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**Retired Green Beret Finds 'Check A Vet'
Organization to Raise Awareness
About—and Prevent—Veteran Suicide**



Veterans Helping Veterans

Retired Green Beret Found's 'Check A Vet' Organization to Raise Awareness About – and Prevent – Veteran Suicide

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

The heartbreak of veteran suicide and its devastating impact on military families has become a national emergency, with an estimated 22 veteran suicides occurring every day. One former Special Forces officer has made it his new mission to address this tragedy, one veteran at a time, through a unique peer-to-peer support group, Check A Vet.

Chief Michael R. Carmichael, CW4 Special Forces (Retired) founded the non-profit Check A Vet program to call attention to veteran suicide and work to prevent it. "My goal is to prevent veteran suicide," he declares. "Preventing suicide sounds impossible, but it is the universal message across mental healthcare in America. The program really is about our three goals, which make Check A Vet different from all other existing groups. First, we raise awareness among the general public about the scope and prevalence of veteran suicide. If no one is talking about veteran suicide, then how can we expect the public to know they need to help veterans? Suicide isn't a topic many in the general public

want to talk about, but knowing that roughly 22 veterans make that choice daily means we must be willing to bear some discomfort for the greater good of all veterans.

“Second, we call upon Americans to forge a meaningful and regular relationship with the veterans in their lives,” he continues. “Many friends and family assume that their veteran is okay and doesn’t need help or interventions. Sadly, we know that all too often veterans needlessly struggle alone without the support they need.

“Third, the American population must be educated on the multifaceted aspects of veteran suicide,” he details. “These aspects include the warning signs of suicide, suicide risk factors, protective factors, and what actions they can take to safely handle a distressed veteran who is dealing with suicidal ideation. Individually, we each need to prevent one suicide at a time by looking after the veterans in our lives. If we are all doing this simultaneously, collectively and individually, we can prevent suicide. Check A Vet will promote our plan nationally by further implementing a program that does those three things well and securing the resources to deliver the approach across America.”

Carmichael himself knows the struggles that military families face, and he can relate to them personally. He had one uncle who served in the military, and he joined the Army National Guard at 17 with special parental consent. “I spent two years in the Montana Army Guard,” he recalls. “As soon as Desert Storm started, I



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—Michael Carmichael, founder of Check A Vet

dropped out of college and volunteered for active duty. I spent 26 years in the Army, 22 of which were spent in the Special Forces. I proudly served in every war from Desert Storm to U.S. actions in Syria. I continue to serve my fellow Veterans through Check A Vet.”

Military families face numerous stresses while troops are serving active duty, including long overseas deployments. “The stress of these deployments takes a heavy toll on the family unit,” Carmichael explains. “One of the results of this stress is high divorce rates.

“After transitioning out of the military, veterans and their families face difficulties receiving timely services from the Veterans Administration and other approved service providers,” he adds. “The mental healthcare system of the VA has never been under the strain that it currently faces. As it struggles to keep up with the demand, continuity of care becomes a major issue affecting the care that veterans receive. By building a network of support around Veterans, Check A Vet will enhance the efforts of the healthcare system and establish a base of



support that is available 24/7. This safety net will provide real-time assistance to veterans in their moments of need."

Check A Vet is hyper-focused on developing peer-to-peer support groups: one group specifically for veterans and a second group for the families, friends, and other people in their lives who want to keep the veterans safe. "These support groups resemble Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-anon," Carmichael explains. "These two models have been proven to be successful since the 1930s. However, I do not want another 12-step program, so I have enlisted the help of four PhDs in the fields of psychology and counseling to develop and maintain our program from the ground up. These experts are working together to ensure our program is grounded in current research and practices to provide the best possible outcomes."

The organization is currently based in western Kentucky, but it is also building networks to raise awareness nationwide through social media campaigns. "Last month alone, we had more than 10,000 views," Carmichael notes. "These views all help to get our mission out across America. Since our humble beginnings in the summer of 2020, we have had over 200,000 views across our social media campaigns. We also travel to large regional and national events to get the message out by meeting directly with our target demographic. We are working hard and fast to expand our on-the-ground reach to other local communities across the country."

The non-profit group relies on donations, including small donations from local businesses and individuals, as well as large "in kind" donations from Progressive Insurance, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and Speedway Motorsports. "We hope to continue building a reputation as a trusted organization to attract even more support," Carmichael comments. "Check A Vet's goal is to use money raised to directly benefit veterans with tangible and measurable outcomes."

Check A Vet offers free suicide education on its website, <https://www.checkavet.org/>. "These lessons help veterans, their families, and friends identify suicide risk factors," Carmichael points out. "This training also shares suicide protective factors. With this information, veterans and their families can strategize on ways to replace risk with protective factors, thus lessening the likelihood that veterans will harm themselves."



