



# THE HOOSIER VETERAN

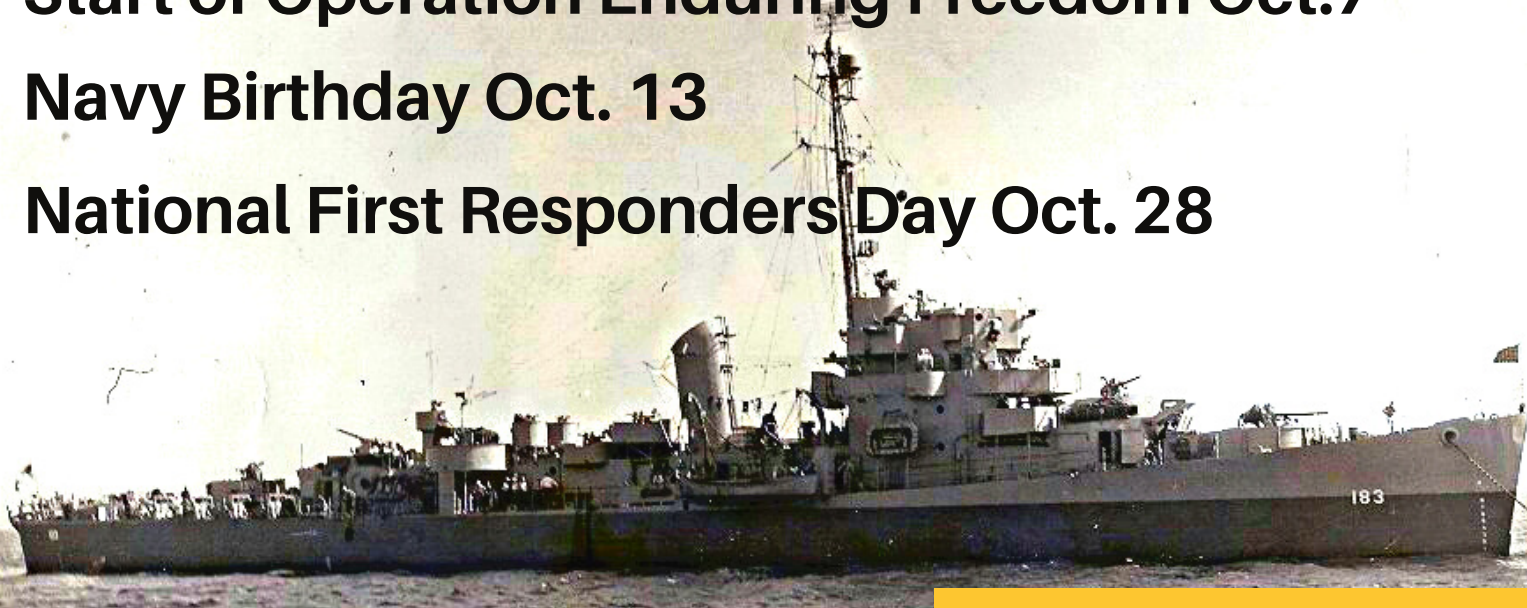
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[in.gov/dva](http://in.gov/dva)

**Start of Operation Enduring Freedom Oct. 7**

**Navy Birthday Oct. 13**

**National First Responders Day Oct. 28**



## WELCOME!

BY JOE DEVITO

Happy Fall! This month we say happy birthday to the U.S. Navy and celebrate with a story about a World War II Navy veteran who recently received his high school diploma. We also recognize the start of Operation Enduring Freedom and National First Responders Day. With the many exciting events and gatherings, we urge our Indiana Veteran community to stay safe and thankful to our veterans and service members. The team at the IDVA remains committed to making Indiana the best place for all Indiana Veterans to Live, Work and Thrive! We welcome contributions and feedback to [outreach@dva.in.gov](mailto:outreach@dva.in.gov).

THE HOOSIER VETERAN  
NEWSLETTER

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# IT'S NEVER TOO LATE: NINETY-SIX-YEAR-OLD WORLD WAR II VETERAN EARNS HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

BY KIRSTEN CLARK

SOUTH BEND – Mishawaka native and U.S. Navy veteran Robert Plasschaert received his high school diploma this summer in a small ceremony surrounded by family and friends. But unlike most high school grads, Plasschaert wasn't busy making plans to attend college or enter the workforce. At the 96-years-old, Plasschaert was accomplishing a goal he never thought possible.

## Looking Back

As news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor reached the airwaves in Mishawaka, Indiana, a 15-year-old Plasschaert and his friends listened to the radio broadcast in horror inside Bonnie Doon's Ice Cream Shop. The USS Arizona descended to its watery grave and the young men were filled with a patriotic fervor. They raced to the local military recruiter's office determined to join the fight.



**"Entering WWII was a big thing for all of us young guys, we were fired up," said Plasschaert. "None of us were old enough to join the military, except one, and wouldn't you know it, he was assigned stateside during the entire course of the war and never saw a bit of action."**

Emotions were running high after the attack on Pearl Harbor and many young Americans were motivated to join the war effort. Plasschaert had to wait two more years before he was able to join the U.S. Navy. He eagerly left high school in the middle of his junior year and became one of the first radio operators on board the newly commissioned destroyer USS Samuel S. Miles, nicknamed "Sad Sack Sammy."

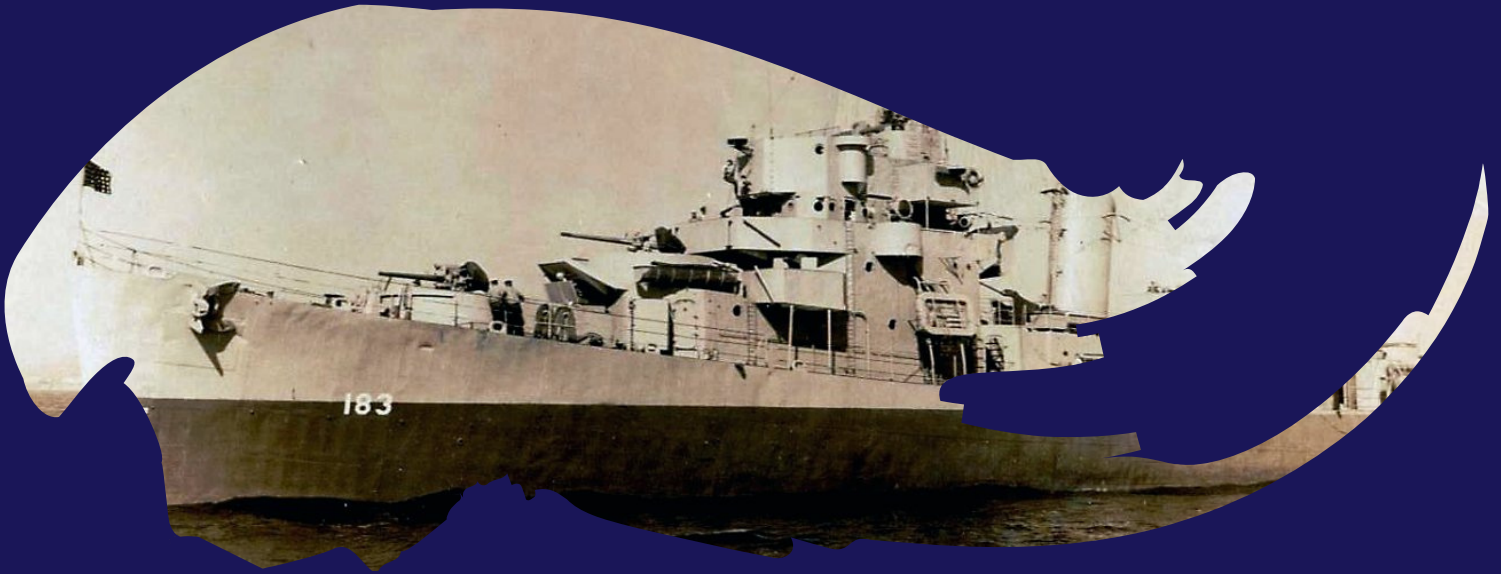
During Plasschaert's time on "Sammy," his crew and he protected ships in the Marshall Islands, sunk a Japanese submarine, guarded Iwo Jima invasion forces and provided cover for Okinawa bombers. They only suffered one casualty during their tour when one of the gunners on the ship was killed in a kamikaze attack.

The ship's crew was nicknamed "the Miracle Boys," and earned a reputation for escaping harm while seemingly caught in desperate battles where many others lost their lives.



The destroyer acted as bait so often they even managed to fool Japanese ship crews into backing down from aggression.

“We ran into the Japanese Navy once as we turned the corner around an island. We turned the ship around and they started after us, chasing us for a while, even gaining on us,” Plasschaert remembered. “But they suddenly slowed their pursuit and began to turn around. We realized it was because they thought our ship was leading them into a trap. But truth was, we were all alone and it was just as well they turn around because we would’ve stood against them by ourselves if they had continued.”



Plasschaert’s tour of duty ended in 1946 when he received news his father had perished in a car accident. He returned home to provide and care for his mother and sister. Plasschaert received an honorable discharge from the Navy and made his way back home to Mishawaka.

“I had to go right to work. It was more important,” he said. “If you were a good worker, you could get a better job than someone with an education in those days and I was a hard worker.”

He went to work immediately, taking up his father’s job in the Major Brothers Meat Packing Company in South Bend. While many of his high school classmates returned from the war and went back to high school, Plasschaert’s family counted on him to earn a living.

“I came out of a working-class immigrant community. Becoming a salesman was like graduating to a higher class in society. I worked myself to a more independent position and worked at the gas company for a long time. Later, I got married and went into business for myself. I did well, but just never got that diploma,” Plasschaert recalled.



## A Way Forward

Close family friend and neighbor, Mary McDermott said Plasschaert would often comment about how it bothered him he never got his high school diploma despite all the life experiences he had. So, McDermott contacted the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs to see how Plasschaert might obtain it.

McDermott discovered a state program with the Indiana Department of Education that rewards veterans with their high school diploma if they left to join the military or were drafted. The two agencies worked together to verify Plasschaert's eligibility and then worked with Mishawaka High School to issue his diploma. Seventy-eight years after leaving school, Plasschaert received his high school diploma.

"Bob's family and I were able to surprise him with it," said McDermott. "He was quiet at first, had to comprehend what it meant and how special it was. He told everybody about it for a long time after we gave it to him."

"I was shocked. I never thought I'd get my diploma," Plasschaert said. "It was really wonderful."



"Everybody here was perfectly pleased to make this happen," said John Ross, the principal at Mishawaka High School. "This is the first time we have issued a high school diploma in a case like this, and it was really nice to honor him as we did."

Now, Plasschaert says he has accomplished everything he wanted to in life - and more.

"Even at my age, I have my high school diploma. It really is never too late."



## HVAF welcomes new CEO!

HVAF – Helping Veterans And Families – is excited to announce its first female Chief Executive Officer: former HVAF Vice President for Strategy Emmy Hildebrand.

The Board of Directors voted to promote Hildebrand as the organization’s newest CEO. Brian Copes has decided to retire to spend more time with his wife and family. He will remain on as Transitional President to provide support and stability over the next several months. Former Vice President for Operations Bryan Dysert has been promoted to the role of Chief Operations Officer with additional leadership and oversight throughout the agency. [Click here for more!](#)



## SIVLAREF’s Music Festival

October 2  
12 to 9 p.m.

Crawford County Community Park,  
Hwy 66 South, Marengo, IN



IDVA Events Calendar: [Click Here](#)





# INDIANA VIETNAM VETS GIFT

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# PUNCH FOR VETERANS BOXING CLINIC




**PUNCH FOR VETERANS  
BOXING CLINICS**

For disabled veterans or civilians with a disability

Saturdays  
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM


Mike Ford Fitness  
2326 E 44th Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46205

\$5 Per class  
FREE for disabled veterans



SCAN HERE  
TO REGISTER  
OR FOR  
MORE INFO

Or go to: <https://rhipunchforveterans.eventbrite.com>



Freedom Isn't Free is a free community event for the entire Tri-state area. Let's come together as a community to recharge our pride in our veterans and celebrate our freedoms.

[Click here for more information.](#)

October 30

9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Crossroads Christian Church  
10800 Lincoln Ave.  
Newburgh, IN

## SATURDAYS 9 TO 10 A.M.

## Madison County Veterans Stand Down

Event Details

Where: Anderson National Guard Armory, 125 S. Scatterfield Rd. Anderson, IN 46016

When: October 8

Time: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.



Writing in Peace, a program of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum & Library in partnership with Turkey Run State Park, is a creative writing workshop for veterans. This is a monthly workshop. Sign up by emailing to [info@vonnegutlibrary.org](mailto:info@vonnegutlibrary.org) indicating which dates you would like to attend. Visit the [Vonnegut Library](http://VonnegutLibrary.org) website for more information.





# ROLL CALL!



1415 North Gate Road  
Madison, IN 47250

The Indiana Veterans Memorial Cemetery is open for visitors. Please follow all COVID-19 guidelines:

- Wear a mask in all buildings.
- Maintain 6 feet social space.

We understand and appreciate your contribution to keeping everyone safe to enjoy their visit.

Click [HERE](#) to see the webpage.



## Indiana Veterans Home News

# Adopt A VETERAN



**SPEND TIME WITH A  
VETERAN TODAY**

**Volunteer at IVH! Adopt one veteran & spend time with them. You only have to spend 30 to 60 minutes, one or two times per month.**

**Contact Patty Chapman, Volunteer Coordinator**

**(765) 497-8638**

**[pchapman@ivh.in.gov](mailto:pchapman@ivh.in.gov)**