From enrollment to employment, MTSU’s veterans center offers support for every step of the journey home.
The Center of It All
The Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center epitomizes MTSU’s long history of military friendliness

Leading by Example
MTSU’s proud history of military friendliness has only been elevated since the arrival of LTG(R) Keith M. Huber on campus

The Center of It All
The Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center epitomizes MTSU’s long history of military friendliness

Learning the Ropes
Amanda Hallam made the transition from combat to campus—now she’s returning the favor

Making the Journey Possible
Supporters line up to give MTSU’s military veterans and families their due

Partners for Patriots
With the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs’ unwavering support, the Daniels Center stands as a beacon for incoming veterans

True Blue Traditions
MTSU hosts four annual events to salute our veterans

Operation Song
Songwriting sessions involving former military, student songwriters, and chart-toppers help local veterans heal

A Century in the Making
MTSU’s volunteer spirit is tangible at the Veterans Memorial outside Tom H. Jackson Building
People often ask me how MTSU was able to open such a comprehensive veterans center so quickly. The answer—answers, actually—are always the same: 1) it wasn’t as fast as it might have seemed, and 2) it’s because of a strong institutional commitment to the military and veterans.

This is not an overnight success story; the MTSU-military relationship really stretches back to World War II, when space was made available so that troops from the 11th College Training Detachment could be educated, trained, and housed on campus. Over the years, this same commitment was demonstrated through the development of a Vet Village community where returning GIs and their families could live while attending school; the formation of premier ROTC programs (Army 1950 and a satellite Air Force detachment shortly thereafter; the annual Salute to Veterans and the Armed Forces football games, held since 1982; and the 2009 creation of a Veterans Memorial on campus.

These are just a few examples. Clearly, MTSU is a school that has consistently tracked and provided for the needs of military-connected students.

So, when it came time to take the next step in MTSU’s important tradition of serving this student population, a veterans center seemed logical. In 2015, the now-named Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center opened. The Daniels Center was designed with intentionality—with the goal of creating a specific environment replicating the trust, teamwork, focus, and selfless commitment of a military unit. Further, by centralizing veteran services in one place, we have been able to focus on academic and career success and on providing our military, veterans, and their dependents with an educational experience that they will not receive anywhere else in the country.

On a personal note, I appreciate that the physical location of the Daniels Center is on what was once a taxiway where WWII pilots were trained to fly in support of the war mission. It is also in close proximity to that early veteran initiative, Vet Village. It is not lost on us that our current veterans and their families meet and are served where past patriots trained and lived.

As you will see in these pages, by holding close to our history, the commitment to our military and veterans is as strong as ever. We are excited to share with you MTSU’s past, present, and future efforts. Until you have time to stop by for a visit, I hope you will enjoy this magazine. And, if you are a veteran or are still serving, thank you.

Hilary Miller, Center Director
THE CENTER OF IT ALL

The Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center epitomizes MTSU’s long history of supporting those who served
An interview with center director Hilary Miller

Transitioning from military life to college is a daunting task. The bureaucracy surrounding admissions, registration, and educational benefits can be confusing and complicated. Many veterans are older with established careers and families, which can be isolating among classmates starting college straight out of high school.

Year after year, MTSU has been recognized by national publications such as Military Times and G.I. Jobs magazine as one of the top universities in the U.S. for veteran education. Military Times also named the Jennings A. Jones College of Business among its 64 Best for Vets Business Schools in 2014.

In 2011, MTSU became the first institution of higher education in the state—and one of the first in the country—to partner with the Veterans Affairs’ new VetSuccess on Campus program. The recent creation of a full-blown veterans and military family center on campus is just the latest step in MTSU becoming the most military-friendly university in America.

The 3,200-square-foot center constitutes the largest and most comprehensive veterans and military family center at a university in Tennessee. The center provides service and support for approximately 1,000 student veterans and their family members at MTSU. Everything a student veteran needs to succeed is available in this single location, from getting advice on courses and completing government paperwork to getting questions answered about benefits and employment opportunities.
The following is a question and answer session with center director Hilary Miller about the work of the Daniels Center.

How was the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center established?
In the mid-2000s, with the growing war effort and the rising number of veterans returning to campus, MTSU began ramping up its support for student veterans and family members. Actions such as the creation of the Veterans Memorial, the founding of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, participation in the VA's VetSuccess on Campus program, and the designation of a small space for a veterans' lounge all led to the development of a critical mass of support for veteran education.

The next big step came at the start of 2015 when Keith M. Huber, retired U.S. Army lieutenant general, was hired (see related article, page 8). Serving as MTSU’s senior advisor for veterans and leadership initiatives and reporting to the president and provost, Gen. Huber quickly became a key advocate for student veterans. His initial assignment was to research and assess MTSU’s veteran environment and, based on those findings, take action. At that same time, I moved into the newly created, full-time position of center director. On Nov. 5, 2015, Middle Tennessee State University opened the Veterans and Military Family Center—now named the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center.

What is the mission of the Daniels Center?
The Daniels Center is much more than a lounge. It is a comprehensive, one-stop hub for student veterans, with a five-point mission: to enroll student veterans and family members, encourage them while at MTSU, assist with employment, educate the University community, and expand the veteran-education knowledge base.

How is the Daniels Center staffed?
To accomplish these goals by the end of the first year of operations, the Daniels Center employed a full-time director, two school certifying officials, and an administrative assistant. There was also a full-time VA VetSuccess on Campus counselor—the first in the state and 12th in the nation—and a VA mental health counselor. Because the Daniels Center is focused on transition points, we created two new full-time positions: transitions manager and an employer search agent. Our transition manager, Sean Martin, concentrates on our first two goals: enrolling and encouraging military-connected students—which includes

“MTSU has led the way in Tennessee regarding serving student veterans.”
VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILY CENTER

Location: Keathley University Center, Rooms 124 and 317

Director: Hilary Miller

MTSU financial commitment: $333,000

MTSU student veteran population: Approx. 1,000, including family members

Center features: Two conference rooms, seven office spaces, advisor workspaces, student computer area, two reception areas, lounge area, kitchenette

Center opened: Nov. 5, 2015

assisting with admission paperwork, conducting a prior learning assessment of military training/experience for college credit, and administering a sponsorship program. Our employer search agent, Shane Smith, is concerned with the exit transition, specifically the employment needs of our students. Working closely with the transition manager, he gets to know our students, learns their ambitions, and then seeks to find them employment opportunities—both internships and full-time positions. Much like Gen. Huber, this employer search agent spends considerable time developing deep relationships with the community, corporations, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. The Daniels Center also benefits from a large part-time staff, consisting of two graduate assistants and approximately 10 VA student workers who serve as the front line, assisting with initial GI Bill questions and the sponsorship program.

What is the relationship between The Journey Home Project and the Daniels Center?

The Journey Home Project is a wonderful organization that describes its mission as “connecting donors to veterans’ organizations that do the most good.” Gen. Huber was introduced to the TJHP board members through MTSU Recording Industry Chair Beverly Keel. This relationship took off quickly. In addition to several large donations, the board is active in assisting military-connected students on a more micro level. They genuinely want to connect with and help our students. This help has come in the form of sponsoring cookouts every semester to feed several hundred students, military and civilian alike; sending our students tickets to attend local music and business-oriented events; funding registration for students’ participation in the Nashville Veterans Day Parade; hosting small mentoring lunches with veterans; and co-funding and attending the MTSU Operation Song event (see related article on page 27).

Talk about some of the gifts that have made the center possible, specifically the ones from country music hall of famer Charlie Daniels.

Music legend Charlie Daniels and MTSU’s relationship continues to make amazing strides. With the unveiling of a plaque and a new logo for MTSU’s Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center now named for them, MTSU formally recognized Daniels and his wife of 52 years, as well as The Journey Home Project that Daniels co-founded to assist veterans, during a celebration on Aug. 23, 2016. The Daniels family and The Journey Home Project gave separate $50,000 and $70,000 gifts to the Veterans and Military Family Center in 2015 and 2016. Charlie Daniels applauds the MTSU center as being a place “where veterans can obtain so much support—health care, teleconferencing facilities, job placement, academics, government bureaucracy, and a therapeutic place to sit and talk with others. Any problems they have, they can get help at the center.”

In a related development, Mike Krause, the new Tennessee Higher Education Commission executive director and a U.S. Army veteran himself, also notified us of a nearly $185,500 grant after THEC accepted the center’s proposal focusing on increasing veterans’ student success. Krause noted that “MTSU has led the way in Tennessee regarding serving student veterans.” Gov. Bill Haslam also announced in 2016 that MTSU would receive a $91,000 state grant to support our vet-success efforts.

One last thing. I have to ask. What is the background on the mural and the quilts that adorn the center?

The mural was painted by Randy Purcell, an MTSU alum and Desert Storm veteran. We wanted the piece to include iconic American themes—the flag, an eagle, Uncle Sam—but we didn’t want to take a traditional approach to these images. For instance, we wanted the feel, the impression, of the flag but not necessarily a photographic-type representation.

The quilts were provided by the Quilts of Valor organization, and there is one for each of the five military branches. These are not the original quilts that were initially hung for the opening of the center. Most of those have been donated to qualifying recipients. According to the Quilts of Valor Foundation bylaws, their quilts cannot be hung on permanent display—they are to be awarded to “military service members and veterans touched by war.” So, several of the QOV quilters, using their own funds, purchased materials and made replacement quilts to hang on the walls of the Daniels Center. Like the mural, they provide a warm and welcoming touch to all who visit.

Thanks, Hilary.

SPRING 2017 7
MTSU’s proud history of military friendliness has only been elevated since the arrival of LTG(R) Keith M. Huber to campus
by Allison Gorman

To understand how difficult the journey transitioning from military to civilian life can be, consider LTG(R) Keith M. Huber, who spent 38 years in the U.S. Army, 14 of them as a general officer. When he retired from the military in 2013, his résumé had no corporate equivalent. His workdays sometimes involved combat, his business trips were tours of duty, his operating budget was $960 million, and his meetings were often with heads of state or the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

A civilian for the first time in his adult life, Huber pondered the path before him. To his mind, true retirement was out of the question, but so were many of the careers available to someone with his rarified skill set and political leverage.

“I consciously decided not to work for a defense contractor or be a news commentator or criticize other people or allow politicians to use my words and my experience to bludgeon other people,” he said.

Service is built into a soldier’s DNA, he added. He wanted to serve.

So, from his home in Franklin, he contacted academic institutions throughout Tennessee that had ROTC programs and offered to speak at commissionings, awards ceremonies, or anywhere else he could provide education or inspiration. When he spoke at MTSU, President Sidney A. McPhee was among the inspired.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

With waves of newly discharged soldiers entering college on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, McPhee had been looking for a way to build on the University’s long track record of partnering with the military and educating veterans. MTSU had been recognized by G.I. Jobs magazine as a “military-friendly” campus, and it had a small but passionate group of faculty, one of whom was Hilary Miller, who worked tirelessly on student-veteran issues. The University also had been selected to participate in the Veteran Affairs’ new VetSuccess on Campus program, one of only 12 universities with a full-time VA benefits counselor.
McPhee invited Huber back to campus for a meeting with him and then-Provost Brad Bartel. There, he asked Huber to take MTSU’s support for veterans to the next level.

Huber’s initial response was no—not because he wasn’t humbled, he said, but because he needed to understand the mission.

“Give me 60 days,” he said to McPhee. “Let me find out who our student veterans are, what they need, and what other universities are doing for their veterans. Then I’ll give you my recommendations.”

**MAN ON A MISSION**

Huber and Miller spent the next two months talking to MTSU’s veterans—stopping them between buildings, visiting their classrooms, inviting them to talk over pizza, handing out surveys.

“When he first started, it was January,” Miller said. “It was super cold. And we would walk all over campus looking for veterans.”

They also visited Arizona State University’s Pat Tillman Center, a 3,000-square-foot space, considered the gold standard among veterans centers.

Huber returned to McPhee with numbers.

“When I presented my assessment to him in March 2015, there were 1,066 student veterans on campus, average age 28.6 years, and 95 percent of that population had had at least one tour in Iraq or one tour in Afghanistan in combat, but normally multiple tours,” Huber said.

He also returned with an understanding of what these men and women needed. Many of them had families; all of them had the singular sense of purpose that comes from military training.

“Student veterans aren’t at universities for the college campus experience,” he said. “They’re there because this is their next mission.”

These nontraditional students needed a “one-stop shop” where they could ask questions not just about academics or education benefits, but also about finances, housing, health care, and jobs—what Huber calls “the complete life cycle” of transitioning from soldier to civilian. That required a dedicated physical location, and not just a place to tell war stories.

“It’s so much larger than that,” Huber told McPhee. “We don’t need another USO. We don’t need another American Legion. You don’t need to give me a room with a pool table and a popcorn machine. You need to give me a location where veterans can go to see other veterans and ask any bloody question they have about their transition.”

McPhee offered him 2,600 square feet of space and $329,000 to design, build, and equip a veterans center on the first floor of Keathley University Center. And he asked Huber to stay on at MTSU as senior advisor for veterans and leadership initiatives.

The retired general replied, “I’d be honored to, as long as I can make a contribution to serving our student veterans.”

He’s been a man on a mission ever since.

**TAKING COMMAND**

Miller, who works closely with Huber and is herself a force of nature, admits she can hardly keep up with him. Asked whether there’s symbolic value to having a general on campus advocating for veterans, she mulls it over for a moment.

“Perhaps he could be symbolic, potentially,” she said, “but he’d have to slow down for somebody to make a symbol of him.”

Eight months after Huber delivered his recommendations to McPhee, the new veterans center was complete—to the apparent surprise of everybody but Huber.

“After the opening ceremony,” he recalled, “I had several professors come up to me and say, ‘Do you know what you’ve done?’ I said, ‘I think we dedicated a veterans center.’ And they said, ‘No, what you’ve done is remind all of us what can be accomplished when you have focus and persistence.’ ”

Focus and persistence: That sums up Huber’s approach for the past two years as he’s worked to build a collaboration of outside resources—individuals, nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies—to support the center’s goals and expand its reach far beyond MTSU.

Over the past two years, musician Charlie Daniels and his wife, on behalf of the Journey Home Project, have donated $120,000 to the center, which was named in their honor August 2016. Meanwhile Miller, who agreed to leave the College of Liberal Arts to direct the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center, secured $276,000 in grants through Tennessee’s Veterans Reconnect program.

Those funds helped her and Huber establish complementary staff positions designed to complete the soldier-to-civilian life cycle by conveying education into meaningful employment. An employer
search agent, who will match student veterans with job opportunities, will work alongside a transition manager in the newly opened Veterans Transitioning Home space just above the Daniels Center. Huber predicts that by the time finite funding for the two new positions runs out, they will have proven measurably worthy of becoming permanent or even being replicated elsewhere in the University.

The Daniels Center already had four full-time University employees, as well as other staff paid by the VA: student veterans who are peer advisors, the VetSuccess counselor, and the only full-time VA clinical social worker located on a college campus.

**Rank Never Retires**

That last fact reflects Huber’s willingness to leverage his name to benefit student veterans. Determined that they shouldn’t have to jump through hoops to get mental health counseling, Huber called two of his former West Point classmates—the secretary and deputy secretary of the VA—who agreed to supply a full-time social worker at the MTSU veterans center.

“Most people within government at the state or federal level either know me or they will listen to me, just out of courtesy for someone with my seniority,” he said. “And as long as I don’t use that for my own ego or self-promotion, it really helps me to help people.”

Case in point: When one academic department had trouble lining up VA internships for its students, Huber called a meeting with the VA’s regional director and the departmental faculty at MTSU.

“We sat down and figured out what we needed to do to get the internships going, and it was done,” Miller said. “Perhaps he just extends an invitation where people never thought to do it before.”

Huber has incorporated that straightforward approach into new campus traditions, such as an annual 9/11 observance and a stole ceremony for graduating veterans, that both honor student veterans’ service while also raising their visibility among potential employers. As chair of the Nashville Serving Veterans Community Board and the Fort Campbell Retiree Council, he works regularly with middle Tennessee’s political and business leaders and includes them in these MTSU events.

Miller notes that Huber simultaneously works on the macro and micro levels. He uses his vast network and professional gravitas to advocate for MTSU’s student veterans as a whole, but he will also work one-on-one with any veteran in transition.

“He is very much a soldier’s soldier,” she said. “He protects his soldiers, the same way he’s always done.”

Huber considers the Daniels Center a national resource, not just a campus resource, she added.

“We will assist anybody that needs help,” she said. “We have no recruitment mission. No one is going to be hired, fired, or promoted based on how many veterans come to MTSU.”

But they are coming. Huber regularly fields calls from newly discharged soldiers who tell him they served with him in Afghanistan or Iraq or Kosovo. Some want his help, but others just want reassurance that he’s going to stay at MTSU.

Because if he is, they’re coming too.

“Student veterans aren’t at universities for the college campus experience . . . this is their next mission.”

Huber walks with Justin McIntosh and Amanda Hallam.
When Amanda Hallam’s military transport was landing at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan, her thoughts weren’t on the beautiful snow-covered Hindu Kush mountains to the north or the impressively vast Registan Desert to the south. She wasn’t even thinking about the potential dangers of landing in a country that’s an active theater of war. No, now retired from the U.S. Army as a sergeant, Hallam was thinking about Gabriel, her then-infant son, who was living with her parents in Ocala, Florida, some 4,500 miles away.

“When I left, my son wasn’t even 2 years old,” said Hallam, a single mother. “I left him with my mom and dad, and they watched him for me until I could get back. It was hard.”

Hallam traveled from Kandahar by Chinook helicopter—the military helicopter that resembles a wide school bus suspended from two huge rotors—to the U.S. military FOB Wolverine where she would serve in an air reconnaissance battalion. She volunteered for the deployment to the war zone as part of an agreement that would eventually allow her to be stationed in Savannah, Georgia, about 250 miles away from Ocala.

“But it was worth it to be closer to home,” said Hallam, now 31.

She spent the better part of the next year at FOB Wolverine.

“I had a very fortunate deployment in that I wasn’t always under an imminent threat of something happening,” Hallam said. “I was there for nine months. Sometimes I worked gate duty as a guard, but most of the time it was working promotions or promotion boards. I was an HR (human resources) soldier and did a lot of paperwork.”

Hallam, now an MTSU student, said the most challenging part of her deployment came in the final two weeks before returning stateside.

“I stayed occupied the whole time I was there—I was really busy, and that helped,” she said. “But that last two weeks of sitting in Kandahar waiting to come home was the toughest for me because we weren’t doing anything and my mind was stagnant. All I could think about was my son and being at home with him.”
There was great fanfare when she returned—and an unwelcome surprise that would take more than a year to heal.

“They had a big ceremony in one of the hangars, and I saw my son when I was standing in formation. I could see him dancing around and was so excited because there was a lot of music playing,” Hallam said.

“My son was very young, and even though I Skyped with him a lot while I was in Afghanistan, he didn’t understand that I was Mommy. It was like a stranger was picking him up. He cried and ran to my mother—that was tough.”

But home they went, to finally begin rebuilding their lives together as mother and son.

“It was odd for the first few months. It was like living in a house with a stranger; my son was weird with me,” Hallam said. “Now my son is on me like glue. He’s a momma’s boy and loves me very much. They say babies are the most resilient when it comes to deployment, but I don’t believe it. It took at least a year for us to get back to the normal.”

All told, Hallam spent five years in the Army and another 2½ years in the Army Reserves, retiring as a sergeant.

“When I got out of the military, I was married. My then-spouse decided to go into MTSU’s Aerospace program,” she said. The marriage, however, ended “two weeks before the semester started. I was scared. I wish I could have seen how well I would do at MTSU; it would have calmed my nerves. But at the time I was worried about financially how I was going to do this.”

As a single mom hoping to earn an undergraduate degree, answers were hard to come by for Hallam. In many ways, Hallam was lost and understandably confused. Her marriage was over, she no longer had her parents caring for Gabriel on a daily basis, and her future was unclear. But she liked Murfreesboro as a community, she said, and was determined to stay if she could.

“I can see now that a big part of my identity was lost, too,” Hallam said. “When you’re in the military, there’s a cohesion with your unit. As you transition out of the military, you’re completely displaced from a situation you know. It’s hard, and it can get really lonely sometimes. But becoming a hermit and being too much into yourself isn’t helpful. I was supposed to be getting mental health treatment, but I didn’t have anybody who could watch my son. I went to a church group where some nice ladies would watch the children. Sometimes you’ve just got to stick your neck out—people want to help, that’s human nature. For me, it was swallowing my pride and going out there and getting the help I needed.”

After “sticking her neck out,” she found a solution to another big problem, too. Hallam soon discovered a provision in her military contract that the government would supplement the G.I. Bill, which pays for military personnel, veterans and, in some cases, a family member, to go to college.

“It’s called a ‘college-fund kicker,’ but there’s a catch,” she said. “It’s an incentive, but the catch is that you have to complete your service before you can receive the benefit, and it pays an extra $850 per month on top of the G.I. Bill.”

The complications she experienced adjusting to civilian life as a single mother while trying to fund her undergraduate studies as a nontraditional student led her to a rich on-campus resource at MTSU that would eventually be renamed the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center. This incredible resource helped Hallam overcome the challenges of transitioning into her new life as a military veteran, a nontraditional college student, and a single mom. This was a powerful game-changer for her, making it practical for her to pursue an undergraduate degree in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. Hallam saw firsthand the tremendous value in helping new veterans transition from military life to life as a student. So much so, in fact, that she began working at MTSU’s military center, renamed in 2016 after the country music legend Charlie Daniels and his wife, who live in nearby Mount Juliet.

“I work about 15 hours per week assisting active duty personnel, veterans, and their families with vocation questions or directing them to rehabilitation help,” Hallam said. “Outside of my job, I also go to Fort Campbell quite often and talk to people getting ready to leave the service about MTSU. They always ask me about the military center, which most schools don’t have. I don’t think I’m selling it, but I’m selling it. As a single mom, I love MTSU. It’s so veteran-friendly; that’s one of the reasons I stayed in Murfreesboro—there are a lot of veterans here and a lot of veteran organizations.”

Hallam, graduating in the summer of 2017, is considering pursuing a master’s degree online in vocational rehabilitation. Her success is indicative of the goal of the Daniels Center and MTSU’s outreach to veterans: to transform soldiers, airmen, sailors, and all other men and women who have served the United States into another staple of a strong nation: college graduates.
"As a single mom, I love MTSU. It’s so veteran-friendly; that’s one of the reasons I stayed in Murfreesboro—there are a lot of veterans here and a lot of veteran organizations."
MAKING THE JOURNEY POSSIBLE

Supporters line up to give MTSU’s military veterans and families their due
Charlie and Hazel Daniels

The country music Hall of Famer Daniels and his wife, Hazel, have had close ties to MTSU for decades. In 1975, the entertainer’s second Volunteer Jam was held at MTSU’s Murphy Center, and in 2009, the University presented him with the Joe M. Rodgers Spirit of America Award, an honor given to a businessperson who has demonstrated the best of the spirit of America through significant contributions in government, education, and/or civic and charitable organizations.

MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee surprised Daniels in 2013 with a presentation on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry that formally announced the Charlie Daniels Scholarship at the University. It was created in the artist’s honor through a $25,000 endowment from the International Entertainment Buyers Association.

The Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center is a one-stop shop for MTSU’s approximately 1,000 student veterans and family members. It’s also a place for student veterans to study, gather, and get help from fellow veterans, who serve as peer advisors and sponsors.

This journey wouldn’t be possible without the help and dedication of The Journey Home Project, Tennessee government, and everyone involved that helped create the center.
The Journey Home Project

Daniels lent his celebrity status and musical talents to raise money for a veterans’ scholarship fund, and The Journey Home Project is an outgrowth of those concerts. Now, The Journey Home Project assists other not-for-profits in securing funds to benefit veterans and assist in their transition from uniform to civilian life.

Daniels and his longtime manager, David Corlew, co-founded The Journey Home Project, along with other board members Ed Hardy and Joe and Mercedez Longever. The project raises funding from individual donors and fundraising events, including the renowned Charlie Daniels Volunteer Jam, which over the years has drawn on the talents of some of the biggest names in the music world, including the Oak Ridge Boys, Alabama, James Brown, Billy Joel, Garth Brooks, Don Henley, and Lynyrd Skynyrd, just to name a few.

Education represents the foundation on which The Journey Home Project was created—leading to the partnership, donations, and eventual naming of MTSU’s new military center for the Daniels.

That happened in 2015, when The Journey Home Project committed $50,000 to help equip the new Daniels Center at Middle Tennessee State University with computers and technology. The contribution came from funds raised at the 40th Anniversary Volunteer Jam. But the generosity didn’t end there.

The next year, The Journey Home Project donated an additional $70,000. “This center will be the resource that will enable young men and women returning home from their service to transition, along with their families, into their lives as civilians,” said Corlew, organization co-chair.

“Charlie Daniels is a great friend of our University and an inspiration to us all for his commitment to our veterans,” McPhee stated at that time. “This support by The Journey Home Project will help us improve the lives of our student veterans and their precious families.”
A Perfect Match
MTSU’s latest example of its dedication to student veterans occurred in early 2017 when MTSU opened the Daniels Center Veterans Transitioning Home office in Keathley University Center Room 316.

The nearly 600-square-foot Veterans Transitioning Home facility will allow Shane Smith, interim employer search agent, and Sean Martin, transition manager, to match veterans with prospective employers. Smith and Martin, pictured above, also are veterans.

A study by the Center for a New American Security, a Washington think tank, is just one of many that have concluded hiring veterans is good for business. According to the study, companies like Boeing, Kraft Foods, and PepsiCo hire veterans for their superior leadership and teamwork skills, excellent character, comfort with structure and discipline, proven expertise, experience working in dynamic and ever-changing environments, effectiveness, resiliency, loyalty, proven success, and even public relations value.

Employers interested in holding interviews with soon-to-graduate student veterans at MTSU’s Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center should contact Smith. Companies can start the process by creating an employer profile in Lightning Career Link, where they can post all available positions as a first step in recruiting at MTSU. Employer event announcements and registrations are also managed through this system. Once available, companies may also request access to the Veterans Résumé book.

State Government
Mike Krause, the new executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and a U.S. Army veteran, notified MTSU in 2017 about a grant of nearly $185,500 for the center’s proposal to increase veterans’ student success.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam had already earmarked a $91,000 state grant in 2015 to support MTSU’s ongoing efforts to help student veterans successfully pursue their higher education degrees. The Veteran Reconnect Grant, focusing on improving the success of student veterans enrolled in Tennessee, helped support programs at the then-new center opening at MTSU.

“MTSU has led the way in Tennessee regarding serving student veterans,” Krause said. “We are excited to continue working with Dr. McPhee and Gen. (Keith) Huber to ensure that after serving their country, veterans are able to earn a world-class degree and enter the workforce ready to succeed.”

Good Partners
With private, public, and University support all marching in step, MTSU’s Daniels Center serves student veterans and military families for their service and helps make their journey seamless from uniform to campus life and then into the workforce.

MTSU Daniels Center
mtsu.edu/military
@mtdanielscenter
@MTVetCenter
PARTNERS FOR PATRIOTS

Jordan McCall Sr., vocational rehabilitation counselor, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs
With unwavering support from Veterans Affairs, MTSU’s Daniels Center stands as a beacon for incoming veterans
by Allison Gorman and Vicky Travis

Tony Johnston was no stranger to college when he used the GI Bill to attend graduate school. But his time in the military had changed him, and suddenly he felt every bit the stranger on a campus full of 18- to 22-year-olds.

“It was a culture shock,” he said. “I was significantly more mature than I was as an undergraduate, and I was very mission-oriented. My objective was to get my degree and get a job so I could support my family.”

Now an MTSU professor in the School of Agribusiness and Agriscience, director of MTSU’s new Fermentation Science degree program, and Faculty Senate representative to MTSU’s new governing board, Johnston said he recognizes himself in the veterans who have swelled the student ranks at MTSU over the past several years.

“We needed to do more than take their money, educate them, and kick them out the door,” Johnston said.

Thanks to Johnston and several other faculty members and administrators who have made it their personal mission to advocate for veterans on campus, MTSU began acting on that imperative well before the recent major wave of veteran enrollees crested around 2009.

“Truly it’s still a passion for me,” said Cathy Delametter, a veteran who is the prior learning assessment manager in MTSU’s University College.

Like Johnston, Delametter was one of the first faculty members on a standing committee to figure out better ways to serve veterans on campus years ago.

“It all started because a group of people wanted to help. And I don’t think it’s going to stop,” Delametter said. “Many of us were working full time but putting in an extra half day every day on getting the military center.”

As that dedicated group anticipated potential barriers for student veterans and found ways to remove them, MTSU followed their lead, establishing a precursor to the current Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center (the largest university-based military center in Tennessee) and becoming the first institution in the state to partner with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) VetSuccess on Campus program.

Clearly as our military members push themselves to go beyond, MTSU has pushed itself to stand out among universities ready and willing to guide veterans to success in college. A key to that success has been MTSU’s unusually close and productive relationship with the VA.

A TIMELY START
Heather Conrad administers services under the VA VetSuccess on Campus program at MTSU, which was established in 2011 and provides career counseling, VA benefit assistance, and financial and transition counseling.
“At the beginning when Heather came in, being with VA and having those connections, she knew the rules and how to cut through the red tape,” Delametter said. “She understood how it operated and was positioned to help our students.”

Counselors like Conrad ensure that veterans receive the support and assistance needed to pursue their educational and employment goals. Easily accessible on campus, the counselors also can provide referrals for health services through VA medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, or vet centers.

In fall 2014, before the new Daniels Center existed, Conrad was the only VA counselor on campus. The VA later reached out again to see about creating a VA health office on campus.

“She started the ball rolling, and it’s been gathering momentum ever since,” Daniels Center director Hilary Miller said of Conrad’s work.

In June 2016, a full-time VA mental health counselor, Betty Struzick, began providing counseling and assisting with access to medical providers at the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) in Murfreesboro. It’s a very rare arrangement to have a full-time mental health counselor devoted singularly to MTSU students and faculty. Struzick coordinates any type of counseling that a veteran could receive at the VA. (MTSU is also outfitted to provide tele-mental health counseling.)

The arrival of the VetSuccess on Campus office and VA employees Conrad and Struzick to run it couldn’t have been more timely. In fall 2014, 986 veterans and dependents were students at MTSU. By comparison, in 2008, that number had been about 700.

**NATIONAL RECOGNITION**

The partnership between MTSU and the local VA health care practice recently earned one of just three national Veterans Health Administration Community Partnership Awards. Announced in May 2016, the VA’s national Community Partnership Challenge spotlighted successful nonmonetary partnerships with nongovernmental organizations that help veterans, caregivers, survivors, and families. The contest’s theme was “Veteran Access to Health Care Services with Special Emphasis on Replicable Partnerships.”

Dr. David Shulkin, undersecretary of health for the VA, announced the award. Suzanne Jené, TVHS deputy health system director, said the partnership with MTSU “reflects exactly the kind of involvement the VA wants to have in our communities.

“By virtue of having this center right on the MTSU campus, we are able to reach our veterans where they spend the majority of their days,” Jené added. “This affords them the convenience to stop by any time they have a question or concern, without having to schedule an appointment.”

The Tennessee Valley Healthcare System and the VA Nashville Regional office provide comprehensive VA health care and benefit services to student veterans. VA staffers have offices in the Daniels Center, located inside MTSU’s Keathley University Center in the heart of the campus. Veterans can stop in anytime to see trained staff about their mental health care, education, and other VA health care services and benefits.

The VA Nashville Regional Benefit Office also has shown unwavering support of the center, Miller said. Every week, they send staff to the center for VA Wednesdays. Twice a month, a vocational-rehabilitation counselor meets with students in that program. These visits allow students to meet regularly with their counselor and save them a trip to Nashville, where they would have to meet in person at least once annually. A representative from e-Benefits also comes to the Daniels Center twice a month to individually discuss benefits with veterans, helping to determine if there are problems, changes are warranted, or if they can assist with a claim. This one-on-one contact is an amazing entry into the VA, and the students rarely have to wait long to see the representative. “After just a handful of these VA Wednesdays, it was estimated that approximately $175,000 in claims were processed for MTSU veterans,” Miller said. “Working with veterans is complex and requires collaboration. If we are to be successful, we need to leverage each other’s resources. Furthermore, the work we do is too important not to be successful. We owe this level of specialized care to our veterans. We just do.”

**HELPING HANDS**

Miller, who is often asked to share MTSU’s formula for success with the military center with other universities, points quickly to the VA association.

“Two things make us unique: the level of institutional support starting at the president’s level … and the level of VA support,” Miller said.

That support runs deep, as evidenced by the relationships across areas and levels. In addition to MTSU having the first VetSuccess on Campus office in the state of Tennessee (and among the first dozen nationally):
State commissioner Many-Bears Grinder and her Department of Veterans Services staff are frequent visitors on campus. Grinder was the keynote speaker for the Veterans Memorial presentation in Fall 2014, a keynote speaker for the Honors Lecture Series on veterans in Fall 2015, and keynote and recipient of the Trailblazer Award in Spring 2016. The Daniels Center collaborates regularly with Grinder’s office. MTSU was the location of the department’s Veterans Education Academy in March 2017.

On the federal level, Sloan Gibson, former deputy under secretary of Veterans Affairs, attended and spoke at the grand opening of the Veterans and Military Family Center in November 2015. Curtis Coy, VA deputy under secretary for economic opportunity, also visited the center in June 2016.

The Daniels Center enjoys a great relationship with regional VA directors. They attend the center’s programs and have even assisted in some academic programs (making internships possible). Director Jennifer Vedral-Baron spoke as part of an Omicron Delta Kappa and Daniels Center lecture in January 2017.

**Case in Point**

The impact of this partnership is real. Just ask Marine Sgt. Sean Martin.

When Martin started as a freshman at MTSU, he was 26 and had served in the military during 2005–09, part of the time in Iraq training Iraqi police officers.

“It took me years to get into school after I got out,” he said. Once he found MTSU in 2012, he got involved on campus pretty quickly, being elected president of BRAVO, a student-veteran organization. From there, he connected with the University committee working on veterans’ issues.

“That was really good because they hadn’t had a student veteran with a voice on the committee,” he said. “They had ideas. Now they had someone to bounce them off of.”

Then, he accepted an invitation to be part of the Tennessee Veteran Education Task Force, attending meetings for more than a year with a group that provided fresh ideas for helping veterans to none other than Gov. Bill Haslam.

Martin has been impressed with the level of commitment and connection to the VA at MTSU.

“This new step with a social worker counselor in particular is unparalleled,” he said. “And here students have their own clinic.”

Martin’s personal experience—connecting veterans to each other and, importantly, also to the Department of Veterans Affairs—gives center officials confidence that they are making a difference in the lives of student veterans.

Clearly, with the VA’s help, the Daniels Center stands as a beacon not just for incoming veterans, but for other universities as well. ☝
True Blue Traditions
MTSU, now in partnership with the Daniels Center, annually hosts four special events geared towards veterans and student veterans that further emphasize the University’s deep commitment to its military legacy.

Salute to Veterans and Armed Forces Football Game
Since 1982, MTSU has dedicated a football game annually to thank service members in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard for their sacrifices for Americans’ freedom. The Salute to Veterans and Armed Services game activities include a memorial service, picnic, Vet Village, Joe Nunley Award ceremony, children’s toy collection, and halftime parade across Horace Jones Field—all paying tribute to veterans and active-duty personnel.
Soldier Scholar

To highlight the academic focus of the MTSU veterans program, the Daniels Center created initiatives of “MTSU: Home of the Soldier Scholar” and “The Soldier Scholar Resides Here.” A public kickoff of this effort took place at the Blue Raiders’ baseball game against Army Feb. 26, 2016. Salute Saturday home games featured different student veterans with 4.0 GPAs throwing out the ceremonial first pitch. Football picked up the same idea, recognizing veterans with a 4.0 on the Jumbotron.

9/11 Remembrance Memorial

A ceremony is held on campus at the Veterans Memorial each year to commemorate the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Graduating Veterans Stole Ceremony

MTSU began honoring its graduating veterans with a formal Stole Ceremony starting in May 2015. Student veterans receive red stoles to wear during commencement.

Vietnam veterans and lifelong friends, Bob Lamb and Bud Morris, were presented the Dr. Joe Nunley Memorial Award, which recognizes the accomplishments of a man or woman who served with distinction in the military.
We invite those just starting out on their academic journey to visit the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center. Stop by and see us.

And for those that have graduated and gone on to careers, it’s time to come home. Drop in and let’s catch up.

mtsu.edu/arotc1
615-898-2470

Army ROTC is a college elective you take with your other college courses.

ROTC offers you the opportunity to
• learn self-discipline and study skills
• make lifelong relationships
• challenge yourself physically and mentally
• develop confidence to succeed anywhere
The day could’ve been another workday for seven Nashville songwriters and another co-writing assignment in an MTSU Experiential Learning course for seven advanced Commercial Songwriting students. By teaming up with seven midstate military veterans, Oct. 28, 2016 instead became an opportunity for healing. The daylong Operation Song songwriting session at MTSU culminated in new friendships, seven unique songs, and a mini-concert filled with cheers, tears, and standing ovations.

“This was the first time I got a chance to speak to someone who truly listened to me, not trying to ‘fix’ me or trying to know what’s wrong,” said U.S. Marine Corps veteran Juan Davila of Antioch, then a senior Computer Science major at MTSU.

Davila’s story was turned into “True Soldier” after his day with Grammy-winning producer and pedal steel guitarist Steve Fishell, who’s working on his bachelor's degree in
University Studies at MTSU, and Regie Hamm, composer of "I Surrender All" for Clay Crosse.

U.S. Army veteran and musician Ian Wagner of Goodlettsville performs often with Operation Song but never wrote with the volunteers before his MTSU visit.

Admitting that he’s one of the few “to be pinned with a Purple Heart at Arlington National Cemetery and walk away,” Wagner, who served with the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan and Iraq, helped craft “Broken Purple Heart” to honor those beneath the hallowed ground.

He worked with senior Laura Short of Atlanta and Marc Beeson, co-writer of the Blake Shelton hit single “She’s Got a Way with Words,” in an Ezell Hall writing room.

“What an amazing experience this has been,” Beeson said. “At the end of the day, the only one I need to know is happy is the soldier. It’s his story, his truth. We’re just two more instruments in the room.”

Blackmon said the “different components in this project, including service learning, are awesome for my students. Not only are they learning from Hall of Fame songwriters, they’re learning something about people who gave so much to all of us. I’m glad that Operation Song wanted us to be a part of it.”

Students in MTSU’s Master of Fine Arts in Recording Arts and Technologies recorded the performances at day’s end in the Bragg Media and Entertainment Building’s Studio A for CDs for each of the veterans.

Hilary Miller, Daniels Center director, said people kept bringing her CDs that Operation Song had previously produced and saying: “You need to do this!”

“This is such an act of courage by our veterans,” she said.

Operation Song co-founder Bob Regan was “thoroughly impressed” with the partnership project at MTSU: “Is this worth doing again at some point down the road? Well, spread the word and we’ll make it happen!”

Other Operation Song outcomes

Some other songs created from veterans’ experiences at MTSU:

“Ain’t Dead Yet,” an anthem culled from Audio Production major Nick Ferzacca’s years as a master gunner with the Army’s 1st Cavalry Division; created with MTSU senior Abe Jacobyansky, from Freeport, Pennsylvania, and songwriter Roxie Dean, co-writer of Jamie O’Neal’s No. 1 single “When I Think About Angels”

“Get Back to Yourself,” about disorientation on resuming civilian life from then-senior Music Business major and U.S. Navy Seabees veteran Kevin Quarles of La Vergne; a collaboration with senior Lauren Wilson of Bremen, Georgia, and Nashville songwriter George Teren, co-writer of Tim McGraw’s “Real Good Man”

“My Mission is You,” a vow of gratitude by retired U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Darryl Leach, an information technology specialist for the Recording Industry Department; written with Commercial Songwriting major Morgan Redmond of Cleveland and Operation Song co-founder Bob Regan

“Screaming Eagle,” where Antioch resident and 101st veteran Blake Pickel explains how his “life changed in the blink of an eye” during Operation Dragon Strike in Afghanistan; penned with Jaclyn Johannsen, a then-senior from Chattanooga, and Steve Dean, composer of “It Takes a Little Rain” for the Oak Ridge Boys

“Things I Can’t Take Back,” a somber remembrance of a lost U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division comrade from Capt. Shane Smith of MTSU’s Department of Military Science; co-written with freshman Cory Fisher of Nolensville and Operation Song co-founder Don Goodman, who co-wrote “Ol’ Red” for George Jones and Blake Shelton

To hear these and others, visit: soundcloud.com/operationsong-tm
In the fall of 2009, I arrived at MTSU from the Pacific Northwest and took a job teaching in the English Department. I had a long background in creative writing, mainly as a poet, and was eager to engage with the campus community. Teaching at MTSU seemed like a great way to continue my career as an academic and artist, but I also had another agenda: to start a writing program for veterans on campus who had served during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

While I moved to Tennessee from Washington state, I did not grow up on the West Coast. I grew up in rural Southern Illinois. Not only that, but I came of age and started college at precisely the same moment that America started its current foray into the War on Terror. Scholarships and family support pulled me, literally, out of a recruiter’s office, but the majority of my childhood friends enlisted in the military as a roundabout path to a college education. All of them went to war at least once. Some came home. None remained unscathed.

I was driven to start a program that could help veterans develop a sense of themselves after service. As a writer, I know how effective written discourse and workshopping can be for personal development and exploration. I started looking around the country at other writing programs offered to veterans but found that those I could identify were lacking. Most were designed to either advance the career of a single academic facilitator or were overtly political. What I developed as a template that was later modified and improved by the members themselves was an organization singularly designed to put the voices and experiences of its members first, Writer Corps. I feel eternally fortunate for the experiences such engagement has allowed me.
The purpose of Writer Corps is to facilitate a space of normalcy and a sense of community among U.S. military veterans who attend institutions of higher education, as well as any other institutions who serve the needs of veterans. Using the creative writing workshop method, Writer Corps encourages participating veterans to articulate thoughts, feelings, or experiences in writing; craft their stories through collaboration and revision; and to ultimately to share their pieces with the larger on- and off-campus communities through publication in our annual literary online journal, *DMZ: A Journal of Contemporary Literature by Veterans*. Through public readings held throughout the year, Writer Corps spreads awareness to student and civilian populations so they might be more cognizant of the experiences of military and post-military individuals.

Writer Corps does not promote or support any philosophical or political point-of-view. The primary goal of Writer Corps is to assist veterans with their scholarly, personal, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In addition to providing a place where veterans can feel comfortable among their peers, many members of Writer Corps have conveyed how the use of expressive writing helps alleviate some of the affect-effects of combat.

Since Writer Corps’ founding at MTSU, the group has helped with the transitioning of numerous veterans through direct involvement and has influenced many more through the presence of DMZ and a variety of public readings and promotions. Because many veterans have expressed the importance of their involvement with Writer Corps as a key factor in their continued attendance and completion of college, as well as their psychological well-being, Writer Corps hopes to help establish and maintain Writer Corps chapters at other colleges and universities, and with other groups that have a veteran presence. To accomplish this mission, we are prepared to work one-on-one with interested parties to share materials, methodologies, and best practices and to model workshops so that startups may be as fluid as possible.

As most veterans I have known are eager to point out, we work best when we work together. Writer Corps strives to accomplish a joining of veterans to other veterans, along with those directly affected by military service and sacrifice, and to members of the civilian public. We hope you will join and support us in this very important mission.

Matthew Brown is a lecturer in the Department of English at MTSU.

Find more info at writercorps.org
Convocation and graduation are two major events in any student veteran’s life. We’d like to offer these coins to commemorate these steps in your journey.

Let us celebrate the beginning and end of your time at MTSU.
A CENTURY IN THE MAKING
MTSU's volunteer spirit is tangible at the Veterans Memorial outside Tom H. Jackson Building.

by Derek Frisby

MTSU students, faculty, staff, and alumni have served our country with great distinction all over the globe.

Since the ROTC program began in 1950, 17 Blue Raider Battalion alumni have risen to the rank of general, earning MTSU the nickname “the cradle of generals.”
MTSU alumni also have been awarded honors as high as the Navy Cross and Distinguished Service Cross and have served in historic units such as the famed Black Sheep Squadron of WWII, the Marine Raider Battalions, the Eighth Air Force, the 101st Airborne’s Screaming Eagles, the 1st Air Cavalry, and many others.

An MTSU grad and WWII pilot even named his P-38 Lightning aircraft the Blue Raider (funny, isn’t it, that the aircraft type’s nickname was Lightning, which eventually became the name of our University’s winged-horse mascot?).

This tradition of service to the campus, community, and country began shortly after the University opened in 1911. In its more than 106 years of operation, MTSU has had thousands of students serve in the military.

At least 68 of these service members have made the ultimate sacrifice. One of the first MTSU alumni to fall in the line of duty was William J. McConnell, author of the original MTSU alma mater.

In spring 2003, MTSU lost two alumni in the War on Terror, Lt. Pierre Piche and Lt. Ken Ballard. As MTSU mourned these two young men, the campus community also sought ways to commemorate them as well as the other MTSU alums like them who had served our country.

The institution’s rich traditions of service were well-known to those who had attended MTSU over the past century; however, memorials to those who had served were small in scale and scattered throughout the campus. By 2004, a movement to create a new, more ambitious consolidated Veterans Memorial began. The result of this grassroots effort—led by faculty, staff, alumni, and students with a passion for honoring these veterans—was the 2009 completion of the MTSU Veterans Memorial, a special tribute to the MTSU spirit of service.

The MTSU Veterans Memorial recognizes the contributions of those who have served in our nation’s armed forces since 1911. It is located within MTSU’s historic core near Kirksey Old Main, the Tom H. Jackson Building (the original cafeteria), and Rutledge Hall.

The memorial also hosts a variety of events to continue honoring veterans and future military leaders. The MTSU Army ROTC uses the location, weather-permitting, for commissioning new officers in a special ceremony that links the past, present, and future. During the football season, the memorial kicks off the Salute to Veterans and Armed Forces celebration with a special remembrance ceremony, and on 9/11 members of the MTSU community gather there to pay respects to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the Global War on Terrorism.

The MTSU Veterans Memorial continues to evolve as a significant part of MTSU’s cultural landscape. It serves as a focal point for everyone in the MTSU community to contemplate and commemorate the responsibility of service that comes with the privilege of pursuing higher education.

Suffice it to say, the volunteer spirit is tangible at the Veterans Memorial, too. It’s not uncommon to witness new students stopping at the site as they walk to and from classes to discover what it is and soak in its meaning. Many of us veterans who work at MTSU now view it as hallowed ground and our favorite spot on campus. But as Hilary Miller, director of the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center, is quick to point out, the site serves as more than a war memorial. “This is about our students,” she likes to say.

Derek Frisby, assistant professor of military history, is a veteran himself.
About MTSU’s Veterans Memorial
Three granite walls resembling an open book to honor our academic roots compose the memorial’s central feature. The center stone reads, “To those who have fallen who were students first and served their country with honor.” The two walls flanking the center stone have the names of MTSU’s fallen along with the location and date of death engraved on the north side.

On the reverse side, a constellation of stars continues the tradition of placing gold stars for each of the fallen. Also, the words every service member recognizes from their enlistment oath, “To support and defend the Constitution,” reinforces the legacy of service to our country.

In front of the memorial is a small plaza with spaces for anyone to honor a veteran by reserving an engraved brick. The MTSU Alumni Association also has set aside a space to have a brick honoring each of the fallen MTSU alumni in the plaza. The University seal sits atop the plaza near the Jackson Building.

Behind the memorial’s walls, a flagpole with illumination permits an American flag and a MIA/POW flag to wave over this sacred space at all times. Arranged around the flagpole are trees, and markers are dedicated annually to a specific group of MTSU veterans.

An Active Duty
Military culture is written into MTSU’s DNA.

Murfreesboro was built via the Revolutionary War land grants, and when Middle Tennessee State Normal School was established in 1911, battle damage from the Civil War was still visible on local buildings.

The area around the University was used for drilling and training during World War I.

During World War II, school president Q.M. Smith helped the institution recover from the Great Depression by securing valuable training contracts with the military industry. The college’s pilot-training program evolved into its Aerospace program, one of the best in the country. Thanks to Smith’s leadership and these war programs, the school began to take on a new identity. The government funding really boosted its reputation as well as its bottom line. And when the war was over, the people who had worked and trained at MTSU used their GI Bill benefits, and many of them came back to campus.

So many veterans enrolled, in fact, that the college built barracks-style housing on campus for soldiers and their families. Vet Village was long gone by the ’60s, but Vietnam veterans still found a place at MTSU, even as universities across the country were marked by antimilitary sentiment. “The people of this community have always supported the troops,” said Derek Frisby, assistant professor of military history and a veteran himself. “The policies and motivations behind war have been secondary to that.”

Maj. Gen. Max Haston, who was an MTSU student at the end of Vietnam, said that comes with the territory in the Volunteer State, which is 17th in population but has the sixth-largest National Guard and the fourth-most deployments. “We have soldiers and airmen who are deployed five and six times,” he said. “MTSU sits in the cradle of volunteerism. It must be in the water.”

Alongside the plaza are granite planters, each with one of the armed services’ emblems. Benches spaced between these planters allow visitors to sit and reflect on the meaning of service and the memories of our veterans.
Since 1911, Middle Tennessee State University students, faculty, staff, and alumni have served our country with distinction. Members of MTSU’s extended family have joined the military to serve and protect our country, to aid others in crisis, and to spread democracy around the world.

For a $150 contribution, you can honor a veteran or active-duty service member who is important in your life while supporting the overall MTSU effort to remember all veterans who have demonstrated the Blue Raider spirit of service to campus, community, and country.

Visit mtsu.edu/military/memorial/bricks.php or call Hilary Miller, Daniels Center, 615-904-8347