



MECMOAA CHAPTER NEWS



This edition is packed with content, so grab a beverage and get started!

The first half of 2024 brought our Chapter the blessings of new members and continued partnerships. At the same time, we rendered final salutes to long-serving friends. In saying goodbye to those whom we owe much gratitude, we look forward to welcoming new friends who will make untold contributions to the story of the Mountain Empire Chapter. This September, we'll celebrate 45 years of this story and the people who are still writing it. While much has changed across our world, we've steadfastly held the course. In 1979:

- There were 34 charter members. (40 today)
- Executive Board meetings were held every other month, with regular Chapter meetings on the alternate months. (Sound familiar?)
- The name Mountain Empire was chosen to reflect the entire community of members from East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. (Yes, some members drive over from the Old Dominion.)
- The purpose of the Chapter was to provide members with social interaction and information. (Brunch, anyone?)
- Medals were also presented to ETSU ROTC and local high school JROTC members. (Every single year!)

FINAL SALUTES

Mrs. Sandee Woolley
February 4



Until we meet
again...

LT Bill Woods, USNR (Ret.)
March 11



CAPT Clint Smith, USN (Ret.)
March 12



THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS 2024 JROTC & ROTC AWARD RECIPIENTS

Each year, our Chapter presents scholarships and monetary awards to JROTC and ROTC cadets selected by their respective military leaders, using established criteria. JROTC recipients receive \$500, while ROTC recipients receive \$1,000. We continue to be impressed by these talented young men and women pursuing a life of service!



Cadet Lexi Cole, Tennessee High School, receives the MECMOAA Award from our Treasurer, MAJ Brett Monette, USA (Ret.)



Cadet Haley Caviness, East Tennessee State University, receives the Herb Ladley Scholarship



Cadet Timothy Gresham, East Tennessee State University, receives the MECMOAA Scholarship



Cadets with MECMOAA President LCDR John Rice, USNR (Ret.)

For more years than we can count, our Chapter has supported a longstanding MOAA tradition by presenting **MOAA JROTC Awards** to selected cadets at every unit within our area--10 total! Led by LTC Ed Champion, USA (Ret.), the following MECMOAA members carried the torch:

LCDR John Rice, USN (Ret.)	Sullivan East
Col Don Thompson, USAF (Ret.)	Westridge & Tennessee High
MAJ Brett Monette, USA (Ret.)	Greene County
COL Pat Shull, USA (Ret.)	Cherokee & Dobyys-Bennett
LTC Chris Carrier, USA (Ret.)	Volunteer
MAJ Malisa Rader, USAF (Ret.)	David Crockett
LTC Ed Champion, USA (Ret.)	Science Hill & Daniel Boone



Malisa Rader presenting a MOAA JROTC Award at David Crockett High School



Ed Champion also presented the MOAA ROTC Award at ETSU

New Member Spotlights

LTC Emil Kovalchik, USA (Ret.) & Kimberly Kovalchik



Emil and Kimberly Kovalchik moved to Johnson City in June 2023 from Tampa, Florida.

Emil served in the active Army for 20 years, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1999. He earned a commission as a Second Lieutenant through Army ROTC and reported to his first assignment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where his service included deployment for Operation Urgent Fury to Grenada. Other assignments included the 21st Support Command in Kaiserslautern, Germany, and the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Stewart, Georgia, where he fought with the division in Operations Desert Shield/Storm in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Emil then returned to Fort Bragg for an assignment first in the 82nd Airborne Division and then in the 18th Finance Group (Airborne), where he planned and executed the Group's operations in Somalia and Haiti. Finally, he was posted to the Washington, DC area where he served as the Comptroller Assignment Officer in Alexandria, Virginia, and then moved to the Pentagon serving on both the Secretary of the Army Staff and the Army Staff.

Emil is currently the Director of Business Development at American Ordnance, Middletown, Iowa. He has worked the past 25 years in the defense industry with other companies such as General Dynamics, OSRAM Sylvania and Chamberlain Manufacturing. He is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame with a BBA in accountancy. Emil was selected by the Army to attend its Comptrollership Program at Syracuse University, where he earned his MBA.

Emil has been married for 27 years to Kimberly (Archer) Kovalchik, Esq. Kimberly recently retired from the federal government where she first served as Associate Counsel for Ethics and Personnel for the Defense Logistics Agency at Ft. Belvoir, VA,

and then as Senior Attorney- Adjudicator for the US Social Security Administration in Tampa, FL. Kimberly received her BA from Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, PA, and her JD from American University in Washington, DC.

Kimberly and Emil have two adult sons, Nathan and Trevor. Nathan is a graduate of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX, and is a Financial Leadership Development Program Associate at Raytheon/RTX. Trevor is a rising sophomore at Elon University in Elon, NC, where he is studying Political Science with plans to attend law school.



Welcome to MECMOAA, Emil and Kimberly!

Heinrich (Henry) J. Reyes, COL, USA (Ret.)

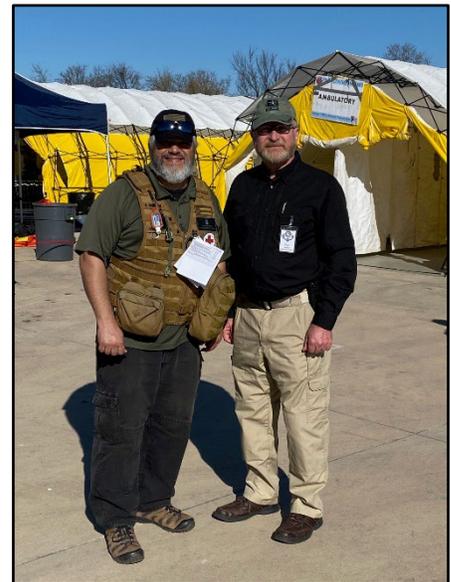


Henry Reyes began his military career in the U. S. Marine Corps in 1973 as a ground radio repairman. Upon completing his MOS training, Henry was assigned to the 2d Tank Battalion at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The M48 tank was being replaced by the M60 tanks and required transitioning communication equipment from the M48s to the M60s. Upon completion of the transition Henry was assigned to the 1st Marine Wing Communication Squadron in Iwakuni, Japan. Several months later the unit transitioned to Camp Zukuran, Okinawa, now known as Camp Foster. His last assignment while on active duty was at Camp Pendleton, California with the 1st Marine Division.

After completing his USMC active-duty tour, he joined the Army National Guard while attending college. Upon graduating from the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree, Henry attended

Officer Candidate School (OCS) and received his commission in 1982 as a Communications (Signal) Officer. He then worked his way through the ranks and retired as a Colonel in 2012. Some of his assignments included Platoon Leader, TAC (Teach, Assess, Counsel) Officer at Officer Candidate School, Company Commander, Public Affairs Officer, S-3 Operations Officer, Battalion Executive Officer, Battalion Commander, Human Resources Officer and Joint Staff (J-6) Communications Officer. He also attended the Army War College (Class of 2004) receiving a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies. In addition, Henry also earned a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

His final National Guard assignment was coming back on active duty at the National Guard Bureau (NGB) Operations (J-3) Joint Staff in Washington DC serving as the Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Division Chief. In this position he was responsible for the National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) Response Enterprise (CRE). The CRE encompassed the manning, training, and equipping of approximately 10,800 personnel with an annual budget of \$325 Million. The CRE is comprised of 57 Civil Support Teams (CSTs), 17 CBRN Enhanced Response Force Packages (CERFPs) and 10 Homeland Response Forces (HRF). Henry retired from the military in 2012 but was asked to stay in his CWMD Division Chief position as a Department of the Army Civilian (GS-15) before retiring in 2021. As CWMD Division Chief, Henry was responsible for the training and evaluation of the National Guard CRE units across the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands. In addition, he developed liaison and training opportunities with numerous CBRN units across the world to include England, Israel, Kosovo, Malaysia, Philippines and Romania to name a few in order to develop good working relationships and joint foreign training experiences for the CRE.



The CRE has been heavily utilized for numerous real world events to include the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster, 9/11 World Trade Center attack, Boston Marathon bombing, Presidential Inaugurations, tornados, hurricanes, bird flu events, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic which involved the testing of over 500,000 samples from the military and civilian population, decontamination of facilities (i.e.: Nursing Homes), medical care at hospitals and care assistance facilities, and assistance in the vaccination process to include setting up COVID-19 testing stations and the actual vaccination process of military and civilian personnel.



Henry also spent 30 years with the Huntsville Police Department (HPD) before retiring as Chief of Police and going back on active duty at the National Guard Bureau. During his HPD career Henry's assignments included SWAT Team Officer, DUI Task Force Commander, Police Academy Director, Special Operations Commander, Deputy Chief and Chief of Police.

During the 9/11 timeframe, Henry was the Special Operations Commander responsible for the Bomb Squad, SWAT Team, K-9, and Traffic Units which were heavily involved in the Anthrax scare responses and responses to hundreds of calls by citizens worried about additional terrorist threats.

Henry was also the Incident Commander during the Eric Rudolph trial in Huntsville who was the Atlanta Olympics and Birmingham Alabama Abortion Clinic bomber. He also served on the Alabama Joint Terrorism Task Force Executive Committee with the FBI, DEA and other major Alabama Police Chiefs and Sheriffs. During his time with HPD, Henry received extensive training in WMD events. His dual military and police career was of great benefit to the National Guard Bureau and the first responder community having served in both arenas.

Henry's military awards include the Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with 2 oak leaf clusters (OLC), Army Commendation Medal with 2 OLCs, Army Achievement Medal with 2 OLCs, Alabama Army National

Guard Distinguished Service Medal, Alabama Commendation Medal and 9/11 Mobilization Service Ribbon.

Henry's Department of the Army Civilian service medals and badges include the Department of the Army Civilian Superior Service Medal, Civilian Commendation Medal, Civilian Achievement Medal, Army Staff ID Badge and the National Guard Bureau Staff ID Badge.

He also received the UAH Alumni of Achievement Award in 2009. The award recognizes graduates who have distinguished themselves professionally and personally and who exemplify the high standards of UAH.

Henry and his wife Annie moved to Kingsport after retiring. Annie is originally from Kingsport. They have one son Scott, grandson Dylan and great-granddaughter Olivia.

What an awesome story--welcome, Henry & Annie!

Chris Hodgin, Lt Col, USAF (Ret.)



Chris served 21 years in the United States Air Force as a Weapons System Officer in the B-1 and a Combat Systems Officer in the U-28.

Chris commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on Maxwell AFB in April 1999, and he went immediately to Specialized Undergraduate Navigation Training on Naval Air Station Pensacola, FL. He selected B-1s out of flight training and spent his first operational tour at Dyess AFB in Abilene, TX.

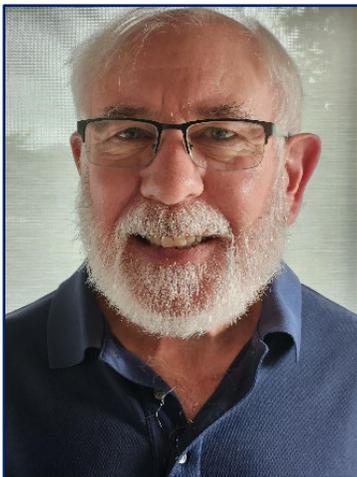
Chris deployed twice with the B-1s before returning to the training command on Naval Air Station, Pensacola, this time as an advanced navigation instructor. He then moved into the Air Force Special Operations world and spent the rest of his career

there. While in AFSOC, Chris flew in the U-28 and deployed several times to various locations around the world. He also served two staff tours: one at Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Hurlburt Field, FL, and the other at Headquarters United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), MacDill AFB, FL. Chris finished his career as a Master Navigator and the Wing Inspector General for Cannon AFB, NM.

Chris is a graduate of The University of Texas – BA 1997, American Military University – MA 2011, and East Tennessee State University – HCMC 2020.

*Chris, it's awesome to have you in MECMOAA,
and we look forward to hearing about some of your experiences!*

Jim Slaight, CDR, USN (Ret.)



Jim was commissioned from the US Naval Academy in 1969 and served on his first ship, USS Van Voorhis (DE-1028), out of Newport Rhode Island, conducting operations in the North Atlantic, Caribbean and Mediterranean oceans. While in the Naval Academy, Jim met his future wife, Mary Jane, and they married in January 1970. Jim's subsequent sea tours included USS Operations Officer, Badger (FF1071), Executive Officer of USS Parsons (DDG-31) and USS (Ramsey FFG-2), and the staff of Commander Carrier Group Eight as Surface Operations Officer. Homeports were Long Beach, Pearl Harbor, San Diego and Norfolk respectively. Operations included East and West Coast, and Hawaii operating areas and operational deployments to the Western Pacific, South Pacific, and Indian Oceans as well as deployments to the Mediterranean Sea and Persian Gulf. Some of the operations included the Taiwan

Straits Patrol, South East Asian Treaty Organization exercises, and Joint and NATO exercises.

While deployed to the Med in 1970, Jim received orders to a combat tour in Vietnam where he served as the PSYOPS Officer to riverine forces in the Mekong Delta at Advanced Tactical Support Base Solid Anchor and later as Base Defense Officer and Political Warfare advisor to the Vietnamese Navy. Jim's oldest son was born while Jim was in Vietnam.

Jim's shore tours included teaching prospective Department Heads at the Navy's Destroyer School, later Surface Warfare Officer School, as the Tactical Warfare Officer course leader, Naval Post Graduate School, where Jim earned an MS in Systems Technology, Joint Command, Control and Communications, and the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OJCS). Following OJCS, Jim was assigned to an exchange tour with the Royal Navy, as the Foreign Navy Communications Officer and British Joint Staff Foreign Navy Communications Policy Officer. Jim was also the Royal Navy's representative to the Allied Naval Communications Agency. Jim and family returned to the US and Washington DC in 1990 where Jim served in the Naval Sea Systems Command as Assistant Director for non-Aegis Command and Control Systems. Jim retired from active service in July, 1992.

After retirement Jim remained in Washington, DC and provided consulting services to various Executive Branch agencies including the DoD, FBI, Interior, and FEMA as well as the Judicial Branch's Administrative Office of the US Courts. Jim retired for the second time in 2015 and Jim and Mary Jane, relocated to Piney Flats on Boone Lake where Jim enjoys everything about Eastern Tennessee.

We're glad to have you aboard, Jim and Mary Jane!

We'll have more new member introductions in the December edition!

2024 Membership Brunch & Meeting Schedule

We meet at Blackthorn Club in The Ridges on a bi-monthly schedule. Cost is \$30 per person at the door.

- You'll receive an email requesting RSVP approximately two weeks prior
- Begin gathering at 1230, with opening remarks at 1300, followed by brunch; *the club requests we do not enter the brunch line early*

Last half of 2024 meetings:

July 21

September 15

November 17 (Annual Business Meeting)

Note: Nametags are funded for members and spouses through membership dues. Once you pay your first-year dues, we'll order you and your spouse a new nametag. *If you haven't received yours, please email us!*

We'll see you at brunch on **July 21!**

In the meanwhile, please consider the following...

Our Board of Directors wants YOU!

As with any organization, our Chapter functions well only if we have an organized group of volunteers working behind the scenes to pull it all together. Every two years, we nominate and elect Chapter officers per our bylaws, and 2024 is one of those years!



The Board of Directors serves as our nominating committee, and our nominating process begins 60 days in advance of the annual meeting on in November. We'll signal the start via email. You may self-nominate or nominate any other member in good standing for ANY position. The nominating committee will notify the Secretary of proposed officers at least 30 days before the annual meeting. Officers will be elected by a membership vote at our annual meeting and installed in their respective positions during the following January meeting.

While all of the current board members enjoy their roles, we simply cannot serve in those positions forever, and we need officers to generate new thoughts. It's also best to prepare our replacements well ahead of a crisis or hurried situation. Even if you don't think you fit into one of the current positions, we'll find a place for you to step in and help!

Here is our current Board of Directors:

President - John Rice

1st Vice President - Don Thompson

Legislative Chair - Don Thompson

Membership Chair - Mark Tipton (also Immediate Past President)

2d Vice President - Stan Gedelman

Webmaster - Stan Gedelman
Secretary - Mary Shaw Van
Treasurer - Brett Monette
Spouse Liaison - Mary Ward
President Emeritus - Jack Woolley

ALL positions except President Emeritus are open for nomination.

The JROTC and ROTC coordinator position is filled by Ed Champion and has not traditionally been an elected position. Further, the 1st Vice President typically assumes the position of President, but this position is still open for other nominations. *If you have ANY interest, just let one of us know, and we'll invite you to the August board meeting, so you can make an informed decision whether to step into one of these roles, or a newly-created one, next year.*

Legislative Update

Don Thompson, Col, USAF (Ret.)



We will be having our MOAA Board of Directors meeting in July 2024, and I expect to discuss more local and regional VA healthcare issues. Please continue to share concerns and needs with me at drdonaldthompson@gmail.com.

REMINDER! Legislative Action Center and Advocacy – The MOAA Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/> is the easiest, most important tool we can use to advocate as a national organization. The top issues at the Legislative Action Center are updated every month or so depending on the current MOAA areas of focus. Right now they are:

- 1) Supporting Comprehensive VA Health Care, and
- 2) Supporting Military Family Access to Children's Hospitals.

Please go to the website, sign up, and click the buttons to the right to see draft letters on each issue with prepopulated emails for Senators Blackburn and Haggerty and Representative Harshbarger. You can edit the letter if you want to make it more personal. Trust me, our representative and senators pay attention to letters that come in this way. I was chatting with Representative Harshbarger a couple weeks ago, and she asked me about the support that MOAA was getting from the Tennessee House delegation. We are more effective with more numbers, so PLEASE sign up!

Revitalization of East Tennessee MOAA Chapter in Knoxville – The Knoxville chapter of MOAA has essentially died. The Tennessee Council of Chapters has identified this problem in the past few years, and only now are there aggressive efforts underway to revitalize the Chapter. This is a no-brainer to those of us in Northeast Tennessee, as we are a small chapter with only a few ROTC sites nearby and only a few hundred or so national MOAA members who are not members of the Mountain Empire Chapter of MOAA. While we are growing, thanks to aggressive outreach by our own membership, Knoxville has a state University of some size, both Army and Air Force ROTC programs, a good University football team, and several hundred national MOAA members.

We MUST help get a robust East Tennessee chapter of MOAA get resuscitated! A planning reception is under consideration for September 2024 or so, with a goal of identifying 5-7 national MOAA members in the Knoxville area who are willing to step up and get the Chapter going. Several of us from MECMOAA have committed to making the two-hour drive and helping to encourage the nascent chapter and get it going, along with Pete Warner, the President of the Tennessee Council of Chapters. If you would like to be on the short list to help, please let me know at drdonaldthompson@gmail.com. If you know of national MOAA members in the

Knoxville area who could potentially join, let both them and me know. If you know of folks in the Knoxville area who should be members of national MOAA and are not, by all means, let them know and encourage them to join! Thanks!

As organizations exempt from federal taxation under Sec. 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code, MOAA and its affiliates must take care to avoid engaging in partisan political activities. Under IRS rules, we are prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

Are you a MOAA National Member?

If not, why? As John Rice says, "The magazine alone is worth the cost of membership."

Just **click the following link** to see MOAA membership options, from Basic (free) to Lifetime:

[Join MOAA](#)

Did you also know that MOAA Vacations plans and executes **world-class vacations** across the globe and can customize a trip for small groups?



Go to <https://www.moaa.org/content/benefits-and-discounts/exclusive-discounts/travel/moaa-vacations/> or scan the QR code to learn more!

A group of lucky members and guests are wrapping up a Paris & Normandy excursion in conjunction with the 80th anniversary of D-Day!

We hope you enjoyed this newsletter.

Please send any comments or suggestions to mecmoaa@gmail.com.

Never Stop Serving.

Mountain Empire Chapter (MECMOAA) is an affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America

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Facebook: [MECMOAA on Facebook](#)