The news continues to be good concerning the COVID 19 virus and the worst does indeed seem to be in the rear-view mirror. Eligibility for the vaccine is now open to all age groups over sixteen, so if you have not received your shots, I would urge you to do so as soon as possible.



Last month we were fortunate to have COL EA 'Buddy' Graham of the TX State Guard as our featured Luncheon speaker. It was a very informative overview of the role that the State Guard plays in assisting our State in disaster relief and other humanitarian needs. This month, we are delighted to have the Director of the Houston USO, Ms. Lorén Westerfield as our featured speaker. For over 77 years, the USO has been the nation's premier organization serving the men and women of the US Military and their families throughout their time in uniform. The April Luncheon meeting will be in person and the May meeting will be via zoom with a very special guest speaker (details to follow).

One of our high schools (Crosby High School) received their Federal Inspection on 30 Mar and were awarded the highest level of distinction - Honor Unit with Distinction (units that achieve 96% or above).

*(Continued on Page 3)*

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### April...

#### Upcoming Chapter Events:

##### **Saturday, April 24th, 2021 @ noon**

MOAA HA Chapter Luncheon  
Golfcrest Country Club  
2509 Country Club Drive  
Pearland, TX 77581

##### **Wednesday, April 28, 2021 @ noon**

MOAA HA BOD Meeting  
Rudi Lechner's German Restaurant  
2503 S Gessner Rd  
Houston, TX 77063

# *Greatest Beer Run Ever: Great journeys make for great movies.*

Think of Frodo and Sam trekking across Middle Earth in *Lord of the Rings*, or Tom Hanks looking for Matt Damon in *Saving Private Ryan*. And then there's Marine veteran John "Chick" Donohue, who traveled all over war-torn Vietnam in 1968 just to drop off some beers to his neighborhood buddies fighting in the war. It sounds made-up, but this story is 100% true, and, best of all, it's getting the movie treatment with some big stars on the roll call. Actors Russell Crowe and Zac Efron are in talks to star in the

picture and Bill Murray may be cast in a supporting role, according to [Deadline](#). Peter Farrelly, who directed the Oscar-winning road-trip movie *Green Book*, is set to direct the picture.

Though the release date for *The Greatest Beer Run Ever* is not yet available, the story behind the upcoming films is less of a mystery.

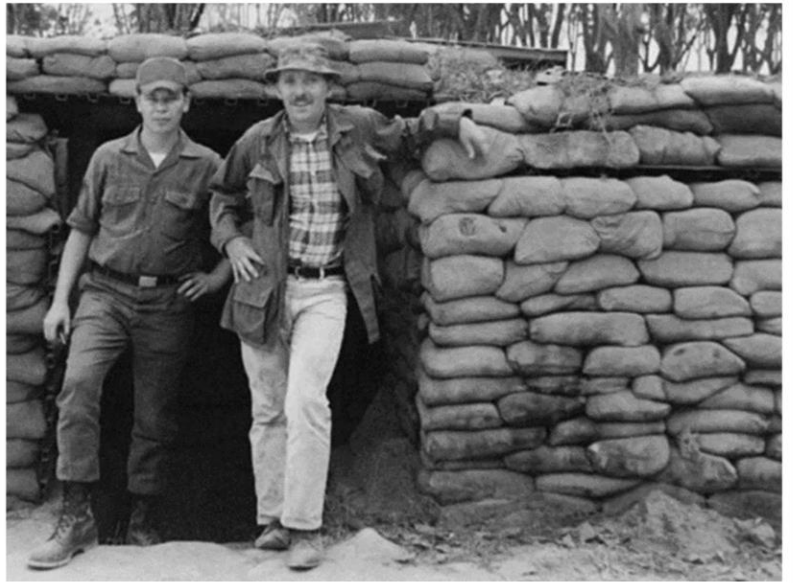
It all started in November 1967, when the 26-year-old Donohue was chatting about anti-war protests with George Lynch, the bartender at Doc Fiddlers, one of many bars and pubs in Inwood, near the northern tip of Manhattan. Donohue had attended too many funerals for Inwood kids killed in the war, and amid all the anti-war, anti-military protests going on at the time, Donohue, a Marine veteran, wanted to do something to let the troops know they were still appreciated. That's when Lynch suggested that someone bring them some beer. You know, like any other beer run, except all the way out to Vietnam.

The idea would be laughable to most people, but Donohue wasn't most people. He packed a seabag full of Pabst Blue Ribbon, got a job on the merchant vessel *Drake Victory* (he was in the Merchant Marines at the time), which was hauling ammunition out to the war, and began his legendary months-long trek. He had a list of the names and units of a half-dozen guys from his neighborhood and he wanted to get a beer in the hands of each one. Unfortunately, the PBR did not survive the sea journey.

"It took two months to get there, so I drank all the beer," Donohue, now in his seventies, told *The New York Times* in 2017.

It was all right though: Donohue stocked back up again when he arrived in Qui Nhon harbor in central Vietnam in early 1968. Now it was just a matter of finding the neighborhood boys. Luckily, shortly after arriving he found some soldiers from the 127th Military Police Company, the same unit as one of the names on his list: Tom Collins. A known gab artist, Donohue pulled an MP aside and spun a sob story about looking for his brother-in-law, then gave Collins' name. It worked, and the man arrived shortly afterwards.

"I said, 'Chickie Donohue, what the hell are you doing here?'" [Collins told the Times](#). "He said, 'I came to bring you a beer.'"



*Chick Donohue (right) in Vietnam, delivering beer to a friend from back home. (Photo courtesy of Chick Donohue)*

*Continued on Page 7...*

JROTC is a federal program sponsored by the United States Armed Forces and operated in schools that agree to host the program. US Armed Forces inspectors inspect the program every three years to ensure the program is managed at Federal standards in the host school. Cadets lead and run the program and accomplishing this level in high school is an accomplishment that will be a primary and lifetime highlight for them. We are proud of them.

On the lighter side, this month's edition has a wonderful story of the Greatest Beer Run Ever and finally, [the membership application/renewal form now includes a section for donations to the Chapter.](#)

Respectfully,

Rob  
Robin P. Ritchie, COL, Infantry, USAR (Ret)

★★★★★★

## ***VA Updates MOAA, Other Groups on Compensation and Pension Exam Status***

**By: Paul Frost**

**April 05, 2021**

The VA's new Medical Disability Examination Office (MDEO) provided an update last week to MOAA and other Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) on the status of Compensation and Pension (C&P) medical exams, and asked the VSOs to use their platforms to spread the news.

All VA disability compensation and pension claims require a medical exam review on each submitted disability. This review is familiarly called a C&P exam. In most cases, the "exam" is more like an "interview," the examiner asks the veteran questions from Disability Benefit Questionnaires (DBQs) about each claimed disability.

As you would expect, COVID-19 played havoc on the scheduling and execution of C&P exams. In March, after the pandemic took hold, the VA terminated the exams with no expectation of when they would resume.

In May, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) announced the resumption of exams at 82 sites using Tele (virtual) C&P or ACE (Acceptable Clinical Evidence) competencies. During the two-plus month hiatus, the VA did not sit on their hands: VBA trained and exported VHA's telehealth technology to contract examiners to be ready to conduct and complete virtual exams when it was deemed safe to resume.

*Continued on page 8...*



# Letter to SECDEF Warns Against TRICARE Fee Hikes, Medical Billet Cuts

By: Karen Ruedisueli

March 30, 2021

Photo by Lisa Ferdinando/DoD



The Military Coalition (TMC), a group of military and veterans service organizations representing a combined 5.5 million-plus membership, urged DoD leadership in a March 8 letter to protect the military health system from proposals that threaten the health care benefit, medical readiness, and the pipeline of uniformed health care providers.

MOAA co-chairs TMC and many of its committees, including the health care committee.

The letter addressed three topics DoD leaders will consider as they undertake the FY 2022 administration budget request: medical billet cuts, funding for the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences (USU), and, potentially, TRICARE fee increases as a means of reducing military health system (MHS) spending.

“The current pandemic has highlighted the risks of eliminating surge capacity within the medical system,” said the letter, sent to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. “Proposed billet cuts risk compromising not only combat casualty care, but also DoD’s ability to effectively provide healthcare and humanitarian support in times of crisis. Medical end strength reductions could also lead to access to care problems for beneficiaries if civilian medical systems lack capacity to absorb patient care moved out of military treatment facilities.”

Medical billet cuts were first proposed in the FY 2020 budget request. Since then, MOAA has highlighted the risks of such reductions to both readiness and beneficiary care. MOAA successfully advocated for a halt to medical billet cuts, including additional reporting requirements and congressional oversight, in National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) legislation for both **FY 2020** and **FY 2021**. With TMC, MOAA is now urging the new administration to reconsider cuts to military medical end strength.

The letter also asked DoD leaders to maintain funding for USU, an essential accession source of uniformed services medical providers including clinical psychologists, nurse practitioners, and certified registered nurse anesthetists, in addition to physicians. USU was targeted for cuts during DoD’s defense-wide review, a zero-based review of all organizations outside the military departments. Funding was reinstated with the FY 2021 NDAA thanks in part to **MOAA members’ efforts** to raise awareness of the issue.

Although DoD has not requested TRICARE cost-sharing hikes since the FY 2018 administration budget request, fee increases remain a looming threat, particularly when DoD’s budget is constrained. TMC’s letter reviewed the series of TRICARE out-of-pocket cost increases implemented since 2018 and underscored the importance of fulfilling obligations to servicemembers, retirees, their families, and survivors by refraining from any further shift of military health care costs to beneficiaries.

MOAA will provide an update on proposals impacting the military health system when the budget is released in the coming days.

## Stay Informed

It’s more important than ever to make sure you’re in the know and your military benefits are protected. ★

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*We need YOU...  
to remain a  
MOAA HA Member!*



*Debating whether to renew your chapter membership?*

*Talking to a potential new member?*

Benefits to belonging to a chapter:

- Camaraderie and Connections: when you attend chapter functions, actively serve on a committee, or take a prominent leadership role, you forge lasting ties with other MOAA members.
- Community Involvement: Membership provide opportunities to contribute to your community in a variety of ways, from providing scholarships to local students, to supporting causes that support wounded warriors and their families.
- Legislative Advocacy: We advocate for the entire military community-all ranks. Members play a critical role in advancing legislation in both Austin and Washington, D.C. This grassroots advocacy is key to MOAA achieving its legislative goals.

Chapter dues reminders will be emailed/sent out in November to those members needing renewal. We are on a calendar year for our chapter dues.

Annual renewal is \$30 for one year, \$20 for each additional year paid with renewal. Surviving Spouse \$15 initial membership; \$10 annual renewal.

Membership Application on the last page!

# Focusing on Finances After Loss

By: Pat Green  
March 26, 2021



The loss of a spouse has quite an impact. At first, you are busy dealing with grief and helping your family recover from the loss. Eventually, though, you must focus your energy on finances. You have lost your financial partner.

Your goal should be to live comfortably with as little financial stress as possible. Losing a spouse often means a reduction in family income. This requires some changes and hard decisions as you consider:

- **Where should I live?** Many factors are involved in this decision. Work, commute time, children, their friends, activities, and school proximity, health, safety, and other family responsibilities are all important.
- **What can I afford?** This is probably the most important consideration. If you and your spouse were conservative in spending, your living expenses and debt might be manageable. Do a budget analysis based on your current income and spending. Be aware of adjustments. Income might be down, but taxes might be up if your new IRS tax status is “single” (higher rates).

Include new insurance costs for yourself to protect any dependents. Don't forget to add in the expense of services your spouse provided, such as lawn mowing, painting, or handy jobs. Do the calculations. If you can stay put for a while, great!

- **How can I make changes to my current home?** It's home, and you love it. You can freshen things up with some inexpensive changes like rearranging furniture, adding some fresh paint, buying a new bed or bedspread, and relocating photos and wall art.
- **What if a change of address is necessary?** Downsizing or moving might be the best option for your new financial circumstances or emotional state. Make a pro/con list of emotional factors and expenses. Be thoughtful about real estate commissions, state income tax, moving, and redecorating expenses as well as all those emotional pluses and minuses. Investigate whether spousal disability exemptions and entitlements are available at a new home or new location. Changing states can generate issues. Do your homework. Be diligent!

This is a lot to do and a lot to consider, but help and resources are available. There are excellent calculators and programs online to assist with mortgages, investments, budget analysis, and insurance decisions, including on [MOAA.org](http://MOAA.org). Find them at [MOAA.org/Finance](http://MOAA.org/Finance). ★

## **Surviving Spouse Corner**

Judith Thomas

Surviving Spouse MOAA Liaison  
[jthomas482@aol.com](mailto:jthomas482@aol.com)

Donohue shared a few drinks with Collins, and then he was off to find the other names on his list. Keep in mind that this was at the beginning of the Tet Offensive, a campaign of bloody surprise attacks across the country that kicked the war into a new gear of violence. But Donohue was undaunted, talking his way onto convoys, military mail planes, and transport helicopters bound for Khe Sahn, An Khe, Saigon, and places in between, often just in jeans and a casual button-down shirt.

“He was in a combat zone and here he is walking around like he’s going on a golf outing or wherever the hell he’s going,” Collins said in a [2015 video](#) about the beer run made by Pabst Blue Ribbon. “We got drunk, needless to say.”

At one point Donohue was caught up in a nightlong firefight shooting at enemy troops in Khe Sanh, and at another he was briefly stranded when his ship left port without him. So he hung around with his buddies a little longer before finally heading home in March 1968. It was a simple gesture, giving old friends a beer. But it went a long way.

“He came through at a time when society didn’t want us and the protesters were on us,” Collins told the *Times*. “But that’s Chickie. He’s one of the nicest but craziest guys you ever want to meet.”

Donohue retold his story hundreds of times, but it was so far-fetched that most people didn’t believe him. Still, that didn’t stop him from writing about his experience in a book *The Greatest Beer Run Ever: A True Story of Friendship Stronger Than War*, which was published in 2017. For some of Donohue’s friends, the book had just as much impact as the initial beer run.

“Seeing Chick gave me a lot of encouragement that I was going to make it back,” said Bob Pappas, a communications sergeant at Long Binh who was growing weary of losing friends before Donohue arrived in 1968. Pappas told the *Times* that being interviewed for the book helped persuade him to finally begin counseling for post-traumatic stress disorder.

As for Donohue himself, “I didn’t have to buy a beer for a long time in Inwood,” he said.

The movie version will be made as an Apple Original Films title, *Deadline* reported. The filmmakers intend to cast Efron as Donohue and start production in August, likely in New Zealand or Australia. ★



**David Roza** covers the Air Force and anything Star Wars-related. He joined Task & Purpose in 2019, after covering local news in Maine and then FDA policy in Washington D.C. He loves hearing the stories of individual airmen and their families, and he also holds the unpopular opinion that Imperial stormtroopers are actually excellent marksmen. [david.roza@taskandpurpose.com](mailto:david.roza@taskandpurpose.com) Contact the author [here](#).

## **VA Updates MOAA, Other Groups on Compensation and Pension Exam Status**

*Continued from page 3...*

ACE, a new joint venture between VBA and VHA, was developed, piloted, and went on to reduce the national average time to complete a DBQ from 25 days down to just eight. It provides the VHA with the option to review a veteran's existing medical records instead of performing an in-person or telehealth examination to complete a DBQ, expediting the rating process by eliminating the delay time to schedule and conduct an in-person or virtual exam.

When a claim is submitted, a VBA rating official will review the claimed disabilities and submit a request initiating VHA to schedule an exam for rating purposes. Under the new process, VHA can complete a DBQ without a medical exam if a veteran's *existing* medical records contain sufficient evidence to complete a DBQ.

### **Contacting a Contractor**

All contract medical exam vendor websites now contain portals providing veterans with real-time status of: appointments (planned, scheduled and completed); provider facility locations (address and contact information); travel reimbursement status (check number, payment amount, date paid, date check cashed); and answers to frequently asked questions (for example, how to cancel appointments, how to reschedule appointments, how to address billing questions, etc.). They can also be contacted via telephone:

- **Logistics Health Inc. (LHI):** 1-866-933-8387; [logisticshealth.com](https://logisticshealth.com)
- **QTC:** 1-800-260-1515; <https://www.qtcm.com>
- **Veterans Evaluation Services (VES):** 1-877-637-8387; <https://www.vesservices.com>

So, where do we stand? At the time of the VA's update, there were 340,754 pending C&P exams including 144,198 from pre-pandemic inventory. Contract vendors are operating at 120% of pre-pandemic capacity, averaging 34,700 DBQs per week. The VBA expects to complete 43% more exams in 2021 than 2020.

Of the pending exams, 57,000 are non-actionable: Either the veteran is unwilling to meet, even virtually, or communication cannot be established. Decisions on these claims will be held in abeyance until the veteran engages with the contract vendor or 60 days following the declared end of this national medical emergency.

As of March 27, there were 475,363 outstanding claims in the system, 205,773 pending more than 125 days (backlogged), the VA's stated goal for claim completion. The current backlog is a far cry from the 611,000 backlogged claims in March 2013, but certainly a significant increase from the levels the VA had been able to maintain since late 2016. Over the last four-plus years, the average backlog fluctuated between 70,000 to 90,000 claims.

The MDEO provides oversight of the contract examination program, to include monitoring contractor production, timeliness, quality, and invoicing. It also will provide the list of veterans on the non-actionable list that are represented by a VSO to that organization. The VSO can access which vendor has been assigned the requisite exams and provide that information to the veteran.

C&P exams are being conducted in 37 foreign countries and U.S. territories. Four new countries were added in August 2020: Colombia, France, Ireland, and New Zealand. Tele and ACE are both authorized worldwide.

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VA has a [website](#) related to its resumption of in-person C&P examinations, and other websites that have answers to commonly asked questions about the examination process. Visit the [VA claim exam](#) website for information ranging from what to expect at a VA examination, how to schedule an examination, and what happens after an examination. Information on VA's Disability Compensation benefits can be found [at this link](#).

The VA encourages all veterans to complete a customer service survey upon the completion of their C&P exams. Survey cards are included in appointment notification letters, and customer service surveys can also be completed at the [C&P exam customer service survey](#) website. ★

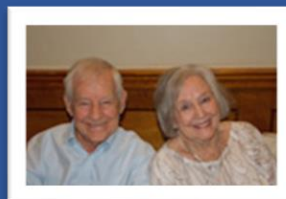
## March 2021 MOAA Chapter Luncheon...

Guest Speaker:  
COL E.A. "Buddy" Graham  
Texas State Guard

COL Buddy Graham and  
Rob Ritchie (middle)



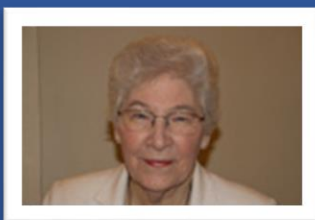
Bif French



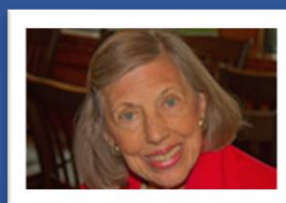
Col Paul Brennan and  
spouse, Dee



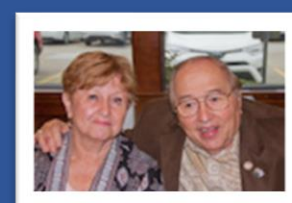
Rick Miller



Judith Thomas



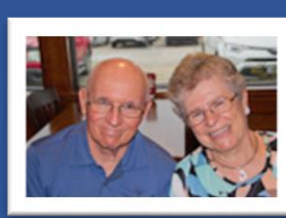
Carol Hebert



Ms. Stancie Chamberlain  
and Dan Gutierrez



Joe Willoughby



Rollin Collins and  
spouse, Pat



Joe Sharpe, USNR

## Chaplain's Corner

Kerry Magee, CAPT USN (Ret.)  
MOAA HA Chaplain

*God, Country, Duty, Honor. Words that demand response. The response to each of those has to begin with Faith.*

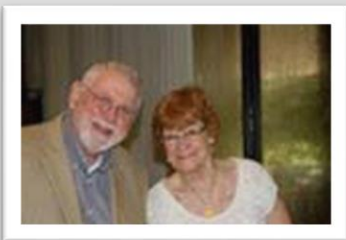
*Faith in God has to be the bedrock for all our values and motives. As our Creator, he instilled in every human some level of awareness of Himself, if only the recognition of a power greater than ourselves. Then we have to admit there must be a proper response in subordinating ourselves to that power. That response is to seek ever greater knowledge of Him.*

*That response is Faith and needs to be nurtured and expanded to form the basis of all our other knowledge and judgments. Faith is what we believe. Religion is how we live out that Faith. The country is a human device to facilitate Peoples living together in mutual support. Countries are established by various methods. By ethnic groups or tribes, by geographic features, or commercial enterprise. To be successful the people of a country must have Faith in the country's founding principles, and Faith in each other. Our country is defined by geography and based on a Constitution that accommodates multiple ethnic groups and beliefs. Our country is both fragile and amazingly resilient. It has become history's most powerful nation with the highest standard of living in the world. So, now comes Duty. We in MOAA understand duty. At the bottom line, duty means putting others ahead of self. Its root is the commandment to love others. True love is self-sacrificing, exemplified by Jesus sacrificing Himself for us. Our military service taught us about Duty. And that obligation did not end when we were separated from active status. As our country enters a new chapter in our political history, the call to Duty is as strong as ever. Duty to God, Duty to Country, Duty to each other. Therein is the source of Honor. We learned this in military service. "On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country...to help other people at all times..." We ask God to continue to bless each of us, bless our country, and bless our men and women in uniform. ★*

## Passing of Glora DeValcourt

By Daniel M. Gutierrez

The Houston Area Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America is sad to report the passing of Surviving Spouse member Glora DeValcourt this past month.



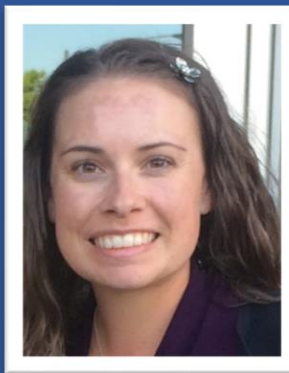
LCDR Vern Gillette  
and Glora DeValcourt

Mrs. DeValcourt tragically died in a house fire at her home February 8 in the early hours. She was a long time member of the Military Officers' Wives Association (MOWA) and a Surviving Spouse member of the Houston Area Chapter of MOAA. Her husband, CDR Carol (Charlie) DeValcourt, USN (Ret.) passed away on April 1, 2016.

Mrs. DeValcourt was a treasured member of this chapter and it was always a singular pleasure to see her at our monthly members' meetings and luncheons. Always, she presented herself with grace and elegance. We will miss her greatly.

No announcements have been made at this writing of a memorial for her. We shall endeavor to keep the chapter informed.

## April MOAA Chapter Luncheon Guest Speaker...



### Lorén Westerfield Executive Director, USO Houston

*Lorén joined USO Houston on September 11, 2015. She spent over 7 years serving in the US Army Signal Corps including 5 years with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and 2 years with the Army National Guard. She deployed with 3<sup>d</sup> Brigade Combat Team (Rakkasans) of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to Iraq in 2008 and completed numerous assignments including 2 company commands. Prior to that, Lorén received a full tuition scholarship from the Army to the University of Kentucky. In 2018, Lorén was named the Texas National Guard Spouse of the Year and was a top 18 finalist for AFI Spouse of the Year. Lorén is happily married to her husband, Mark, who is currently serving in the Texas Army National Guard as an Infantry Officer and raising two boys, Caleb and Cameron in Northwest Houston. After the Army, Lorén spent 2 years as a project manager in the Oil & Energy sector before following her passion of serving those who serve at the USO (United Service Organizations).*

*Lorén holds a B.A. from the University of Kentucky in Foreign Language and International Economics with an Emphasis in Spanish and received a graduate level certificate from Rice University at the Leadership Institute for Nonprofit Executives. She has already become widely respected in the Houston Military and Veteran communities for her strong desire to foster collaboration and unwavering focus on leading the Houston USO to serve as the Force behind the Forces.*



*Since 1941, the USO is the nation's leading organization serving the men and women in the U.S. military, and their families, throughout their time in uniform. From the moment they join, through their assignments and deployments, and as they transition back to their communities, the USO is always by their side.*

*Today's USO continuously adapts to the needs of our men and women in uniform and their families, so they can focus on their very important mission. We operate USO centers at or near military installations across the United States and throughout the world, including in combat zones, and even un-staffed USO service sites in places too dangerous for anyone but combat troops to occupy.*

*USO airport centers throughout the country offer around-the clock hospitality for traveling service members and their families. Our trademark USO tours bring America and its celebrities to service members who are assigned far from home, to entertain them and convey the support of the nation. And our many specialized programs offer a continuum support to service members throughout their journey of service, from the first time they don the uniform until they last time they take it off.*

*In Houston, we operate four distinct centers including Bush & Hobby Airports, the MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Center) where recruits enlist from all 5 branches, and at Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base. We serve over 250,000 military service members and their families each year and host programs to foster connection at various locations and times of the year. Houston is led by 4 dedicated staff members who manage over 250 volunteers.*

*The USO is not part of the federal government. A congressionally chartered, private organization, the USO relies on the generosity of individuals, organizations and corporations to support its activities, and is powered by a family of volunteers to accomplish our mission of connection. ★*

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM

### Military Officers Association of America – Houston Area

Membership is available to Officers who have held a Federal Warrant or Commission in any of the seven uniformed services of the United States or to the surviving spouse of such a person. Please use this form for application for membership, renewal or changes to the current directory of members. Additionally, The Chapter always welcomes donations to assist the Chapter's operating expenses and supporting our ROTC and JROTC programs.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print)                      Last                                      First                                      Initial                                      Rank

Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Status \_\_\_\_\_ MOAA Nat'l ID \_\_\_\_\_ \*

Spouse's First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. for Directory \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dues:** Regular Membership – \$30 first year; annual renewal \$30 (Discount for multiple years if paid with renewal: \$20 for each add'l. year **paid with renewal**)

Surviving Spouse – \$15 first year; annual renewal \$10 (same discount for multiple years)

#### Chapter Assistance Fund

\$100.00     \$50.00     \$25.00     Other \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to MOAA-HA and mail to:

MOAA-HA  
PO Box 1082  
Houston, TX 77251-1082



For more information, call COL Robin Ritchie, 713-818-0408

*\*If not a MOAA national member, another benefit of chapter membership is the opportunity to become a national MOAA member at the BASIC LEVEL for free! If you would like to do so, please indicate here:*

YES     NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_