



## **85th National Convention of the Military Order of the Purple Heart in Dallas, Texas, Elects Patriot NEIL VAN ESS as National Commander**

The 85th Annual Convention of The Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) and the 84th National Convention of the MOPH Auxiliary concluded Friday, August 18, in Dallas, TX, with the election of new officers for the upcoming year. Patriot Neil Van Ess, a combat wounded veteran from Totowa, New Jersey was elected as National Commander. Elected as National Senior Vice Commander was Doug Middleton, a combat wounded veteran from Roswell, Georgia. Elected as National Junior Vice Commander was Felix Garcia, a combat wounded veteran from Sugar Land, Texas.

Elected as President of the Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary was Gloria Sanchez of Tallahassee, Florida. Diane Petrini of California was elected as Senior Vice President, and Cheryl Perez of Chula Vista, California was elected as Junior Vice President.

The election of NEIL VAN ESS, a former law enforcement officer and police Captain in New Jersey, with extensive Union negotiation responsibilities, brings a new depth of experience to the position of National Commander of the Order. After being sworn in to his new position, Patriot Van Ess said, "I am deeply honored to serve as National Commander of our Nation's bravest combat heroes, those Purple Heart recipients who have shed their blood to defend the freedoms that all Americans are blessed to enjoy. Anyone who knows me knows that my passion is working on behalf of veterans. I truly look forward to working together - not only with the leadership team, but each and every Member of the Order, as we honor the present, remember the past, and preserve our legacy as we work to make this the most productive year in the history of the Order."

The newly elected Senior Vice Commander DOUG MIDDLETON, a retired military veteran with more than 30 years of dedicated service to the Nation, brings extensive leadership experience and qualities gained from a highly successful

military career. After retiring from the U.S. Army, Middleton served as the Chief Operating Officer of the Atlanta Region of the American Red Cross. Speaking to the Members, he said "I am deeply honored and humbled by your trust. I believe that my experiences, which spanned both the Vietnam and the Gulf wars, give me a unique insight into the hopes and aspirations of all generations of our Order's Members to serve our Veterans and their families. My goal is to mentor our newest members and help develop the necessary skills for leadership of our Order's future. In the past year, I have grown to admire and respect our new Commander and look forward to assisting him in advancing the goals and objectives of the Order."

Also noteworthy was the election of Patriot FELIX GARCIA as National Junior Vice Commander, making him the first post 9/11 combat wounded veteran to assume this National leadership position. Speaking to the Convention, Garcia said "I am honored to be entrusted with the mission of carrying on the traditions and legacy of this great Order by my generation, and just as important, to honor the generations of combat wounded veterans that came before us. I thank the Members for their confidence in my abilities to lead this venerated organization, and I do not take this duty and its responsibilities lightly."

Region Commanders: (\* = indicates newly elected)

Region I - Zach Fike (VT)\*

Region II - Rick Cherone (WI)\*

Region III - Barry Gasdek (WY)\*

Region IV - Lee Brown (FL)\*

Region V - Francisco "Paco" Elizalde (CO)\*

Region VI - Billy Weldon (AZ)

Patriot Pete Rosie from Woodcrest, Texas was named the "MOPH Patriot of the Year." Born in Edenborough, Scotland in 1941, he immigrated to the United States in 1959, and that same year he joined the U.S. Army. In 1972, while on his second tour in Vietnam, Staff Sergeant Rosie was wounded when his APC hit an anti-tank mine. He retired in 1980 as a Sergeant First Class with 21 years of military service. After retiring from the Army, he went to work for the family of BK Johnson, heir to the famous King Ranch, where he served as Executive Assistant to Mr. Johnson. After retiring from this position in 1995, Patriot Rosie joined the MOPH, and served many years as his Chapter's Welfare and VAVS Officer, before becoming the Department of Texas Welfare Officer for six years. Patriot Rosie lives with his wife, Trish, in Windcrest, Texas, a suburb of San Antonio. He and Trish have six sons, three granddaughters and three grandsons. Trish has always been a very active and dedicated member of the MOPH Auxiliary.

This year, thirty-two applicants received education scholarships, while SSgt Jacob Anderson was selected for special recognition as this year's recipient of the Navy Seal Lt. Michael Murphy Scholarship. Lt. Michael P. Murphy was the leader of a U.S. Navy SEAL Team who was killed in action on June 28, 2005, during a covert counter-terrorism combat operation in Afghanistan. Staff Sergeant Anderson has served in the U.S. Marine Corps since 2008. He received his Purple Heart for wounds received in Afghanistan. He is currently enrolled at the Citadel where he is majoring in Electrical Engineering with a minor in Aerospace Science. Upon graduation in 2019, he plans to pursue a career as a Marine pilot.

For more information contact: John Bircher, MOPH Public Relations Director  
[publicrelations@purpleheart.org](mailto:publicrelations@purpleheart.org).



**L to R: National Commander Neil Van Ess, National Senior Vice Commander Doug Middleton and National Junior Vice Commander Felix Garcia**