

**NINA MOINI:** The Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum is partnering with Lakeland PBS and Pioneer PBS to bring a Veterans Day Film Festival across the state today. Audiences in Mankato, Stillwater, and Little Falls can see three films about three different Minnesota veteran experiences. Randal Dietrich is the executive director of the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum in Little Falls. Right now, he's calling in from the official State of Minnesota Veterans Day Ceremony in Mankato. Randal, thanks for taking time to be with us this afternoon. Really appreciate it.

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** No, I appreciate the chance to speak to you. Thanks so much. It's a lovely sunny day here in Mankato.

**NINA MOINI:** Oh, that's wonderful. And what a lovely idea to have this special Veterans Day Film Festival. I understand it's the second year. How did this get started?

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** Sure. It got started when our museum has been partnering with PBS stations around the state of Minnesota to get at some of the things that we were just hearing Billie DeFoe talk about. Billie DeFoe is a board member of our museum. And as we were interviewing veterans as part of our museum experience at Camp Ripley, where we've been for almost five decades, we can't help but appreciate the fact that PBS stations, and others like MPR, are doing your own interviews and stories as well.

So the chance to collaborate, in this case with two PBS stations in Bemidji and Granite Falls respectively, and develop programming with them over the course of a year, and then be able to broadcast those on their stations, and then go to locations on Veterans Day and share those documentaries in person, seemed like something we needed to do. With limited resources, sometimes, and the importance of veterans' stories, working together is essential.

**NINA MOINI:** Absolutely. And I want to talk just briefly, if you would, about the three short films. You don't have to do the whole summary of the movie, but just give people a little taste. So one is called *Frozen in Time-- Vietnam*. What is that one about?

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** Yeah. Gary Bipes, a Vietnam veteran and photographer, saw so much during his service in Vietnam, of course, and brought those photographs back with him. And his motivation after his service for the last decades, of course, has been to get these photographs in the hands of other people and make sure that they understand his story from Vietnam, and more importantly, the stories of those he was photographing. So his passion, post his Vietnam service, to make sure that we all have access to these pictures that do speak a thousand words. And so his passion about getting his photographs that he took out and shared with Minnesotans across the state.

**NINA MOINI:** Wow, that's beautiful. And so another one is *Greater Good-- Mission of a Minnesota Family*. And tell us a little bit about that one, if you would.

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** Sure. Boy, there couldn't be a more interesting Minnesota family than Bud and Paul Nakasone from White Bear Lake. Bud, of course, has told his story several places over the many, many years, a former educator himself. But he was living with his family at Pearl Harbor the morning of December 7, 1941 and as a teenager, having breakfast on that Sunday, watches the Japanese airplanes fly over and attack Pearl Harbor. But he is with his family living at Pearl Harbor at the time.

He grows up during the war and ends up serving in the United States Army as a colonel, and is in occupation duty in Japan just after the war ends, does his training here at Fort Snelling. And then his service is passed on to his son Paul, who just retired two years ago as a four-star general in the United States Army, rising to the rank of general and head of United States Cyber Command, and director of the National Security Agency.

And much like Bud was at Pearl Harbor in 1941, Paul remarkably finds himself in the Pentagon the morning of 9/11 on 2001. So within a generation you have somebody, a family, a father that witnessed the attack on Pearl Harbor, a son that witnessed the attack at the Pentagon on 9/11, and just this amazing legacy that they have.

And the encouragement in the documentary that Paul and Bud both make is national service, a calling to serve in some capacity, whether that's the military or the diplomatic corps or the Peace Corps or as a first responder. But both advocates for folks serving in some capacity to make it a better state and better nation.

**NINA MOINI:** Mm. As I'm listening to you I'm thinking I'm just so glad that people's stories are able to live on in this way, in film and through video and through photos and just through conversation. It's just such a great service that you're providing, again. Tell me really quick, if you would, about the last film as well, *General John Vessey-- Cold War Soldier and Statesman*.

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** Yeah, thank you. John Vessey, 46-year military career, World War II veteran, lied about his age to join up after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Went on to serve a Vietnam veteran as well. Rises to the rank of four-star again, is actually chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for President Ronald Reagan at the height of the Cold War. But after his service then is asked by administrations, both Democrats and Republican presidents, asking him to serve on many international initiatives post his military service, including the creation of the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC.

And he passed away a number of years ago and is buried at Camp Ripley at the Veterans Cemetery, and our new museum, going up and to open next year, is right across the street from his gravesite. So a remarkable man and a remarkable family.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned that because I wanted to make sure to touch on, you've expanded this festival this year. You're in the three locations. You're obviously in Mankato right now, but tell us a little bit about just what is next for the museum and what you're doing to, not only today, but every day, make sure that stories are living on.

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** Yeah. So right, our museum does this every day of the year, to document these stories, and we've had a museum on post at Camp Ripley just north of Little Falls since 1976. We are finally in the final phases of construction for a new 40,000-square-foot building just off of Highway 371 between Little Falls and Brainerd, right on the highway, that will be dedicated to men and women who have served the state and the nation and will open next summer.

**NINA MOINI:** Wow, amazing. Congratulations on that. And I do also, Randal, just want to make sure, can you give the details of how folks can still go out and enjoy these films? Is it all sold out? I know it's free.

**RANDAL DIETRICH:** Yeah. Right now, I stepped outside of our Mankato screening, so they're happening as we speak. But for sure, folks can find those films via the Lakeland PBS and Pioneer PBS websites, and we'll be adding it to our website as well moving forward. So a tip of the iceberg. There's so many more stories to tell, documentaries available. We'll do more screenings at more locations next year and would welcome folks to come and see the new Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley in the summer of 2026.

**NINA MOINI:** All right, Randal, thank you so much for your time today. Really appreciate it.

**RANDAL** Oh, thank you. Have a great day. Have a good Veterans Day.

**DIETRICH:**

**NINA MOINI:** You too. That was Randal Dietrich, the executive director of the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum, joining us today. So grateful for his time, and for all of our veterans.