

VFW Elects Carol Whitmore as New National Commander

The Iowa native is the first woman elected to lead the 125-year-old organization

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Carol Whitmore of Des Moines, Iowa, was elected today as the new national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), a congressionally chartered veterans service organization comprised of approximately 1 million eligible combat veterans and military service members from all six branches of the armed forces.

“Standing here today, surrounded by such incredible people — fellow veterans, families and friends — I am filled with a deep sense of pride and humility,” said Whitmore during her acceptance speech. “This is not just a recognition of me, but of all the men and women who have served in our armed forces.”

Whitmore’s election as the VFW’s 117th commander-in-chief occurred at the conclusion of the organization’s 126th National Convention in Columbus, Ohio. More than 10,000 members of the VFW and its Auxiliary converged on the city to conduct the business of the organization, recognize individuals and organizations for excellence and to elect new leadership for the 2025 – 2026 year.

Whitmore is the first woman elected to lead the more than 125-year-old organization. She delivered remarks to those attending in person at the Greater Columbus Convention Center and watching via livestreaming video.

“When I think back on my journey, I am sure it was just like many others — my reality is not necessarily the VFW reality,” said Whitmore. “But I was driven by a sense of duty, a desire to serve something greater than myself. And little did I know that decision would shape me in ways I could never have imagined.”

Enlisting in the Women’s Army Corps in 1977, Carol’s 36-year military career was marked by significant milestones, from integrating with men into the regular Army to becoming an

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Army nurse and later serving as a first sergeant for her unit while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was there that she earned her VFW eligibility. In recognition of her service, she received the Legion of Merit Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal (six), Army Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal (two), National Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Non-Commissioned Professional Development Ribbon (three), Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Ribbon (three), Armed Forces Reserve Medal with “M” device and the Combat Action Badge.

“As we look to the future, I believe that the strength of our veteran community is our greatest asset. We have so much to offer,” said Whitmore. “We have lived through adversity, we have faced challenges that many can’t even imagine and we’ve come out on the other side stronger. It’s because of that strength that we are still serving our communities and our nation.”

She joined the VFW in 2012 at Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa, where she maintains her Gold Legacy Life membership. She has served in elected and appointed positions at the Post, District and Department levels, culminating with her election as the VFW Department of Iowa Commander from 2018 to 2019, in which she achieved All-American status. On the national level, she served on the Legislative Committee, the General Resolutions Committee and on the National Council of Administration from 2019 to 2023. In 2022, she was elected as designee for National VFW Commander-in-Chief for the year 2025, becoming the first woman and first Iowan to hold the position. She is also a life member of the Military Order of the Cootie, the VFW National Home, and the American Legion and its Auxiliary.

During the speech, Whitmore emphasized legislative advocacy as a priority for her year, with a focus on fighting to get Congress to grant concurrent receipt for select combat-injured veterans through the Major Richard Star Act.

“Through advocacy, our legislative efforts need to be resolute,” said Whitmore. “The [Major] Richard Star Act must pass this year. This effort was started in 2004, and the bill has repeatedly and shamelessly been voted down. Let’s get this done already. Honor the Contract!”

Whitmore also spoke passionately about the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) mission and the key diplomatic role the VFW played in Southeast Asia during the early 1990s.

“More than 30 years ago, it was VFW Vietnam War veterans who led the mission back to the country that cost them so much to extend a hand of peace to their former adversaries,” said Whitmore. “This tremendously brave effort opened U.S. relations with Vietnam and access to the country so DPAA could find and bring home our comrades who were missing in action.”

In addition to Whitmore, other national officers elected were Cory Geisler, an Iraq War veteran from the Department of Wisconsin, as senior vice commander-in-chief, and Glenn Umberger Jr., from the Department of Pennsylvania, who is also a veteran from Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, as junior vice commander-in-chief. The final day of the convention also saw Adjutant General Dan West and Quartermaster General Marc Garduno reassume their posts.

“I may be the first veteran to have been elected VFW commander-in-chief while wearing a dress ... the first female veteran, but I will not be the last,” said Whitmore. “And as I have said while campaigning, I am your comrade by mud, by blood, by dust, by dirt, by sand, by land, by sea, by air ... I am a veteran first.”

Carol, a retired nurse, attended the University of Northern Iowa and Hawkeye Community College. She and her husband, Brad, reside in Des Moines, Iowa.

[Watch](#) or [read](#) Whitmore’s acceptance speech.