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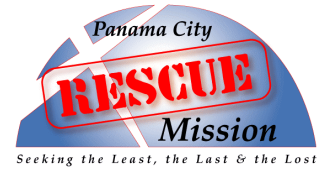
Homeless Veteran Remembers Comrades on Memorial Day ***Mission Helps Veteran Deal With Issues of Life and War***

When Mike Bell* watches the news and hears the reports of American military personnel being injured or killed, it hits close to home. Bell was once in military service during time of war. He witnessed what happens to servicemen in conflict. This Memorial Day, as he winds up his own personal battles, he remembers those with whom he served.

Bell was only 20 when he entered the Navy, a dream he held most of his life. “My dad was a Mustanger,” Bell said, explaining how his dad enlisted in the Navy and worked his way up to Lieutenant before he retired. Bell wasn’t even supposed to go to the Navy; he was a 4-F, meaning scoliosis had left him physically unfit to serve, and he was the sole surviving son. But after persuasion by his father, the Navy allowed him serve two active years during the Vietnam War. Bell worked in Aviation Safety Equipment in the states. Though he never made it to the battlefield, he was still affected by the war.

“It made me sad when my friends died on the battlefield. I didn’t like how the war was going anyway and it just intensified my dislike. It was just like the war in the Middle East now, they need to quit playing games.” Bell said. “After 20 years of military in my life, I know enough to know I don’t want to know any more about it.” A faded eagle tattoo on his left arm was just visible under his blue t-shirt that reads “This is what a cool grandpa looks like.”

Bell came to the Mission to regroup. “I didn’t have any purpose in my life. I had recently stopped drinking and I didn’t want to start back,” Bell added he had been a drinker most of his life, especially after his wife died seven years and one month ago. He still wears his wedding ring, made of a 1964 silver dollar.



“The Mission has helped me find my purpose. I really enjoy Chaplain Larry’s class on boundaries. It gives me a good learning tool.”

Bell recently graduated from the men’s recovery program, “Power to Choose,” and moves out into his own apartment in four days. “I’ll be back to volunteer though, I can’t fish all the time, so I might as well be doing something good. It makes sense to me.”

The Reality of Homeless Veterans Struggles

“One-fourth of the homeless men in our country are veterans,” said Thurman Chambers, Executive Director for Panama City Rescue Mission. “For many, the memories of wartime are still fresh. And with U.S. servicemen and women again placing themselves in harm’s way, it brings back names and faces from years ago- including some who never came home from battle.”

Rev. Stephen E. Burger, Executive Director of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions said, “Nationally more than half of the veterans who are homeless served during Korea, Vietnam or the Persian Gulf conflicts. What used to be called ‘shell-shock’ is today termed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. When you combine the numerous other issues in homelessness, you see that homeless vets have much to overcome.”

Panama City Rescue Mission’s purpose is to provide an environment where the compassion and love of Christ can empower people to overcome and prevent life’s adversities. The Mission is funded through private donations. It serves more than 250 meals a day and provides shelter for 85 people a night. This summer, seven men will graduate from “Power to Choose.” More information can be found on the web at www.pcrmission.org.

*Name has been changed to protect client’s privacy.

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