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Navy E-5 commander of Hickam VFW commemorates his military legacy

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Carolyn Viss

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Hanging out with veterans who are 40 to 60 years older than he is the most rewarding thing Damage Controlman 2nd Class Kenneth B. Wiseman III can think of doing.

He spends 10 to 15 days out of the month going to meetings, recruiting and working special events on top of his full-time job as a damage controlman at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

At the age of 26, he's the youngest commander of any VFW post – and, his birthday marks the most significant day in military history for Hawaii: Dec. 7.

"I come from a long family tradition of military service," said the young Sailor, who spent Veterans Day weekend this year conducting commemorative services with his 'boys' at Hickam, Kaneohe and the WWII and Korean/Vietnam War Memorial downtown. Three of his four grandparents, including his paternal grandmother, served in World War II and the Korean War.

The way Wiseman decided to both commemorate his military legacy and preserve his own future entitlements as a veteran was to join the Horace Hickam VFW Post a year and a half ago, when he became stationed at Pearl Harbor. Soon after he joined the post, the young firefighter decided to take it a step further and become the leader of the men and women of post 970.

"Even though I'm young, I have experience as a vet," Wiseman said. He served two six-month deployments on the U.S.S. Samuel B. Roberts during the drug wars, one of which, to Colombia in 2009, earned him the right to be a VFW member. "I wanted to not only honor those who have served, but also serve my community," he explained.

The hard-working college student has little time for much else, since his job as an E-5 in the Navy requires more than the ordinary 9 to 5 job. But the camaraderie and fraternal nature of the VFW draws him to stay as a "lifetime member."

Chartered on the former Hickam AFB in 1980, this post is the most active of the 21 VFW posts in the state of Hawaii, according to the organization's web-site. Seventy percent of its membership consists of Air Force veterans, and the post itself was named for an Airman.

“It’s important to me to remember the contributions of those who have served our country,” Wiseman said. “Our focus is on doing a lot for veterans, especially the older ones who are no longer able to do some things for themselves, but it’s about more than just sitting around drinking beer and telling seafaring stories. I know one day I’ll be retired and I’ll need all these benefits we’re [lobbying] for right now.”

Along with trying to get funding to help victims of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries; trying to get more benefits for female veterans; and campaigning against suicide among veterans, Ken and ‘his boys’ are trying to garner interest in a national “Unknown Soldiers Day” – something similar to Veterans Day and POW/MIA Day that will honor those buried in unknown tombs.

“The hardest part of being the commander of a VFW is trying to find the balance between what you want to get done and what you can get done,” he said.

So last weekend, they handed out poppies at the commissary and placed flags on unknown tombs at the Punchbowl in Waikiki. That, he said, was “some-thing he could do.”

For more information on how to become a member of the VFW, visit www.vfwhawaii.org or e-mail membership_p00970@vfwhawaii.org
