

TIMES OF WAYNE COUNTY

ONE ON ONE

Jerry Slater Jr.

Director of Williamson American Legion Riders (Post 394) and Veteran Brotherhood Association, and a Harley Rider

By Patti Holdraker
Times Writer

Where did you grow up?

I am from Sodus, and grew up there. I was adopted when I was just a year old, and grew up with a brother who they also adopted. My parents were Jerry Slater Sr. and Grace Slater.

Dad was an Industrial Arts teacher at Wayne Central. He taught me about building and construction. I help put in a foundation on a house when I was a teenager. My mom was a Nurse, working originally at the old Sodus Hospital and then at Myers Community Hospital.

Did you graduate from Sodus High School?

Actually, I did not. I have a fairly high IQ and I was bored in high school, so I decided to go down to Pennsylvania and take their GED course at 16. When I passed that, and had my certificate, I went back to New York and back to my high school for a while. They were not aware that I had already earned my degree.

I worked for a while at Paton's Supermarket in Sodus when I was 16.

At age 17, I began my career with the military. My Dad had served in the Army at Fort Myers, VA, Alpha Company. He served during Korea, out of Fort Dix. My uncle also served in submarine duty. I wanted a trade skill also, and because I had been in the AV Club and helped start the first FM radio station at Sodus High School, I chose Engineering as my Army MOS (Military Occupational Skill).

I am a Cold War veteran, and I served in the Army at home with the Corps of Engineer units and then later I was called back up and served in Iraq.

Give me a timeline of your military deployments and stations.

I went in the Army in 1979 and from 1979 to 1981 I was stationed at Fort Campbell Kentucky with the 101st Airborne. Then from 1981 to 1983, I was stationed in Germany at Hielbronn in the 237 Engineering Battalion.

I served with the 39th Engineering



Battalion in Fort Devens, Massachusetts from 1983-1985. During that time I was sent to Virginia for training. I remember stopping in Arlington to visit President Kennedy's tomb and met and talked with a very nice lady there. I learned later, I had been speaking with Jackie Kennedy.

I headed to the Seneca Army Depot in Seneca Falls, in Operations and Training from 1985 to 1987.

From 1987-1989, I was back at Fort Devens with the 39th Engineering Battalion, and from 1989-1993, I was with the 756 Engineering Battalion at Fort Devens.

From 1993 until I retired in 2001 from the Army Reserves, I was part of the 2/310 Engineering team in the 78th Division at Devens, as Observer/Controller/Validator.

With enough years of service in (over 20), I chose to retire from the Army Reserves.

Sometime in 2005, I was visited at my work (I owned a logging company), by a recruit that I had known. I asked what he was doing there, and he said, the Army was calling me back up. He said I had a choice of going where they sent me or "volunteering" and choosing my battalion. I went to the 479th Engineering Battalion, where I worked a rock quarry for road work jobs. I was sent to Fort Drum, then California and then back to New York, where I was later deployed to Iraq. I received the Bronze Star in Iraq for heroic service.

I am an "8-rower," with these medals: 7 Army Achievement medals, 8

Good Conduct medals, 1 meritorious Service Award and the Bronze Star.

It is interesting to note that I was an 80% disabled veteran when I was called back up in 2005. I had metal plates in my head, I am blind in one eye, and part of my brain is missing. I was sent for my physical before deploying to Iraq, and the doctor was going to hold me back because he said I had a cavity!

I reminded him of my disabilities - and he kept saying..."We waived that...We waived that..." But, they were going to hold me back because I had a cavity? The doctor backed off.

One time in Iraq, the roads became impassible. I decided to grab a dozer and "pave" the way for the humvees and tanks, so they could continue. I remember telling them, that if I hit an IED, they could use the dozer to fill in the hole, and continue.

I returned to Fort Drum in 2008 and was finally released from duty in 2010. I received my orders of retirement in 2012.

I know that you are very involved in Veterans volunteer work through the Williamson American Legion and the American Legion Riders. Tell me about what you do.

There are so many veterans out there, who are struggling - even some without food or housing.

I joined the Williamson Riders about 10 years ago. We started a "Food Box" program to help veterans in dire need. The statistics are, that with a below poverty level person makes \$1200 a month, many of the veterans we serve were trying to survive on just \$500/month.

Our group is non-profit, and the only organization in Wayne County which targets our local veterans and their families. 100% of our donations go to help less fortunate vets.

Our fundraisers help us to serve the food and housing needs, and also help the Family with Special Needs program and our Emergency relief programs we can offer some financial help on an as needed basis throughout the year. The Food Box program (averaging 29-34 boxes per delivery) are delivered to veterans in need, four times a year (Easter, 4th of July, thanksgiving and Christmas). This program has been active for over eight years.

I work with Jason at the Wayne County Veterans Department in Lyons and often we work with the Veterans Outreach program, when we do not have the funds needed to help every case.

Suicide prevention is a big part of what we try to assist with. I have personally taken some PTSD vets to counseling and the Canandaigua VA Hospital.

I speak to many groups on Veteran

subjects - from community service groups to schools and clubs.

We are always seeking funds to keep going. We are listed on the Wayne County Veterans Service recommended list of organizations to donate to. You can come to any of our events, or call the Wayne County VA at (315) 946-5993.

Recently, we have connected with the Ontario Rod and Gun Club, who have made our mission - there mission!

Last week, The Ontario Rod and Gun Club presented the Legion Riders with a check for \$12,000 for our outreach programs for Veterans.

Are you married with children?

I married to my wife Kelly in 1987, after we met at Fort Devens. She worked for the Red Cross as a civilian. She had attended school in Williamson. We have two children, Joseph who is 30 and is a foreman with an Electronics company, and Kristen who is 29 and is a professional college student. Even in my time in the Reserves, I was gone a lot, and my marriage suffered from that. We are no longer married.

In my community service work, I am a member of the Williamson American Legion Post 394, the Legion Riders, the VFW in Wolcott, and I have served as a Scoutmaster for a Webelos troop when my son was young.

What kind of motorcycle do you currently ride?

I have a Complete Custom Military Commemorative Harley and an Ultra Classic Harley. (Currently in the shop after an accident). I bought my first Harley in 1982 in Germany and have always had only Harleys.

Who has been influential in your life?

My Dad was a big influence with his military background. He was proud of his service and mine, and he taught me the carpentry skills I have.

Scott Frey was my 1st Platoon Sergeant at Fort Campbell. He taught me the skills I would need to survive. He was a Vietnam Vet in his 40s at the time I arrived for Basic Training.

I am also very influenced by General George Paton and his philosophies.

Why would you encourage young veterans to join the American Legion or VFW?

It is all about support of veterans and getting the support you need - and the camaraderie is the best you will ever see.

What, to you, is the meaning or purpose of life?

I live by the motto: "I want to be an Asset not a Burden." I live my life that way.

It is about helping others and carrying yourself through life, not relying on others.