

# 'This Community Has Saved Lives'

## In an ever-growing digital world, veterans have found a way to build camaraderie and connections through gaming

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This past August at the VFW National Convention in Columbus, Ohio, one booth stood out among the rest. Attracting attendees of all ages, Regiment Gaming, the largest veteran gaming community in the U.S., was letting attendees try out the new video game “Gray Zone Warfare” on three gaming personal computers.

The game, which is described as a massively multiplayer online first-person shooter (MMOFPS), requires players to efficiently team-build to succeed at objectives. “Gray Zone Warfare” also features realistic physics with bullet impact, gun mechanics and vehicle handling, among other aspects.

Over the past few decades, gaming has exploded into an industry that is worth hundreds of billions of dollars, with new players joining unique gaming communities each day. Regiment Gaming is just one of the many gaming communities that are exclusive to veterans.

One representative at the Regiment Gaming booth emphasized how gaming can be a way for veterans to “escape,” as well as build connections with each other.

### **VFW AND GAMING**

On July 5, VFW Post 2205 in Denton, Texas, collaborated with Regiment Gaming to host a video game tournament at the Post’s state-of-the-art gaming suite. Excerebus, a veteran-founded, Fort Worth, Texas-based company, sponsored the event.

Participants competed in the popular battle royale game “Call of Duty: Warzone,” with prizes ranging from \$750 for first place to a free year of VFW membership for third place.

This was the first official tournament held in the gaming suite since its opening on April 23 and is indicative of a growing interest in veteran gaming communities — including VFW’s

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own official gaming league, Combat Tested Gaming.

VFW Director of Programs Lynn Rolf pitched the idea for a VFW-centered gaming league six years ago, and his idea was officially green-lighted in 2023. Today, Combat Tested Gaming hosts a Discord server with more than 2,500 veterans participating.

Discord, an instant messaging and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) social platform, allows veterans to easily communicate — over both texts and phone/video calls — with each other, easily connecting each other in multiplayer games and staying on top of Combat Tested Gaming and VFW news through group chats and forums within the server.

On Aug. 12, at the VFW National Convention, Rolf announced to the crowd that over that weekend alone, two veterans claimed that the Combat Tested Gaming community saved their lives.

Seven veterans in total came forward to credit the Combat Tested Gaming community for saving their lives since the league first began.

“You’ve made a difference this weekend,” Rolf told the crowd at the VFW National Convention, in reference to Combat Tested Gaming. “This community has saved lives.”

### **GAMING CAN PROVIDE HEALTH BENEFITS**

Video games have been proven to positively benefit mental health for veterans.

“Gaming helps veterans with ‘socialization,’ one of the Army’s five pillars of resilience,” VFW Post 2205 Commander Tim Middleton said.

For some veterans, getting together with others in person on a regular basis can be challenging for a multitude of reasons. Whether it’s generally not having enough time, challenges relating to injuries sustained in combat or challenges pertaining to mental health, connecting with other veterans can prove difficult.

Gaming can help “fill that gap,” according to Middleton, creating an accessible space for veterans to socialize and reduce feelings of isolation.

Along with feeling a sense of community, gaming can help veterans with substance abuse disorders. By promoting self-growth and camaraderie, video games can help veterans find a deeper sense of purpose that does not involve harmful substances.

Middleton also says virtual reality gaming can help veterans navigate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Excited to continue expanding its gaming community, Post 2205 hosts video game tournaments at its Post every Saturday and hopes to extend competitive, veteran-based gaming to the national level.

On Sept. 9, Combat Tested Gaming began its “Madden ’25” gaming league, with veterans compiling football teams to compete against each other once a week throughout the National Football League season (Sept. 2025-Feb. 2026).

By attracting younger veterans and helping veterans build stronger bonds with each other, gaming has the potential to expand the influence of VFW — to help reach out to veterans who are in need of a connection.

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