



MECMOAA CHAPTER NEWS



A message from our outgoing President

As my term as President comes to a close, I want to express my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you for the support, dedication, and collaboration that made this journey so meaningful. It has been an honor to serve alongside such a talented and passionate group of officers. Together, we've faced challenges, celebrated successes, and pushed the boundaries of what we thought possible.

Though my time in this role is ending, I am excited to see where you all will take this organization in the future. I have full confidence that the work we've started will continue to grow and evolve under new leadership. Please continue to work together with the same spirit of unity and determination that has defined us.

Thank you again for trusting me to lead. I look forward to supporting you in new ways and watching all the great things ahead.

Warm regards,

John W. Rice, LCDR, USN (Ret.)



Incoming President Musings

Don Thompson, Col, USAF (Ret.)

Thank you for your vote of support last month in electing me your new President! I do realize that one of the loudest acclamations came from John Rice, but I take that as a

badge of honor!

The Mountain Empire Chapter of MOAA is one of the better performing affiliated chapters in MOAA, and, as Jack Woolsey commented to me last week, it is in the best shape as it has been over the past 10 or so years. Some of this can probably be attributed to an influx of new members as more people retire in northeast Tennessee. Some of our members are aggressively recruiting new members as well. I'll give a shout out to Jack Butterworth who keeps finding retirees in the area and encourages them to join us at our Sunday membership meetings. We have seen a steady growth over the past year, which clearly puts us in the top 10-20% of affiliated MOAA chapters.

Virtual Chapters are Growing

MOAA continues to add virtual chapters that are based on specific interest rather than geography. These virtual chapters usually meet by Zoom monthly, and I do not think any of them have any dues. All you need is to be a MOAA member. Here's the list:

VC-01 Uniformed Services Nurse Advocates Virtual Chapter

VC-02 Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter

VC-03 Public Health Service Virtual Chapter

VC-04 Chaplains Virtual Chapter

VC-05 Judge Advocate Virtual Chapter

VC-06 Advocacy for Servicewomen and Military Families Virtual Chapter

VC-07 MOAA Public Affairs and Communication Professional Virtual Chapter

You can visit the MOAA home page to learn more and join one of these chapters.

Initiatives Underway

We are still working on two big initiatives – **revitalizing the East Tennessee MOAA Chapter in Knoxville** and developing **Veterans Treatment Court in Sullivan County**.

The revitalization effort depends on a lot of different people taking some steps, and everyone is busy, so it is moving in fits and starts. This will be one of my priorities in coming months, to cajole and encourage the right people at the right time.

The Veterans Treatment Court requires a lot of training and coordination. I am learning from Chris Dooley in Chattanooga as he develops the Veterans Treatment Court in Hamilton County. It can take months to get all the right supporting agencies to provide the necessary training. MECMOAA's role will be to provide veteran mentors to the participants in the program, with each mentor being assigned a maximum of two program participants. I will be prodding these supporting agencies in coming weeks but expect it will be February or March 2025 before we get much training scheduled. Let me know if you would like to participate or at least get more information as the project moves forward. You can reach me at drdonaldthompson@gmail.com.

MECMOAA is Growing!

We had solid membership growth in 2023 that would be hard to beat, but we did just that in 2024! This is because of YOU, as you invited prospective members to our gatherings, and when they came, YOU were there to make them feel welcome. Let's keep doing this!

Welcome to our new members and spouses:

Tony & Kathy Banchs

John & Leslie Sampson

Emil & Kim Kovalchik

John & Viv Lyle

Chris Hodgin

Henry Reyes

Jim & Mary Jane Slaight

Doug & Vicki Higgins

Henry Brant

Membership dues remain \$20 per year, and Surviving Spouses never pay dues. A lifetime membership is available at \$250.

New Member Spotlights

Antonio “Tony” Banchs, COL, USA (Ret.) & Kathy Banchs

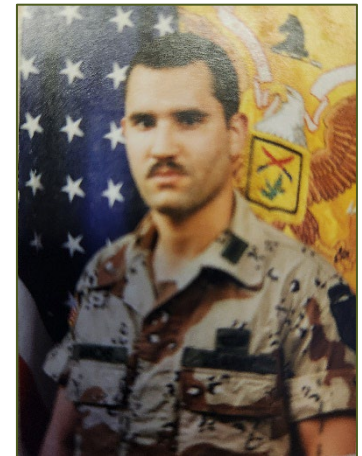


Tony and Kathy returned to Unicoi, TN, in December 2021 from Stuttgart, Germany.

Tony’s career began in the U.S. Army Reserves as a 54E Chemical Specialist from 1984-1986 in Washington State and later Iowa, where he attended the University of Iowa and met his wife Kathy Colleen Borchers.

After receiving a Regular Army commission in 1989 into the U.S. Army Chemical Corps, his first assignment was with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Fulda, Germany. He deployed with the Blackhorse to Kuwait as part of a stabilization force after the conclusion of Desert Storm.

Tony went on to Chemical Officer positions at Fort Hood, including 3rd Signal Brigade, 2d Armored Division Chemical, and commanded the 31st Chemical Company, 4th Infantry Division.

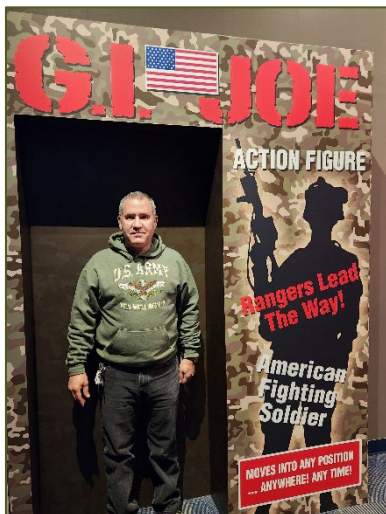


After command, Tony went to Fort Bragg to qualify as a Civil Affairs Officer (Functional Area 39). He learned Russian and earned a Master’s in International Relations from Troy State University. However, the Army decided they no longer needed that many Civil Affairs Officers once he made Major. Tony was redirected to become a Foreign Area Officers (Functional Area 48) and returned to a classroom in the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, to

learn Arabic. His training was curtailed as a result of September 11, 2001, and that began a 14-year series of continuous overseas assignments.

Tony's first tour as a FAO was as an Intern at the Office of Military Cooperation, US Embassy Kuwait City. He transitioned over to become the Kuwait Navy and Coast Guard Advisor in the leadup to OEF and later OIF. He had later assignments in Stuttgart, Germany, at U.S. European Command J-2 (2003-06); a special duty assignment in Jerusalem (2005); Chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation, US Embassy Rabat (2006-08); AFRICOM J5 North (2008-11); Deputy Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation Sana'a (2011-12); and Senior Defense Official/Defense Attache US Embassy Beirut (2013-15). It was during the Lebanon tour that he graduated from the U.S. Army War College (Distance Learning) in 2014 with a Master's in Strategic Studies.

Tony's last tour before retiring at just shy of 27-1/2 years was as the Levant Division Chief, Joint Staff J5 at the Pentagon (2015-16).



Tony and Kathy came to the Tri-Cities area to live near her parents in Unicoi, where they had retired to out of Iowa. Tony worked at East Tennessee State University as the Director of Veterans Affairs from 2016-19. He then accepted a Government Service Civilian position at United States Africa Command until December 2021.

Tony and Kathy have five daughters, twelve grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Welcome back to Northeast Tennessee and MECMOAA, Tony & Kathy!

John M. Lyle, SES (Ret.), Col, USAF (Ret.)

John retired from the DoD on 1 March 2022 after almost 43 years of service (27 Active Duty USAF, retired in September 2006; followed by 16 years civilian service). He was appointed to the Senior Executive Service (SES) in 2011. After completing four previous SES assignments as a one and two-star equivalent, he was promoted to a three-star equivalent as the Deputy



Director for the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA), Mr. Lyle oversaw approximately 12,000 civilians and military personnel at more than 1,000 locations. The agency executed worldwide contract management responsibilities covering more than 19,000 contractors and more than 345,000 active contracts with over \$250 billion in unliquidated obligations. Prior to his DCMA assignment, John served as the Deputy to the Commanding General at Army Contracting Command, Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force at the Pentagon, the interim Director of Contracting at the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office at Bolling AFB and Contracting Director at Electronic Systems Center at Hanscom AFB.

John retired from active-duty U.S. Air Force as a Colonel in 2006. While on active duty he served in a variety of contracting and acquisition management and leadership positions at all levels of the Air Force. He served as an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Commander at Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota, earning the 15 AF Excellence Award for over five perfect missile operations evaluations. He was both a missile operations instructor and evaluator before

selection in the Education with Industry (EWI) program at Grumman Aerospace, Long Island, New York. After EWI, he served as a warranted contracting officer at multiple locations including HQ USAF Europe.

John earned a bachelor's degree in business management from Eastern Nazarene College, a master's degree in business management from Central Michigan University, and a master's in strategic studies from the Air War College. He is a graduate of the Program Managers Course from the Defense Systems Management College.

John's major awards and decorations include the Meritorious Civilian Service Award; Legion of Merit with one oak leaf cluster; Defense Meritorious Service Medal; Air Force Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters; Air Force Materiel Command Systems Field Grade Contracting Officer of the Year; Aeronautical Systems Center Air Force Association Executive Manager of the Year; David Packard Excellence in Acquisition Award; and Air Force Systems Command Operational Contracting Officer of the Year.

John has owned and operated the Lyle Consulting Service since May 2022 with multiple clients including Cypress International, Dayton Aerospace, and Owens Minor. He also helped many DoD civilian clients successfully complete the rigorous SES application process. He is on the Board of Directors for a start-up government contractor and a leader in his local church.

John and his wife, Viv, have been married 47 years as of this month. They have two children and six grandchildren. John and Viv are certified Special Olympics leaders for the Tri-Cities region; John is currently coaching basketball.

Talk about Never Stop Serving--welcome, John & Viv!

In our community

On December 14, our Chapter members once again gathered at **Mountain Home National Cemetery** to participate in **Wreaths Across America**, a MECMOAA tradition led by Stan Gedelman, and *we collectively donated 50 wreaths to adorn local veterans' gravesites.*



Next year's remembrance will be on December 13, 2025. We'll explore establishing a Mountain Empire Chapter donation link to make it easier to work together in 2025...more to follow.



2025 Membership Brunch & Meetings



Mark Tipton, Maj, USAF (Ret.)

We meet at Blackthorn Club in The Ridges on a bi-monthly schedule.

Cost is \$35 per person at the door.

- You'll receive an email requesting RSVP approximately two weeks prior
- Begin gathering at 1230, opening remarks at 1300, followed by brunch

Mark your calendars!

January 19

Installation of newly-elected officers

March 16

May 18

July 20

September 21

November 16

Annual Business Meeting



***Do you know of someone who would be a good guest speaker,
maybe even yourself?***

Just let us know by emailing mecmoaa@gmail.com!

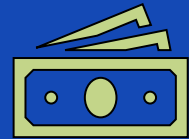
We'll see you at brunch on **January 19!**

Note: Nametags are funded for members and spouses through membership dues. Once you pay you first-year dues, we'll order you and your spouse a new nametag. *If you haven't received yours, please email us!*



What's in the Treasury?

Brett Monette, MAJ, USA (Ret.)



EASTMAN CREDIT UNION

Business Checking: \$1,061.86

Herb Ladley Fund: \$3,045.03

MECMOAA Scholarship Fund: \$2,435.28

Interest: \$17.76

Money to Keep Account Open: \$5.00

TOTAL: \$6,768.93

EDWARD JONES: \$7,144.92

GRAND TOTAL: \$13,913.85

We'll have a call for scholarship donations at our January & March meetings.
Scholarships are awarded to JROTC and ROTC cadets each May.



Legislative Update

Don Thompson, Col, USAF (Ret.)



Happy New Year to all! This will be my last legislative update, as John Lyle (joviyle@gmail.com) will be taking over as Legislative Liaison at the end of December. Don't hesitate to reach out to him with any questions, ideas, or complaints!!!

REPEATED REMINDER! Legislative Action Center and Advocacy – MOAA

awards to chapters will include a count of the number of local chapter members that are registered at the MOAA Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/>. This continues to be the easiest, most important tool we can use to advocate as a national organization. Please sign up so that MECMOAA will get credit for this easily measurable step.

The top issues at the Legislative Action Center continue to be updated, depending on the current MOAA areas of focus. Right now the focus areas refer to several issues that were just included in the House version of the FY25 NDAA – increasing pay for junior enlisted members, and several other NDAA issues. The Senate will probably have passed the NDAA by the time you read this, but it is still worth sending a message to our Senators and Representative, as these issues come up again and again.

If you see Congresswoman Diana Harshbarger at her “Coffee with your Congresswoman” campaign events, make sure to thank her for her ongoing support for these issues. An in-person thank you goes far.

Current Legislation of Interest: HR 8371, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st

Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, was surprisingly passed by the House 389-9 on November 18 and transmitted to the Senate for action. This bill improves support for family caregivers, improves educational assistance for surviving spouses, increases per diem payments to support homeless veterans, and will enhance the electronic health record and health information technology systems within the VA. It is looking doubtful that the Senate will move on this bill before they adjourn for Christmas, but it is still worth calling the offices of Senator Blackburn and Senator Hagerty to express your support, as the bill will likely be reintroduced in the new Congress in January.

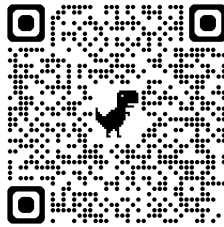
As organizations exempt from federal taxation under Sec. 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code, MOAA and its affiliates must take care to avoid engaging in partisan political activities. Under IRS rules, we are prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

Are you a MOAA National Member?

If not, why? John Rice will always say, "The magazine alone is worth the cost of membership." Just **click the following link** to see MOAA membership options, from Basic (free) to Lifetime:

[Join MOAA](#)

Did you also know that MOAA Vacations plans and executes **world-class vacations** across the globe and can customize a trip for small groups?



Go to <https://www.moaa.org/content/benefits-and-discounts/exclusive-discounts/travel/moaa-vacations/> or scan the QR code to learn more!

Final note: Our webmaster, Stan Gedelman, is actively working on a website migration that promises to be even better than what we have today! We'll communicate when that transition occurs.

We hope you enjoyed this newsletter.

Please send any comments or suggestions to mecmoaa@gmail.com.

Never Stop Serving.

Mountain Empire Chapter (MECMOAA) is an affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America

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Website: <http://www.mecmoaa1.org/> (Webmaster - Stan Gedelman)

Facebook: [MECMOAA on Facebook](#)