

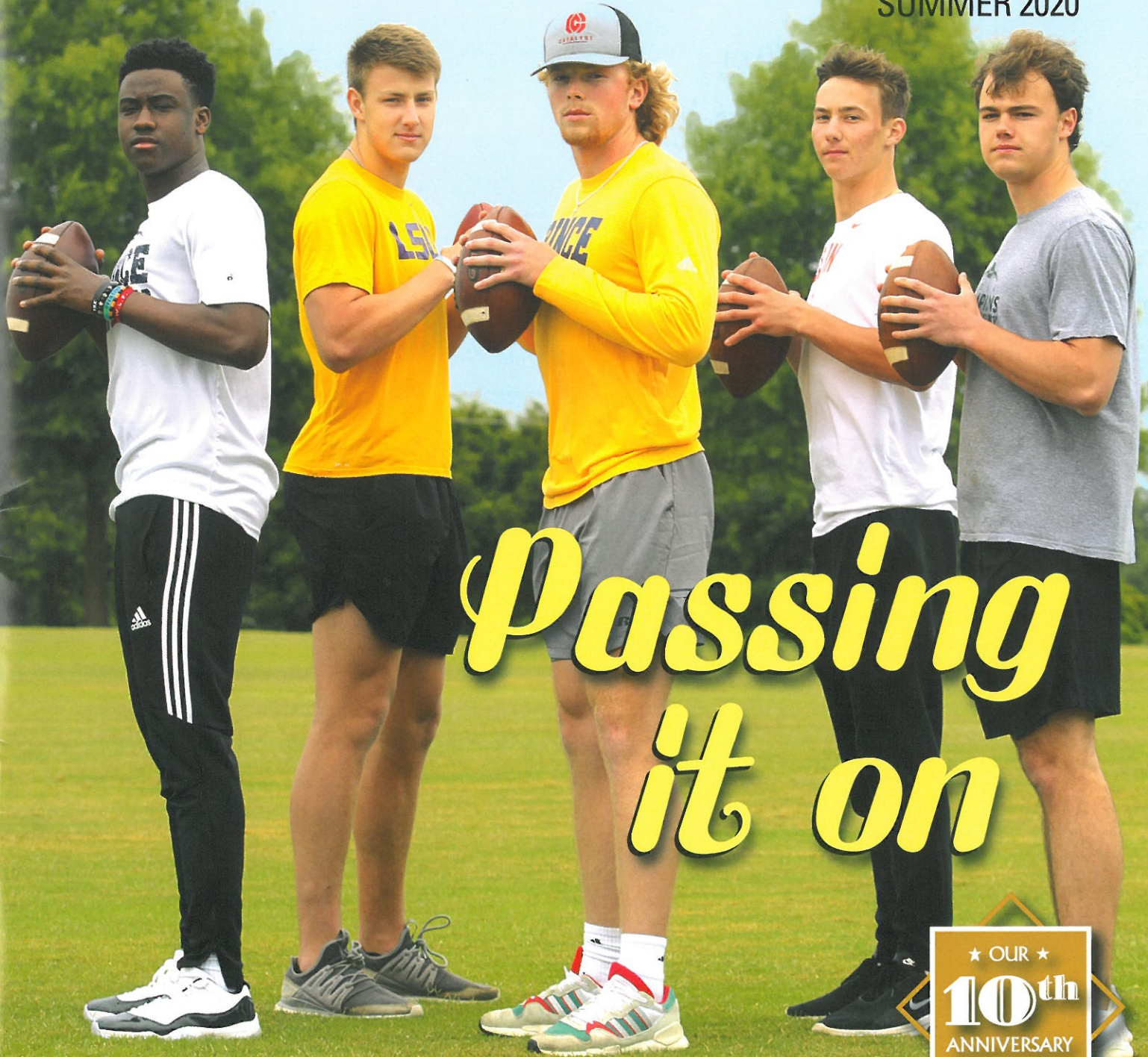
CULINARY  
PERFECTION

VETERAN  
HELPS HEROES

# OCCONEE

THE MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2020



*Passing  
it on*

★ OUR ★  
**10<sup>th</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY  
★



# Vietnam veteran devoted to helping others

By Kathie Anderson



Courtesy Dick Thompson

*At a young age, Thompson joined the most elite group of special forces in the world, MAC V- SOG, which conducted black ops missions so secret that they were not allowed to discuss them for 20 years.*

► Kathie Anderson is a freelance writer in Oconee County.

The night Dick Thompson arrived in Vietnam, the black school bus that showed up to transport him to camp was full of bullet holes and shot-out windows. The driver explained that they were often ambushed along the route. If that were to happen, he said, they'd need to get on the floor and do what they were told if they wanted to stay alive.

Ten days later, his first mission found him in a helicopter rotating down into a bomb-created crater. Before they could jump out, a massive ambush was initiated by the North Vietnamese. Cobra gunships were called in to provide firepower. Thompson was getting powder burns from bullets flying by his face.

"I was thinking that this is my first mission, and I'm going to die," he recalled. "I experienced a level of fear that I never knew existed."

Thompson, a decorated veteran with a doctorate in psychology, has survived more than a cat's nine lives. As a result, reducing stress has been a lifelong passion for the Watkinsville resident and CEO of the consulting firm High Performing Systems, Inc. He's currently working with retired military personnel and firefighters who suffer from PTSD and are at high risk of suicide.

Most of Thompson's ideas about stress were born during his time in Vietnam. At 19, he left college in South Carolina for basic training, after which he became an Army airborne ranger. On the fast track for Vietnam, Thompson was also accepted into Officer Candidate School and emerged as a second lieutenant.

*At right, decorated Vietnam War veteran Dick Thompson delivered the keynote speech at a recent Oconee Veterans Memorial Foundation's Memorial Day program.*

Courtesy Dick Thompson



# VETERANS MEMORIAL

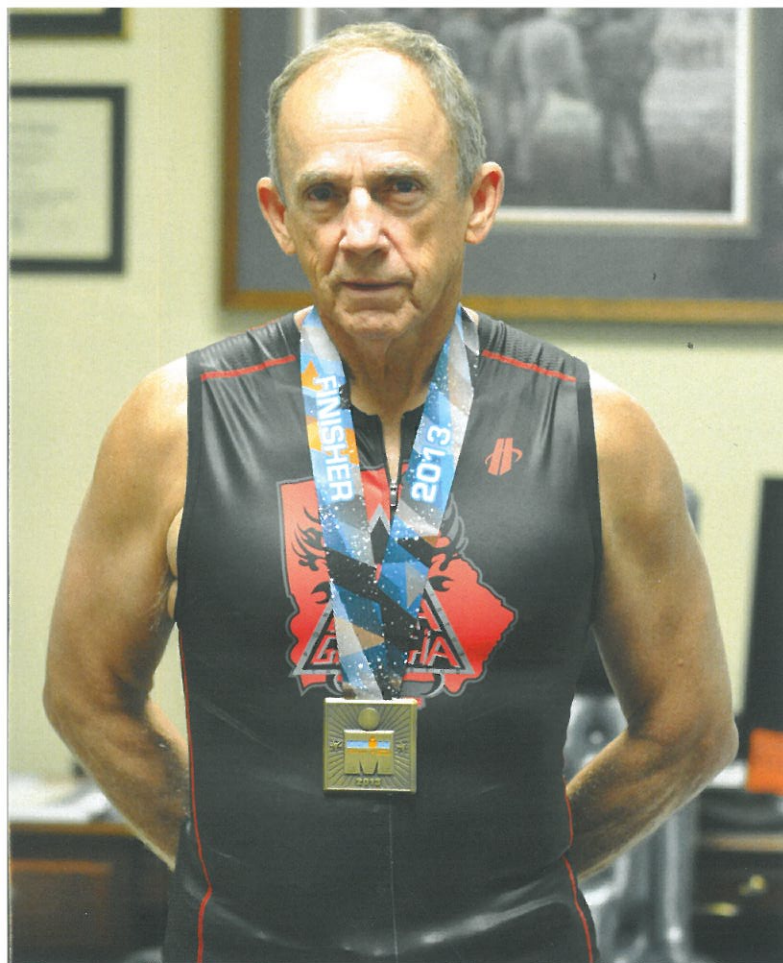
OUR FALLEN SHALL  
NOT BE FORGOTTEN

**WORLD WAR II  
KILLED IN ACTION**

1LT Douglas M. Campbell • Staff  
PFC Henry A. Huff • PFC  
Technician 5th Grade James  
PVT John E. Jackson • SGT  
PVT Raymond O. Marshall • PVT  
SGT William H. Mobley • SSG  
Seaman 1st Class Lee G. Nelson •  
Technician 4th Grade John  
PVT Thomas L. Powell • PFC  
Chief Gunner's Mate Fred  
PFC Walter L. Wood • PFC  
PFC Herschel H. Burger • PVT  
Seaman 1st Class Robert

"Our debt to the heroic men and  
service of our country can never  
earn our undying gratitude. And  
their sacrifice  
— President Harry S.





Courtesy Dick Thompson

Thompson has completed 17 half Ironman competitions and seven full ones within the past 10 years.

Next, he was called to join the most elite group of special forces in the world, MAC V- SOG. Considered a top-secret special operations group, team members were called “dead men walking” due to the high probability that they would be wounded or killed during the war.

This command conducted black ops missions so secret that they were not allowed to discuss them for 20 years. It was only recently that Thompson spoke about his service when he was interviewed in 2019 for a series of podcasts by Jocko Willink, a former Navy SEAL, author and blogger in California.

“I discovered that things that you can do very easily in training become very difficult under the stress of dozens of people shooting at you all at once,” said Thompson. “Even your vision changes as stress rises. You can’t react the way that you trained. After that first mission I was thinking, ‘What should we have done differently? Was there anything else we might have done to prepare better?’ You have to get better every time. You have to adapt on the fly.”

Thompson spent many combat nights sleeping with his heavy rucksack on, straddling a tree to avoid sliding downhill. At times, he thought that he would never see his 21st birthday.

Thompson ran black ops in five different countries during his career. His ability to adapt probably saved his life countless times during his 21 years of military service. He spent his last years in the Army as a consultant doing research on stress in the battlefield.

When he came home from the war, Thompson became an instructor for young Ranger recruits and Special Forces Green Beret units at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

Thompson felt responsible for giving these soldiers extra training to make them tough and ready for combat. He told them, “I won’t ask you to do something I won’t do. Follow me, and I will set the example.”

As they trained together every day, Thompson told his recruits to think of themselves as medical doctors, as every day is about professional practice.

Testing physical endurance is integral to the mindset of a soldier, he explained. Thompson still feels that if you keep your body sharp, you keep your mind sharp. He holds a black belt in Taekwondo, and even at 73, he still pushes himself constantly. Thompson has completed 17 half Ironman competitions and seven full ones within the past 10 years. Ironman requires competitors to complete a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and finish with a 26.2-mile marathon.

“I was hoping to do another one this year,” said Thompson, “but current circumstances (the novel coronavirus pandemic) have cancelled those plans.”

In 2010, his book “The Stress Effect” became a textbook for the corporate world to create a stress-resilient workplace. Thompson makes the argument that a failure in leadership is often the result of elevated stress. He opens the book with the story of Capt. “Sully” Sullenberger, the pilot who successfully landed U.S. Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River. Thompson explained that Sullenberger “was under extreme stress, yet he was able to make a series of complex decisions while executing precise control over a plane that was literally falling out of the sky.”

Thompson is a celebrated consultant, educator and public speaker. He produces webinars and resources on preventing suicide and offers help to those stressed by isolation due to the novel coronavirus.

Thompson sees a lot of positive changes coming out of this pandemic.

“A lot of learning can be done virtually,” he said. “I think that maybe more classes will be offered online. Campuses won’t see as many students. Corporations may utilize more virtual meetings. More people will work from home instead of offices. Insights gained from this will enable people to do things more efficiently.”