

# FRONTLINE

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE FINEST!

No. 4

## THIS ISSUE:

- ❖ **SPECIAL:** New Commanding Officer Elected!
- ❖ Building a Full-Scale COBRA A.S.P.!
- ❖ \$27,330 Raised in 2018!
- ❖ Life with a Service Dog
- ❖ A Visit to Farpoint Toys!

January 2019

PUBLISHED BY THE

**FINEST**  
A G.I. JOE COSTUME CLUB



# WELCOME TO *FRONTLINE*

**Produced every now and then by our Public Relations Office and approved by the Command Staff, the goal of Frontline is to keep you informed of all things Finest as we continue world domination! You'll find breaking news, club activities, upcoming events, resources for current and aspiring members, as well as tips and facts. Occasionally, you might even find yourself entertained!**

Happy New Year! We're starting 2019 off with a PACKED issue of Frontline!

Election results are in, and by a difference of only EIGHT votes, the Finest has a new Commanding Officer! Never think that your vote doesn't count!

Congratulations to Missouri member Alex T. on his election as the new CO of the Finest! Alex has served as Executive Officer (XO) since June 2016, so he is no stranger to the ins and outs of Command Staff! His two-year term of office started on January 1, 2019, and we wish Alex and his new administration all the best! We also congratulate Indiana member Ryan B. on running an outstanding race! If you read both candidates' Q&A responses during the election, you'll have no doubts on Ryan's vision and passion for this club, and we thank him for all his contributions to the Central Defense garrison and to the Finest!

As Joe fans, at some point we all ask ourselves, "How can I build a full-scale Cobra A.S.P. in my garage?" Well, we have the answer for you in this issue, courtesy of Michigan member Eric W., and it is a sight to behold!

How much do you *really* know about service animals? Pennsylvania member and U.S. Army veteran Allen B. gives us some insight into living life with a service dog!

If you're passing through South Jersey, you owe it to yourself to visit Farpoint Toys & Collectibles. Co-owned by Finest member Penelope D., Farpoint has all your favorite vintage toys, as well as an awesome memorial to a Finest member and friend that we lost along the way. Check out this touching tribute, as well as a Cosplay Origin Story by author James Hannon!

Frontline is constantly looking for ideas and content! If you'd like to submit a write-up for publication, whether it's a multi-page feature article or just a few sentences re-capping your latest costume build, drop us a line!

Public Relations Officer

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Allen B.  
Penelope D.  
James H.  
Amy L.  
Alex T.  
Eric W.  
Garrison COs and Squad Leaders

#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Johnny K. (Public Relations Officer)

#### PHOTOGRAPHERS

Action Figure Junkies  
Bestow TV  
Jason Colflesh  
Jeremy Ellsworth  
Rick Strange  
ZanyGeek

#### CONTACT INFO

FinestPublicRelations@gmail.com

#### WEB

[www.TheFinestCC.com](http://www.TheFinestCC.com)  
[@TheFinestCC](https://www.facebook.com/thefinestcc)  
[www.facebook.com/thefinestcc](http://www.facebook.com/thefinestcc)

## ON THE COVER

**COSTUMER:** New Commanding Officer of the Finest, Alex T.

**PHOTO:** Jeremy Ellsworth Photography



With your help, the Finest raised **\$27,330** in 2018. All proceeds will be donated to K9s For Warriors! Thank YOU for helping us give back!

2014:	\$ 10,250 raised	(proceeds donated to Wounded Warrior Project)
2015:	\$ 9,550 raised	(proceeds donated to the USO)
2016:	\$ 11,583 raised	(proceeds donated to K9s For Warriors)
2017:	\$ 16,665 raised	(proceeds donated to K9s For Warriors)
2018:	\$ 27,330 raised	(proceeds to be donated to K9s For Warriors)

CLUB TOTAL: \$75,378

[www.TheFinestCC.com](http://www.TheFinestCC.com)



**A new record is born! All proceeds benefit K9s For Warriors!**

The numbers are in and, in terms of fundraising for military and veteran charity organizations, 2018 was officially our best year ever!

By exhibiting at more than 100 events worldwide, having more squads and garrisons on the move than ever before, absolutely CRUSHING the final JoeCon, and closing down the year with our online campaign, in 2018, the Finest raised a record-smashing **\$27,330!**

In what will be the single largest check our club has ever written, all proceeds will be donated to K9s For Warriors, America's largest provider of service dogs to veterans suffering from PTSD and other trauma.

A huge THANKS to our fans, friends, and the tireless work of our members for helping us use our love of the G.I. Joe franchise to give something back to veterans in need. We can't do it without you!

**YO JOE!  
Today, tomorrow, and forever!**



# COMMANDER'S CORNER

## ***A note from the newly-elected Commanding Officer of the Finest, Missouri member Alex T.!***

I'm Alex and I was honored to be elected the new Commanding Officer (CO) of the Finest in November. I want to start by saying thank you to our outgoing CO, Joe Colton. The Finest had an incredible four years under her tenure as CO and her dedication to the Finest is a key element of our current success.

For those who don't know me, here's a little bit of info. I love BBQ, books, G.I. Joe and almost anything sci-fi. My first costume was Cobra Commander from the short-lived *G.I. Joe Reloaded* comic. My favorite G.I. Joe character is Mercer. I have nine distinct G.I. Joe costumes at the moment (eleven counting variants).

I've been a member of the Finest since March 2015 and have been a part of Command Staff for most of that time. During those years, I worked on four charity campaigns as well as all three series of Finest trading cards (Series 4 will be coming out in 2019).



My three goals for this club are for us to have fun, grow, and make an impact.

As you know, 2018 was an outstanding year for our club. Our members attended well over 100 events, new friends were made, and countless photos were taken. Our ranks grew as 36 new members joined (roughly one new member every 10 days). We raised a record-breaking \$27,330 with all proceeds for K9s For Warriors. Additionally, I want to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of Ryan B., Dan N., and members of our Central Defense garrison who raised a staggering \$13,226! I love the initiative and dedication that y'all bring to the club. Truly fantastic job and well done!

I'm going to do everything I can to ensure that 2019 is just as successful as 2018. In order to do that, I need help from all our members! Y'all are the lifeblood of the Finest and our overall success is bound to your effort and enthusiasm! I want to encourage everyone to get involved and I'm making it my priority in 2019 to create opportunities for folks to be involved, as well as to improve how we communicate those opportunities.

Here are a few of my top priorities in the first few months (all of which are in progress as of today):

- A modernized Forum solution to replace our currently outmoded Forums
- A revamp of our website ( [www.thefinestcc.com](http://www.thefinestcc.com) )
- A published list of upcoming events for the Finest in 2019

For questions, comments or concerns, I can be reached at [thefinestcommandingofficer@gmail.com](mailto:thefinestcommandingofficer@gmail.com).

# AROUND THE HORN

Our Squads and Garrisons are always on the move!  
Here are the latest reports from the field!

## COMMAND STAFF

With the new Commanding Officer beginning his term in January, 2019 brings several changes to the Command Staff of the Finest:

- ❖ Commanding Officer - Alex T.
- ❖ Executive Officer - Maggie C.
- ❖ Membership Liaison Officer - Candice D.
- ❖ Communications Officer/Webmaster - (VACANT – if interested, please contact CO Alex T.)
- ❖ Quartermaster - Keith M.
- ❖ Public Relations Officer - Johnny K.
- ❖ Forums Admin - Matt F.

Effective immediately, Clyde L. will be stepping down as garrison CO of the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Defense (NY, NJ, PA) with Ray E. assuming command.

### **GARRISONS:**

13th Civil Defense (PA/NY/NJ)  
CO: Ray E.

234th Tigerhawks (MO/KS)  
CO: Chris R.

31st Carrier Assault Brigade (NC/SC)  
CO: Justin S.

602nd Desert Corps (AZ)  
CO: Lee K.

Action Force 44 (Ireland/United Kingdom)  
CO: William R.

Capital Defense Regiment (MD/DC/VA/DE/WV) -  
CO: William J.

Central Defense: The Fighting 5th (IL/IN/OH/MI)  
CO: Ryan B.

Southern Command (GA)  
CO: Rebecca H.

Task Force 27 (FL)  
CO: Edwin S.

### **SQUADS:**

45th Mountain Armory (Utah)  
Squad Leader: Shane E.

Revolutionary Guard (New England)  
Squad Leader: John B.

Volunteer Assault Force (Tennessee)  
Squad Leader: Keith D.

## 13th CIVIL DEFENSE (NY, NJ, PA)

On January 10, 2019, 13<sup>th</sup> members were invited to bring their costumes to 80's Pop Culture Night with the NJ Devils at the Prudential Center, where they posed for photos with fans of both the Jersey Devils and G.I. Joe.

We also begin 2019 offering thanks to Clyde L. of PA, the outgoing Commanding Officer of the 13th.

Clyde headed the garrison since its formation in 2013, and he was instrumental in recruiting, encouraging, and inspiring many new members of the garrison during his tenure. Although he will be enjoying a well-earned retirement from his duties as CO of the 13th, Clyde still plans to be an active part of the club and will be coordinating his own convention with PA Pop-Con 2.0 on Saturday, March 30 at the Holiday Inn Morgantown in PA. For more details, visit PA Pop Con on Facebook.

Members of the 13th will be in attendance at several conventions and events in 2019, including:

Jan 27	Gotta Have It! Collector Show, Essington, PA
March 30	PA Pop Con, Morgantown, PA
April 12-14	The Great Philadelphia Comic Con, Oaks, PA
April 27	Camden Comic Con, Camden, NJ
May 24-26	Thy Geekdom Con, Oaks, PA
June 13-16	Wizard World Comic Con, Philadelphia, PA
June 29-30	Garden State Comic Fest. Morristown, NJ
Aug. 23-25	Keystone Comic Con, Philadelphia, PA
Sept. 14-15	Retro Con, Oaks, PA
Oct. 3-6	New York Comic Con, New York, NY

Be sure to look for the 13th at these events for new Finest merchandise, new character trading cards, and all-new custom G.I. Joe costumes.

For information on any additional conventions and other upcoming events, visit the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Defense on [Facebook!](#)



## 234th TIGERHAWKS (KS/MO)

The 234th Tigerhawk garrison began planning months ago for the 2019 Planet Comicon event in Kansas City and we have a great plan coming together. Planet Comicon Kansas City is the region's largest pop culture festival and is celebrating their 20th Anniversary. Taking place at Bartle Hall in downtown Kansas City on March 29-31, 2019, the event will pack this large convention center with celebrities, comic artists, collectibles, and cosplayers, all coming from and enjoying a full variety of pop-culture, sci-fi, cartoon and comic fandoms.

For the fifth year, members of the Finest will have a display at the event, and we encourage other members to come and join us. Fans of G.I. Joe should be sure to come by and see our display, take pictures with our Joe-universe costumed, talk G.I. Joe, and help us support K9s For Warriors through donations at the display. The Tigerhawks will have the usual large display of life-size props that is slightly different each year, with a variety of costumes. Come help us keep G.I. Joe alive and in the minds of children (young and old) with an average of 60,000 people coming through this convention over the three-day weekend!



## 31st CARRIER ASSAULT BRIGADE (NC/SC)

We have a date for the 5<sup>th</sup> annual OPERATION YORKTOWN! "Operation Yorktown V" will take place on **Friday, April 5, 2019** at the Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum near Charleston, SC!

Since 2015, Finest members and other G.I. Joe costumers have taken part in this epic one-day photoshoot on board the USS YORKTOWN and surrounding areas! Our 2019 photoshoot will be on April 5<sup>th</sup>, and as always, is open to the public (museum entrance fees apply)! This annual shoot always results in thousands of amazing photos of our members and friends, so don't miss out on the action! See you in Charleston!



## CENTRAL DEFENSE: THE FIGHTING 5th (IL/IN/OH/MI)

Central Defense enters 2019 buoyed by success, motivated by progress, and excited at the opportunity for more. There is a great deal of happiness and fond memories to recall from these last twelve months and, if the past year is any indication of the future, our garrison has much to look forward to experiencing this year. With new shows, new plans, and new leadership, there will be a chance for exciting changes and new ideas to be brought to fruition. The promise of the new year has its roots in the success of the last and we look now to grow from its foundation.

Our costumes, props, and materials have brought great joy to many. Whether it was the discerning eye of the collector who was shocked at seeing their favorite toy brought to life at full scale or the amazed expression of a child understanding for the first time just how cool G.I. Joe really is, we have run the gamut of reactions to know this with certainty. You would be forgiven if you mistakenly thought the area around our members was a battlefield from the classic cartoon, because the amount of "Hail Cobras" and "Yo Joes" could have easily fooled you. The amount of people who would stop dead in their tracks when they saw us, bee-lined to our side, and then told us that we were the



best booth there was flooring. The number of memories and recollections that we inspired of years of happiness and joy playing, watching, and reading G.I. Joe made apparent just how important this hobby was and continues to be in many lives. It is all those moments and more that promise even more wonderful interactions this year.



The member ranks of our garrison have grown and we remain ready to help bring more people into the fold. In a fandom which is so often characterized as being a product of decades past, we are committed to adding new and colourful content to the community. If 2019 is to be a year where we open ourselves to bringing in even more wonderful people to our hobby, than it will be a very good year indeed. For those wishing they could see more G.I. Joe at comic conventions, just stop by our booths and see. For those lamenting they want to do their own costume but do not know where to start, talk to our

members and let us try to help. For those unsure if costuming is something they might enjoy, look at our photos and know you can experience the same fun, too. There is much to be said for trying it for yourself and we want to help make it happen.

The charitable efforts of the Central Defense garrison have simultaneously been ambitious and over-performing, a point of pride that has helped the Finest reach an incredible new height in terms of our fundraising. We are ecstatic for another year of helping the amazing cause and program of K9s For Warriors. Interacting with the public on their behalf and spreading the word of the benefit of service animals in the lives of our veterans has been a rewarding and humbling experience. At show after show, table after table, the amount of appreciation and support we have received, the emotions and commitments of people wanting to help, has proven over and over the goodness of those we interact with. There can be no understating the generosity of those who would donate some of their time and enjoyment for a cause higher than themselves, benefitting those who need it the most. We can hardly wait to start helping them again.

Our friendliness and openness to our fans and supporters, our care and support of our members, and our dedication and devotion to a worthy charitable cause have made the past year something truly special and it is with great hope and ambition that we seek to carry it forward into 2019 and beyond. We hope that you will share it with us, in your own way joining us on this path forward. Whether as a member, supporter, or simply someone who takes delight in seeing people in cool costumes doing amazing or even simple things, we will be happy for you to join us this year.

## **TASK FORCE 27 (FL)**

As we enter 2019, the Florida Garrison of The Finest is preparing for our first show with Central Florida Comic Con (Jan 19-20) in Lakeland! This will be our first show in the area, so we are eager to meet all-new people and hope to find some new recruits to join the cause! In March, we return to West Palm Beach for Comic Con Revolution, and April 12-14, you will find the garrison out in force at Ultracon in Miami, where we plan to have a huge exhibition setup. The garrison has also recently confirmed that we will be returning to Ft Myers in November for SWFLcon as well. Last year was a year with many highs for the garrison, as we tripled our charity collection efforts in the state and added nine new members in 2018! We have lots of plans cooking up and hope to make 2019 an even bigger year for Task Force 27!



# BUILDING THE COBRA A.S.P.



Debuting in 1984, the Cobra Assault System Pod (A.S.P.) is a one-man, towable gun emplacement. A mainstay of Cobra forces, the A.S.P. features twin 120mm 'eliminator' cannons, shell-proof deflector shields, retractable front and rear stabilizer pads, and a protective roll-cage!



Michigan member Eric W. of our Central Defense garrison has brought this iconic Cobra weapon into reality! Check out this jaw-dropping prop which debuted in November 2018 at Grand Rapids Comic Con in Michigan!

By Eric W. (Central Defense Garrison)

I started this project because I wanted to make a display piece for an upcoming comic convention in Michigan for the Central Defense garrison of the Finest.

Since I joined the Finest in October 2017, I saw other garrisons and groups building large display pieces for comic cons and I knew how much these display pieces helped get people to stop by the table booths to help with our charity fundraisers.

So in December 2017, I laid out a rough plan of what I wanted to build: the Cobra A.S.P. from the G.I. Joe toy line.



I figured something that could be trailed in and easily set up at a convention would be a huge bonus for the group. It took a month to find a trailer that would work and would not cost too much to obtain. I found an older boat trailer that needed some help and was about an hour away from me. I had my daughter's mom follow me to pick it up since I really wasn't 100% sure of the road-worthiness of it.

Once I got it home and parked it for a few weeks I started on a blueprint based from measurements of the toy. Once I got a good blueprint idea I decided to cut the trailer down by a total of eight feet.

I then started with a rough framework as shown in the pictures and went off that. After many setbacks with the hydraulic system, I had to put that on pause to make sure I could make the

deadline of Grand Rapids Comic-Con in November 2018.

There were several trips to the metal shop to get steel in different sizes and thickness to accomplish this show piece.

This was all welded with a stick welder. I bought a MIG welder but it wound up not working and to not lose time, I just used my stick welder.

The A.S.P. electrical system was a great part from my local wrecking yard. The gun turrets raise and lower from a window drive system from a Ford Mustang.



The wire harness used to separate the trailer from the A.S.P body was from the Dodge truck I got the radio from.

The body tilts on G.M. engine mount hinges, and I used an old computer tower to house the relays, fuse panels, and a Kenwood radio. The computer tower was donated from a computer shop.

There is an old Tandy (Radio Shack) Atari controller used in the body and I made a switch box to use when the body is in the "down" position. This controls the gun turrets, as well as opening the electrical latch, the roll cage, and the hydraulics to raise and lower the body once it is reinstalled.

Sadly, before the outer skin was installed, someone decided to break into my garage and try to steal my tools. Luckily I saw the person walking out of my garage on my way to work. My tools were recovered, but explaining why I had something that looked like a large weapon was not an easy task to explain to the local police!

I used Plexiglas for the outer skin so I knew the decals would not fall off easily and I could replace the panels as they get damaged.

The trailer is road-legal with a permanent trailer Michigan license plate. The total project time was just under nine months, and the estimated total cost was \$2,000.

*How amazing is this?*

*Want to see more of the A.S.P.? Check out the [Finest YouTube channel](#) for a complete "walk-around" video, narrated by Eric!*



# FARPOINT and the FINEST

TOYS & COLLECTIBLES

***There's nothing like walking into a brick-and-mortar toy store and seeing all the toys from your childhood in one place! Not only is Penelope a long-time Baroness in the Finest, she also co-owns Farpoint Toys & Collectibles in New Jersey! If you're a Joe fan (and we know you are), stop by for a visit – not just for the toys, but to see an amazing memorial to a friend we lost way too soon!***

**By Penelope D.**

I'm proud to say that I'm one of the lucky few nerds whose job and geeky hobbies overlap!

As co-owner of Farpoint Toys & Collectibles – a new and vintage toy, comic, game & collectible shop in Mays Landing, NJ - I've truly found that when you love what you do, you never really work a day in your life.



Farpoint Toys was born in 2010 after my husband and I both finally realized we were waaaaaay too geeky to live a 9-to-5 kind of life. It was also the year that I first heard about The Finest! I met quite a few members at JoeCon 2010 in Providence, RI when I debuted one of my favorite costumes – the Baroness. I've always been the costuming sort, but she was my first “serious” character portrayal, and it went over pretty well! I'm happy to say I made a number of friends because of her, many of whom were (and are) Finest members.

Fast forward about four years – after a lot of cajoling and begging from my Finest Friends, and after hosting countless events at Farpoint's old location (including signings from Joe alum like Fred Van Lente, Tom Scioli, and of course the amazing Mr. Larry Hama), I was finally convinced to join The Finest myself.

At Farpoint's next event, I met another New Jersey member from the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Defense garrison – Scott Byrne. He was trooping with us that day as Cobra Commander and I immediately knew he was awesome! That kit! That helmet! His cane! His mic! To this day, one of the best CCs I've ever had the pleasure to troop with - for sure - and certainly the coolest one to ever troop at an event I was personally running.

By then, Scott's health was failing and he was already not well. He came to a handful of Farpoint events after that, and even when he wasn't feeling great, he was always in high spirits, brightening up everyone he interacted with, and doing so not IN SPITE of his physical limitations, but BECAUSE of them – because of WHO he was.

Scott was Scott. And he was awesome.



Unfortunately, Scott lost his battle with cancer and passed away in September 2016.

After learning of his passing, I knew I wanted to honor him and his place at our store events somehow. A memorial event? An exhibit? I wasn't sure, so I reached out to Clyde L., our garrison's commanding officer, to brainstorm.

Farpoint was in the process of moving into our "forever home" about then - a much larger location with A TON more space. At that point, Clyde and I started floating the idea of making a shadowbox of Scott's Cobra Commander shirt and slacks to hang in the shop. But once Farpoint fully moved in and we saw the potential of our new space, we decided a mannequin-display of Scott's full costume was the most appropriate thing we could do to honor him.

So, since our grand opening in July 2017, Scott has been a Farpoint fixture in our G.I. Joe room. Both those who knew him and those who never had the pleasure of meeting him get to see him and learn a little bit about him and his love of trooping every day, all while enjoying the part-museum, part-boutique sort of unique shopping experience we try to cultivate here at Farpoint!

You can see Scott's kit on display at:

**FARPOINT TOYS & COLLECTIBLES**

5113 Harding Hwy  
Mays Landing, NJ 08330

Normal hours are:

Wednesday-Saturday: 12-6pm

Sunday 12-4pm

If you're a Finest member or friend of Scott's who wants to visit his kit during our off-hours, just give me a buzz to arrange it: (609) 829-TOYS



MEMORIAL: Scott Byrne's costume on display at Farpoint Toys (NJ).  
Photo: Action Figure Junkies

# INTELLIGENCE REPORTS

***The news you need... when you need it!***

## FAREWELL SALUTE TO THE G.I. JOE COLLECTORS' CLUB!

As many Frontline readers know, Hasbro's contract with Fun Publications, Inc. (who ran the G.I. Joe Collectors' Club and the annual G.I. Joe Convention) ended in 2018. Many of our members and fellow G.I. Joe fans enjoyed travelling to new locations each year for JoeCon, subscribing to the monthly Figure Subscription Service, and seeing the production of action figures which wouldn't otherwise be possible. The Finest offers a farewell salute to the employees of Fun Pub., and we thank them for all the memories, and an incredible ride of 25 years! Fair winds and following seas!

## K9s FOR WARRIORS SELECTED AS 2019 CHARITY!

If it ain't broke, don't fix it! For the *fourth* consecutive year, the Finest is proud to once again select K9s For Warriors as our military/veteran charity organization of choice! K9s For Warriors is the nation's largest provider of service dogs to military veterans suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disability, traumatic brain injury and/or military sexual trauma as a result of military service post-9/11, and we are excited to once again partner with such an amazing organization.



Since our partnership began in 2016, the Finest has raised more than \$55,000, with all proceeds donated to K9s For Warriors! Be sure to speak to our members at conventions and events worldwide and watch for our online campaigns to find out how you can help contribute!

## NEW FIELD MANUALS PUBLISHED!!!

In December 2018, the long-awaited Field Manuals for the ALLEY VIPER and IRON GRENADIERS were published! Thanks to our resident Alley Vipers and Iron Grenadiers for their help in pulling these manuals together!

Now you have everything you need to build your costume and join the ranks of Laird Destro's private army, or take your place among Cobra's inner city invasion force!

Captured G.I. Joe intelligence reports indicate that a Steel Brigade Field Manual is coming next! All Finest Field Manuals are available for download at [www.TheFinestCC.com](http://www.TheFinestCC.com)!



## THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO G.I. JOE (3rd Ed.)!

Not only has author and friend of the Finest Mark Bellomo updated his immensely popular "Ultimate Guide to G.I. Joe (1982-1994)" for its third edition, it's also in **HARDCOVER!** This book is in hot demand, so pick up your copy as soon as you can!

Inside, you'll find 336 pages of full-color action, breaking down your favorite toy-line year by year! Even if you already own previous editions of Mark's books, this hardcover edition features new material and is well worth the upgrade!

Since its release late last year, the book has exceeded all sales expectations and has repeatedly been out of stock! Get yours now at Amazon or direct from Krause Publications! You can also catch Mark dropping G.I. Joe knowledge on the hit Netflix show, "The Toys That Made Us"!



## FINEST FORUMS: NEW & IMPROVED!

Frequent users of the Forums at [www.TheFinestCC.com](http://www.TheFinestCC.com) will soon be in for a real treat! Our Techno-Vipers have worked around the clock to identify a new mobile-friendly platform featuring tons of modern features (and less ads!), and a transition is set to occur in early 2019! While certain critical content will be migrated to the new platform, the current Forums will be archived for record-keeping purposes.

The Finest Forums have long been a hot-spot for our members to communicate with aspiring costumers from the general public, providing a more accessible, searchable, library of instructional posts, build threads, costume showcases, and more!

Not been to the Forums lately? Come see what's new!

- Say hello in the "Sound Off" section and find other fans and members in your area!
- Check out the latest costume and prop Build Threads from our members and recruits, including multiple Firefly kits, Crimson Guard, Mainframe, Range Viper, RPG props, and more!
- COBRA LAPEL PINS are back!!!! Don't miss a limited run of this very hot item!
- Costume gear, references, and resources, and so much more!

Sign up and introduce yourself on the Forums TODAY!



### CENTRAL DEFENSE LAUNCHES 'DEFENDER' NEWSLETTER!



Late last year, our Central Defense garrison unveiled their newsletter, *Defender!* Featuring costume and prop builds, member spotlights, garrison news, and more, *Defender* will keep you apprised of all things Central Defense! Be sure to follow their adventures from Michigan to Illinois, Ohio to Indiana, occasionally Kentucky, and all points in between!

Follow the Central Defense garrison on Facebook and don't miss a single issue of *Defender!*

### NEW WEBSITE: STEEL BRIGADE TRACKER

Former Hasbro toy designer and Steel Brigade super-fan Bobby Vala has launched an all-new website to track everyone's favorite personalized trooper! [www.steelbrigadetracker.com](http://www.steelbrigadetracker.com)

Between 1987 and 1994, fans received the same mail-away figure, but were given the opportunity to name their trooper and choose specific attributes to make their Steel Brigade character truly unique.

The Steel Brigade Tracker website is designed to create a history of the troopers that are all around the world. Although each figure is the same, the included file cards made each character one of a kind. The file cards, which are quite possibly the rarest part of the offering, are the key to tracking the thousands of Steel Brigade troopers that were ordered. Did you have your very own Steel Brigade action figure? Please help the effort to bring this squad together for the first time!



**NEW ENGLAND!**

**NOW RECRUITING!**

REVOLUTIONARY GUARD  
THE FINEST - NEW ENGLAND

FINEST  
A G.I. JOE COSTUME CLUB

# GET TO KNOW...

## GEORGIA MEMBER AMY L.!

### **WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST G.I. JOE MEMORIES?**

When my oldest brother gave me my first G.I. Joe comic book in 1984. That began my love of comic books and Marvel and Anime. Then waking up early on Saturday mornings before my parents got up just so I can have the TV all to myself to watch G.I. Joe in the mid-late 80s.

### **WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO JOIN THE FINEST?**

I finally found a group of people that love G.I. Joe now as much as I did as a child, and I wanted to be a part of a cosplay group that I could be a part of. Where I could be Baroness and be accepted by others?

### **WHAT ARE YOUR OTHER INTERESTS?**

I love anime, crafting, leather working, art and dancing.

### **WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR 2019?**

2019... I'm gonna be a Viking at Dragon Con, trying to buy a house, lose weight, and finally send myself on a cruise.

### **WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE QUOTE?**

It's actually from G.I. Joe – "Knowing is half the battle." And what I take from that quote is the more you know, the more you understand, the better chance of excelling and succeeding and not being left at the wayside by advancements or losing what we've learned through our history. And the more you know the less afraid you are.



# MY LIFE WITH A SERVICE DOG

By Allen B. (PA member & U.S. Army veteran)

I guess we can start at the beginning...

I first got my service dog, Duke, at a rescue center for cats. The lady who brought him in was quick to get rid of him and that day I happened to be there with my wife at the time, who wanted me to give Duke to a friend of hers that apparently had a problem keeping dogs. She was going through dogs like they were potato chips. I made the decision Duke was staying with me. This was in 2009 and since that time Duke and I bonded. I worked with him teaching him tricks and giving him the attention he didn't have before.

Fast forward to 2014 my wife and I had divorced and I was engaged to another woman. Well things didn't pan out and I was back to living on my own. Hey, at least I had Duke. Turns out, the woman I was engaged to wasn't done making my life miserable - she and her mom made it their life mission to get me fired from my job which resulted in me eventually living in my car.

Late one night, I thought life wasn't worth living. I had pretty much lost everything. What I didn't get into storage I lost to my ex, I had no job and nowhere to live because I really didn't have any close friends or family in Delaware. So here I am sitting in the backseat of my car contemplating how I was going to end my life. When I looked over at Duke I just saw him staring with his brown eyes reflecting off the moonlight. He was looking at me like he knew what I was planning. At that second, I made the decision to get myself out of this situation.

The next morning, I went to the VA Hospital for help. We discussed the events of the night before and how I got into this situation. Then the caseworker introduced me to another caseworker who trains Service Dogs. So I met with him and he noticed how Duke and I have a strong bond and he proceeded to guide me in training Duke to be a Service Dog. In the mean time I was working on moving out of my car and into an apartment. After a couple of months I was in my apartment and receiving disability for anxiety disorder, PTSD, and depression.

As months turned to years, Duke and I continued to work on improving his skills. That wasn't as challenging as it was with the public - mostly stores that weren't up to speed with Americans With Disability Act (ADA) laws. The first experience I endured was being kicked out of a business because of Duke. I tried to show the manager my paperwork, but she insisted I leave. I was at a loss because at the time I didn't know ADA laws. Well the manager got an ear-full from her district manager along with some



friends of mine from Facebook. After that, I went online and researched my rights under the ADA.

So what's life like with a Service Dog? Well, I feel better when Duke is around. When we would go out in public we would encounter a problem about once a week. So I thought why not try and educate people about Service Animals. I got business cards made that had the basics of what stores can and can't do. This seemed to work for the most part, but I was still running into issues. But it was getting better. Eventually I moved from Delaware to Pennsylvania. These days, I have an issue about Duke at least once a month.

The stories I could tell would probably make you laugh or question why people are the way they are. I've had people make barking noises towards Duke which I hate about as much as I hate the "kissy" sounds people do. Some people that walk up to me ask about Duke, and I will explain his purpose and why he's with me. Usually this leads to statements like "I wish I had a Service Dog", or they proceed to tell me about how they had to put their dog down. First, it's not that I don't care that you had to put your dog down, it's just sad to hear and I want to enjoy the time

I have with Duke and not think about that. Second, wishing you had a Service Dog... no you don't. You like the idea of bringing your dog everywhere.



The best example I can think of is this: you're an actor on a stage. The actor has a disability, be it visible or not. You have a spotlight on you; this represents the people who notice your disability. There is always one person who has to point out that I have a Service Dog, and they aren't quiet about it. This leads to others looking at you. Well, that one person just turned on several more spotlights, which in turn creates a chain reaction of anxiety and stress for the dog and handler. Combine this with the attention of other people who feel the need to approach me, ask about Duke, or try and pet or distract him, which feeds my anxieties more. This isn't cool and you wouldn't do this to someone in a wheelchair or with a cane. I remember I was told I was being rude when three people ran up on me while my wife and I were talking. We had just walked into the store. They were literally in my personal space and trying to pet Duke. I didn't handle this as well as I should because I told them to back off. I explained Duke is a Service Dog and you can't pet or distract him. The one lady even said "yeah, I know. I can read his vest."

#### **"Then why are you petting him?"**

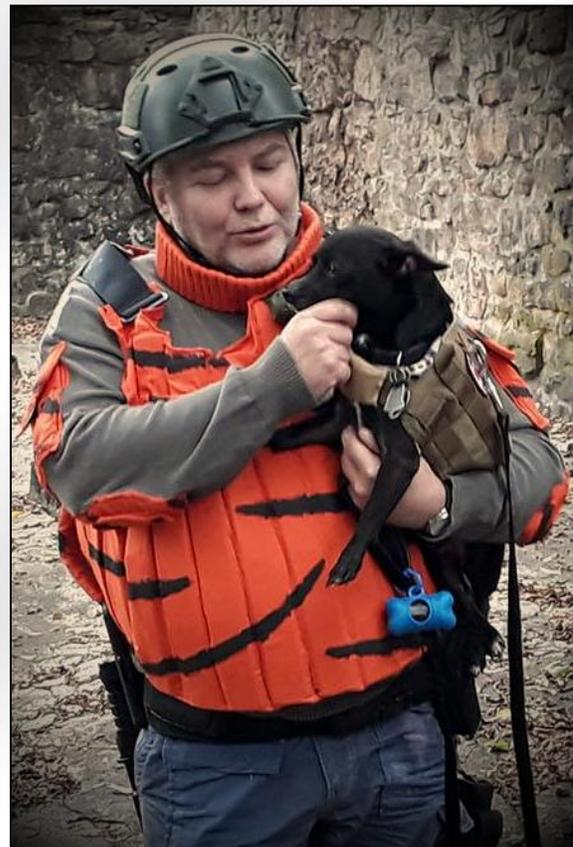
I was told I was rude and probably a few other things as they walked off. I had a lady tell a store employee about me having Duke and I just happened to be in earshot of the conversation. The employee told her that Duke was a Service Dog and was allowed to be in the store. I also put my two cents in and handed her the business card with the ADA laws and told her that if she had an issue with my dog she could call the Department of Justice.

I'm more amazed at some of the stupid things people say - case in point.... I was in a store buying a CD. I went to the register to pay (keep in mind I had to read the CD title and the price). So after I paid I was looking at DVDs while my wife checked out. The

employee who waited on me started asking about Duke, so I explained the PTSD, anxiety disorder, and Duke's purpose. The employee looked right at me and asked, "so are you blind?" I couldn't believe he just asked me that, so I replied with "Yes, and my dog is over here reading the DVD titles to me."

Duke, Leslie (my wife), and I are a team. When we're out, we just want to get what we need and get out. Sometimes I don't want to have a conversation about Duke or my disability. People should be able to respect that and not be persistent about petting Duke.

In closing, life with a Service Dog is an adventure. Yes, there are some funny moments and other times they're stressful. But the bottom line is this - don't be the guy responsible for "turning on" extra spotlights, crowding someone with a disability, or just making a fuss for nothing. Duke is a dog with a certain skillset. He knows that when the vest is on that it's time to work. Even when he looks like he's sleeping he's very much alert. People like to point that out a lot. When we're home he checks up on me, but he also acts like a normal dog. So there's a balance that we have, and I honestly can say that I don't have a dog, I have a really great close friend. Things were bad for me at one point, but it was Duke who saved my life, and for that reason I'm grateful for having him.



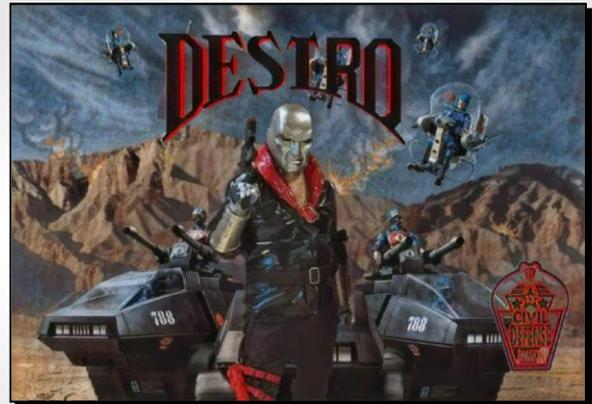
# A COSPLAY ORIGIN STORY

**Did you know we have a published author in our ranks? Author, New Jersey member, and former *Finest Executive Officer James Hannon* has just released his most recent book, "*Anatomy of a Cosplayer: Tales From Behind the Mask*", and we congratulate him on his success! Pick up your copy today wherever respectable cosplay books are sold!**

By James Hannon

When I was asked to be a staff writer for Frontline, I jumped at the opportunity. I have been in the *Finest* since 2012 and served as Executive Officer (XO) in 2015. I have made some of the greatest friends in this club, and welcome the chance to give back a little to a great organization.

But first, let's go back to the beginning and how I ended up in the *Finest*. I was already being too cool to watch cartoons as a junior in high school when the G.I. Joe cartoon was on TV, so I didn't get in on the first wave of fandom. My friend Richie and I would go every week to Honig's department store on Webster Ave. in the Bronx to buy each new G.I. Joe figure as they came out. Afterwards, we would go back to his house and play with them. I had no idea who they were, so I usually made my own backstories - which Richie hated, but nobody else would play G.I. Joe with him, so he had no choice.



A side note to this story is that Richie's older sister Jackie saw me playing dolls with her brother every week, and STILL said yes to me when I asked her out a few months later. Thirty-plus years later we are still together cosplaying as G.I. Joe characters in the *Finest* (amongst other genres)!

So back to joining the *Finest*...

I have been a member of the 501st Legion (Star Wars costuming organization) since 2008. That might not be the best line for an origin story of a *Finest* member, but it is very important to what brought me here. You see, the 501st is where I met **Scott Byrne**.

Scott, as many of you know, was the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Defense's Cobra Commander for years until his passing in 2016. But I met him on my very first 501st troop at the Toms River Halloween Troop in October 2009. He was quirky, but was very passionate about costuming and Star Wars. We trooped together many times - and countless times where it was just my wife, Scott and I (before the last batch of Star Wars movies caused an explosion of new costumers).

In June, 2011, I was trooping with the 501st at a small New Jersey Convention called ZoloWorld, when I met Rosemary W, who was cosplaying as the Baroness at the time. She was a friend of Scott, and I saw that she was really nice to him. If you haven't noticed, I had become quite protective of Scott over the years. And if someone was nice to him, I tended to like the person instantly.

Rose told me about the G.I. Joe club that she was in, and let on that Scott was about to join the club with his Cobra Commander costume. Hearing all the good stuff that the club was into made me have a positive image of the Finest, but I wasn't ready to start a whole new costume at the time.

Flash-forward a little over a month later, and by fate, I saw a complete Cobra Trooper costume go up for sale on one of the Internet message boards I was on. The owner had recently dropped his price, and I bought it.

I waited until Eternal Con 2013 - the next convention Scott was going to attend, and wore it to surprise him. And surprise him I did, he did NOT wear his Cobra Commander costume that day. But a large portion of the local Finest garrison was there (the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil Defense) and we became friendly. They let me hang out with them and be in on group pictures. I found out that my costume didn't fit the new requirements for the group, but I was told how to fix it easily. Within a couple of months I was an official member of the Finest!

The best part is that in that one day, I met so many people who would eventually become great friends - even to this day. This same convention was also Robert Franzese's first time meeting the Finest as well, in his Sgt. Slaughter costume. Rob is now more famously known to the world as "The Real Life Peter Griffin."

Even though Scott didn't costume as Cobra Commander at the event, we eventually started trooping together for the Finest as well. We had done tons of troops together in the 501st Legion, and now we were doing the same in the Finest - Him being the boss Cobra Commander, and me as his minion Cobra Trooper.



Scott enjoyed the Cobra organization chart a little too much, bossing my character around, and I decided I wanted to mess with him a little. So, I decided to become the one character who would always be a thorn in Cobra Commander's side - the mighty Destro. Destro was always my favorite G.I. Joe character, and I had just found Len from Pit Viper Studios who made a beautiful Destro helmet. Most Destro cosplayers I had seen at this point were bald and painted their heads silver to match Destro's complexion - and I was most certainly not going to do that.

With the Destro helmet ordered, I went to my friend (and huge G.I. Joe fan) Warren Mundell, to sew the iconic jacket that Destro wore. But the problem was that there were two versions: the shiny vinyl version and the simple black fabric version. Some folks in the Finest tried to talk me into the dull fabric version, but the best part of Destro to me was his shiny “disco” version. So, I compromised and had Warren make both, and they came out wonderful. But once I saw the shiny vinyl version in person, I just couldn’t bring myself to wear the fabric version. I added a few guns, grenades, gauntlets, and jewels, and Destro was born.

I went on to completely tease Scott Byrne in his Cobra Commander at every event we attended

### **AUTHOR BIO**

*James Hannon has been a cosplayer for the last 10 years with the 501st and Rebel Legion in a variety of Command Staff roles. He is also the founder and president of the Legion of SuperVillains cosplay group and has served as the executive officer of The Finest: A G.I. Joe Costume Club.*

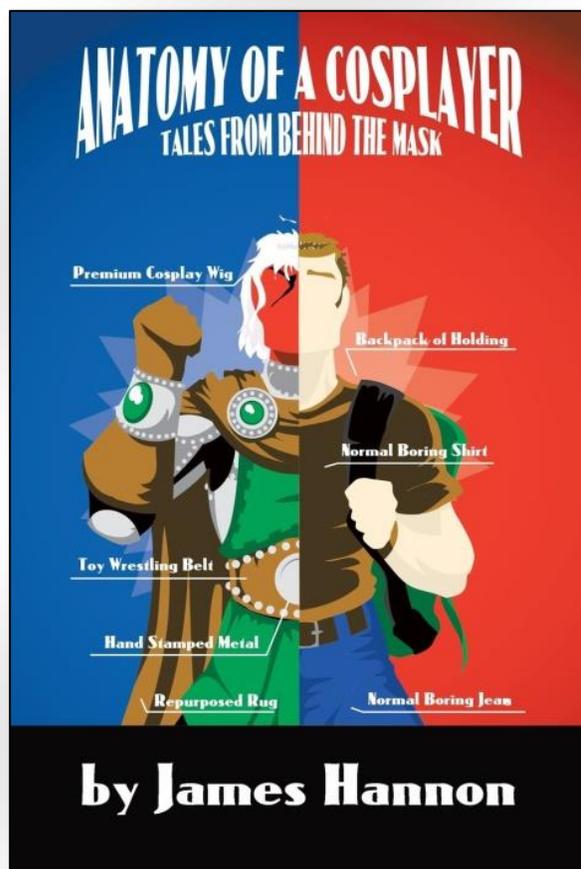
*He is also the author of the recently released book **Anatomy of a Cosplayer: Tales from Behind the Mask**, which tells the stories and tips of 70 cosplayers from multiple fandoms, ages, countries and experience levels.*

*His costumes include numerous Star Wars characters, Captain Cold, Jay Garrick, Two-Face, Destro, a Gorilla Soldier from Planet of the Apes, a Cylon from the original Battlestar Galactica, and Jesse Ventura.*

together, and we had a great time bickering like the characters in the cartoon. It was a fun costume.

Unfortunately, Scott passed away in 2016, so I cut back on wearing it a little bit. I do plan on taking Destro out of retirement in 2019 for more adventures with the Finest! Hopefully one day to appear at Farpoint Collectibles in Mays Landing, NJ at Penelope and Justin D.’s store where they honor Scott’s memory by displaying his Cobra Commander costume.

*(Editor’s note: for more about Scott Byrne and his memorial, don’t miss the article “Farpoint and the Finest” earlier in this issue!)*



# SCOTT BYRNE

1974 - 2016



# THE ARMORY

**Need weapons or gear? Here are a few Finest members and vendors to help you on your way!**

## Battle Gear Depot

Viper and Iron Grenadier parts, 3D printing and sewing services, Viper backpacks, and more  
alpinetraditions@gmail.com

## Catt Call

Custom enamel pins and more  
<https://www.facebook.com/CattCallCo/>  
<http://cattcallco.storenvy.com/>

## Cobra Tech

Jetpacks, helmets, and more  
<https://www.facebook.com/CobraTech->

[721538184672834/](https://www.facebook.com/CobraTech-)

## Cremeans Creations

Helmets, costume parts, props, and more  
<https://cremeanscreations.com/>

## Negative Eleven

Helmets, belt-buckles, and more  
[chris@negativeeleven.com](mailto:chris@negativeeleven.com)

## Patch Czar

Custom patch design and small production runs  
[www.facebook.com/patch.czar](http://www.facebook.com/patch.czar)

## Pit Viper Studios

Helmets, shields, armor, and more  
[www.pitviperstudios.net](http://www.pitviperstudios.net)  
<https://www.facebook.com/PitViperStudios/>

## SkyForge Leather

Custom leather straps, scabbards, belts, pouches, and more  
<https://www.etsy.com/shop/SkyforgeLeather>

## Xero Props

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