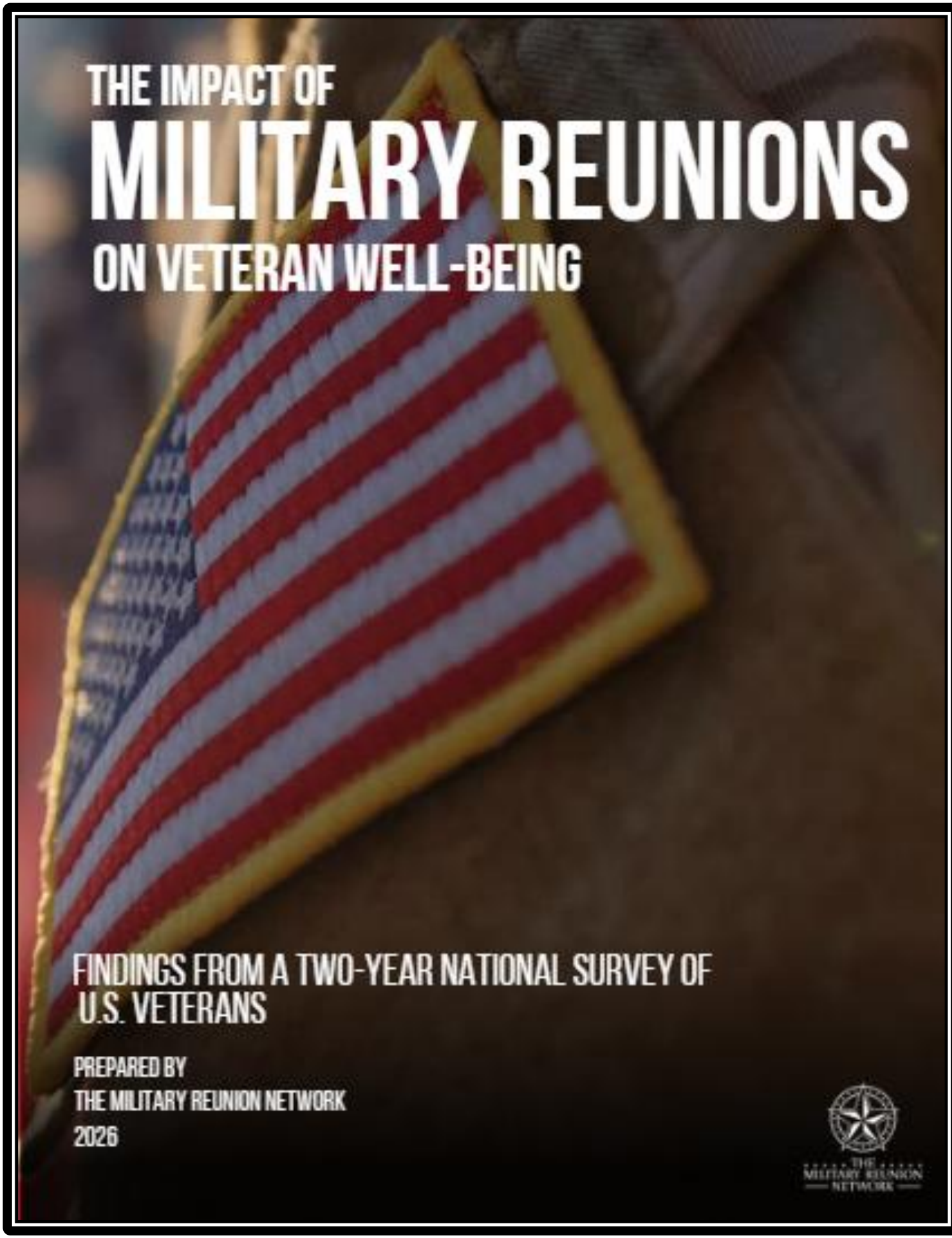

THE IMPACT OF
MILITARY REUNIONS
ON VETERAN WELL-BEING
FINDINGS FROM A TWO-YEAR NATIONAL SURVEY OF U.S. VETERANS
PREPARED BY
THE MILITARY REUNION NETWORK
2026
THE MILITARY REUNION NETWORK

Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense have identified social connectedness as a protective factor associated with reduced suicide risk among Veterans and Service members. Military reunions provide a unique opportunity for Veterans to reconnect with those they served with and to renew relationships formed during that service. Yet limited research has examined the relationship between military reunion participation, Veteran-to-Veteran connection, and self-reported mental health.

Typical military reunions take place over approximately four days and bring together Veterans who served in the same ship, unit, battalion, squadron, or other military group, often accompanied by their spouses/partners and sometimes their children. Attendees generally stay at the same hotel, visit local attractions together, and spend informal time in a designated hospitality space. Many reunions also include a memorial service honoring those who have died and conclude with a more formal banquet on the final evening. **The Military Reunion Network (MRN) estimates that more than 15,000 military reunions take place annually across the United States**, ranging from smaller gatherings of approximately 45 attendees to larger reunions of more than 200.

To better understand the relationship between reunion participation, Veteran connectedness, and well-being, MRN launched a national survey of Veterans on **August 12, 2024**. The survey remains ongoing and examines reunion participation, Veteran-to-Veteran connection, perceived effects on mental well-being, and whether relationships continue following reunion attendance.

A total of **951 individuals** participated in the survey during the period covered by this report. Of those respondents, **896 (94.2%)** reported prior military service. Non-Veterans were excluded from questions and analyses specifically related to Veteran experiences. Not all Veteran respondents had attended a military reunion and therefore were not eligible to answer reunion-specific questions. As a result, the number of respondents varies by question throughout the report.

The findings show a consistent pattern of Veteran-to-Veteran connection before, during, and after reunion attendance. Reconnecting with their military family was the most frequently selected reason respondents gave for attending a reunion, and 88.73% of the 772 respondents answering the camaraderie question agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced a sense of camaraderie during the reunion. Following reunion attendance, respondents reported increased contact across each communication method measured, while the percentage reporting no connection declined. Among the 772 respondents who answered the mental health question, 74.2% reported that attending a military reunion affected their mental health positively or very positively, 24.2% reported no effect, and 1.6% reported a negative or very negative effect.

This survey does not establish a causal relationship between military reunion participation and clinical mental health outcomes. Rather, the findings document respondents' experiences and identify an association between reunion attendance, increased Veteran-to-Veteran connection, and self-reported positive effects on mental health.

Given the recognized importance of social connectedness to Veteran well-being and suicide prevention, these findings provide a basis for further examination of the role military reunions may play in strengthening and sustaining Veteran-to-Veteran connection.

1. Introduction

Military service creates unique interpersonal relationships formed through shared training, deployments, operational assignments, and, for many, combat experiences. These relationships often extend beyond active service and remain meaningful throughout a Veteran's lifetime. Military reunions provide opportunities for former service members to reconnect with those who shared these experiences.

While reunions have historically served as occasions to reconnect and renew friendships, their broader influence on Veteran well-being has received limited formal study.

The Military Reunion Network conducted this survey to better understand Veterans' perceptions regarding the role military reunions play in strengthening social connections, maintaining peer relationships, and influencing self-reported mental well-being.

This report presents those findings objectively and distinguishes participant perceptions from clinical or medical conclusions.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine Veterans' perceptions regarding the impact of military reunions on their lives.

Specific objectives included:

- Understanding why Veterans attend military reunions.
- Measuring changes in Veteran-to-Veteran communication before and after reunion attendance.
- Examining perceived effects on mental well-being.
- Identifying whether relationships established or renewed during reunions continue afterward.
- Providing baseline information to support future research into Veteran social connectedness.

The study was not designed to diagnose mental health conditions or evaluate clinical outcomes.

3. Methodology

The Military Reunion Network (MRN) launched a voluntary online 14 question survey on August 12, 2024, to examine the relationship between military reunion participation, Veteran-to-Veteran connection, and self-reported mental well-being. Data collection remains ongoing. The findings presented in this report reflect responses received through August 14, 2026.

The survey consisted of demographic questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses.

Participants were asked about:

- Military service
- Reunion participation
- Communication with fellow Veterans **before, during, and after** reunions
- Perceived effects on mental health
- Personal observations regarding reunion experiences

Participation was voluntary and anonymous.
Because responses were self-reported, the findings reflect participants' perceptions and experiences. The survey was not designed to establish causation, diagnose mental health conditions, or substitute for clinical evaluation.

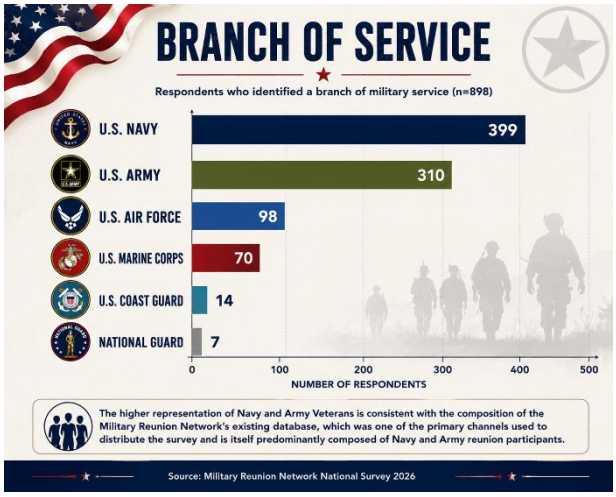
4. Participant Demographics

Overview

A total of 951 individuals participated in the Military Reunion Network's national survey examining the impact of military reunions on Veteran well-being and social connectedness. Of those respondents, 896 (94.2%) reported having served in the military. The remaining respondents were excluded from questions and analyses specifically related to Veteran experiences.

Branch of Service

Survey participants represented all major branches of the United States Armed Forces. Of the respondents who identified a branch of service, the largest representation came from the U.S. Navy (399 respondents) and U.S. Army (310 respondents), followed by the U.S. Air Force (98), U.S. Marine Corps (70), U.S. Coast Guard (14), and National Guard (7). The higher representation of Navy and Army Veterans is consistent with the composition of the Military Reunion Network's existing database, which was one of the primary channels used to distribute the survey and is itself predominantly composed of Navy and Army Veterans who have volunteered to plan their reunion.
Among respondents identifying a military branch, this represents approximately:



The higher representation of Navy and Army Veterans should be considered when interpreting the overall findings, as the experiences of those service populations are more heavily represented in the survey.

Years of Service

A total of 839 respondents provided their years of military service. Reported service extended from the early 1950s through recent military operations, providing perspectives from Veterans whose military experiences span multiple generations and service eras.

This broad range is particularly important to the study because military reunion participation frequently occurs many years—and sometimes decades—after military service has ended. The survey therefore captures perspectives from Veterans at different stages of life and at varying distances from their period of military service.

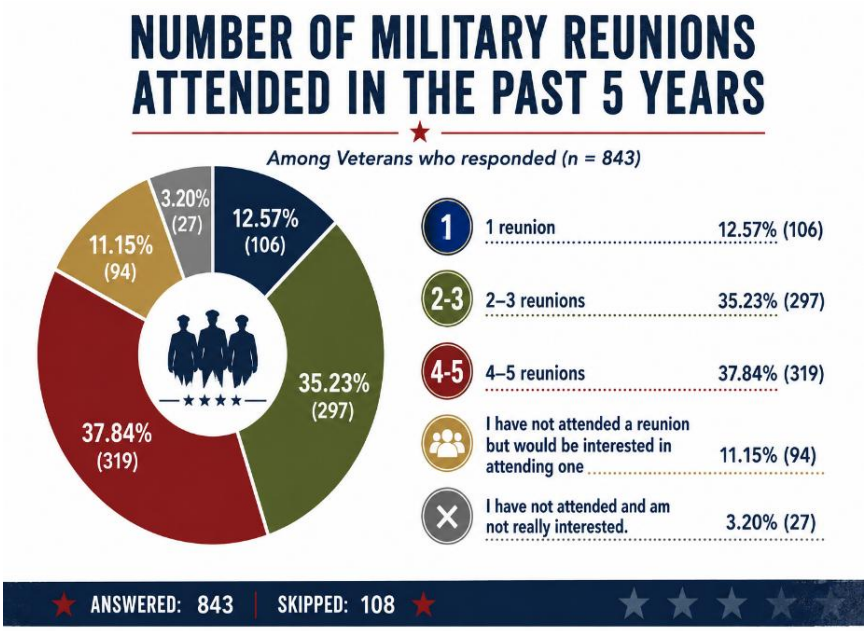
Interpreting the Demographics

The breadth of military branches and service years represented in the survey provides a valuable cross-section of Veteran experiences with military reunions. However, participation in the survey was voluntary and the respondent population was not selected through random sampling. Accordingly, the demographic composition and findings of this survey should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the entire U.S. Veteran population.

5. Participation and Military Reunions

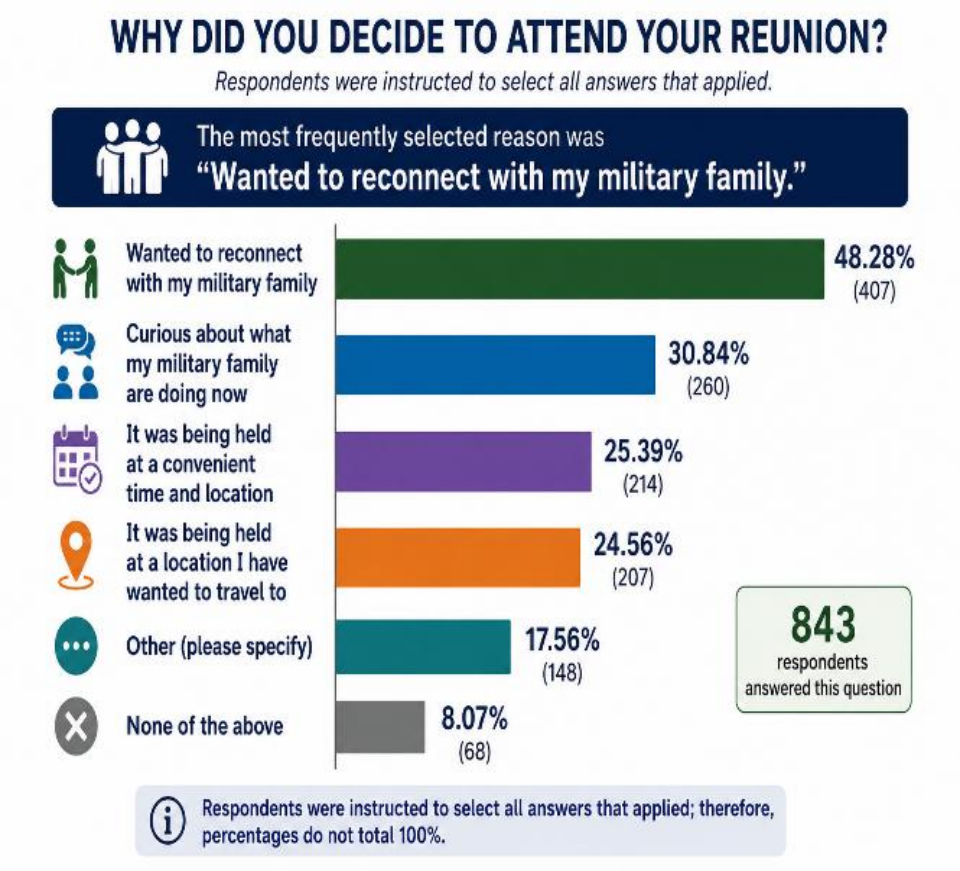
The overwhelming majority of Veteran respondents reported attending one or more military reunions with those they served with, including reunions organized around ships, battalions, squadrons, units, and similar military groups.

The findings indicate that military reunions remain an active means of reconnecting former service members many years after military service has ended.



Why Veterans Attended

Respondents were also asked why they decided to attend their reunion. Among the 843 respondents answering this question, the most frequently selected reason was “Wanted to reconnect with my military family,” selected by 48.28% (407 respondents).



Respondents were instructed to select all answers that applied; therefore, percentages do not total 100%.
These responses identify reconnecting with their military family as the most frequently selected reason respondents gave for attending a reunion.

6. The Reunion Experience

Camaraderie During the Reunion

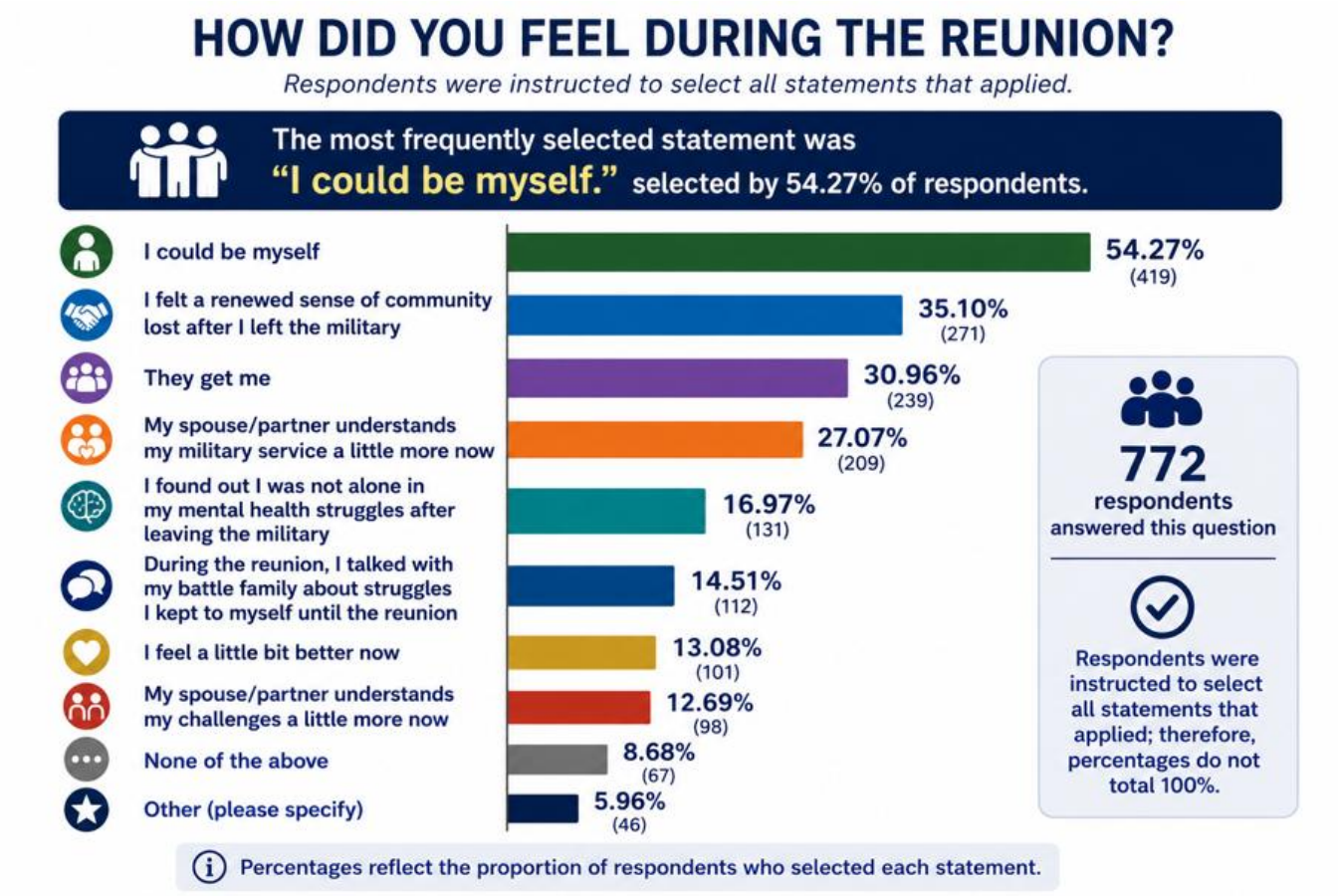
Participants who had attended a reunion were asked whether they felt a sense of camaraderie during the event. Among the **772 respondents** answering this question:

- 69.17% strongly agreed.
- 19.56% agreed.
- 9.72% were neutral.
- 0.78% disagreed.
- 0.78% strongly disagreed.

Combined, **88.73% (685 respondents)** agreed or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of camaraderie during the reunion.

How Veterans Described Feeling During the Reunion

Respondents were also asked to select statements describing how they felt during the reunion. The most frequently selected statement was **"I could be myself," selected by 54.27% (419 respondents).**



7. Veteran Connections Before and After Reunion Participation

One of the primary objectives of this study was to determine whether military reunions influence ongoing communication among Veterans after the reunion concludes.
Participants were asked to identify the methods by which they connected with fellow Veterans both **before** and **after** attending a military reunion.

Communication Prior to Reunion Attendance

Before attending a reunion:

- 45.3% maintained contact through email.
- 40.8% participated in military social media groups.
- 38.5% communicated by telephone.
- 31.2% maintained one-to-one social media connections.
- 7.77% Thinking about it, just haven't yet.
- 17.56% reported no ongoing connection with fellow Veterans after leaving military service.

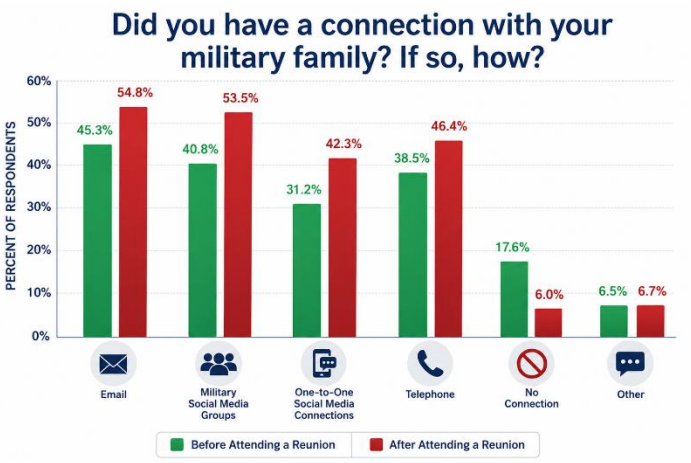
These findings indicate that many respondents maintained some form of connection with those they served with prior to attending a reunion.

Communication Following Reunion Attendance

Following participation in a military reunion, respondents reported increases across every measured form of communication.
After attending a reunion:

- 54.8% maintained communication through email.
- 53.4% participated in military social media groups.
- 46.8% communicated by telephone.
- 42.0% maintained one-to-one social media connections.
- 6.97% Thinking about it, just haven't yet.
- 6.03% reported no ongoing connection with fellow Veterans after leaving military service.

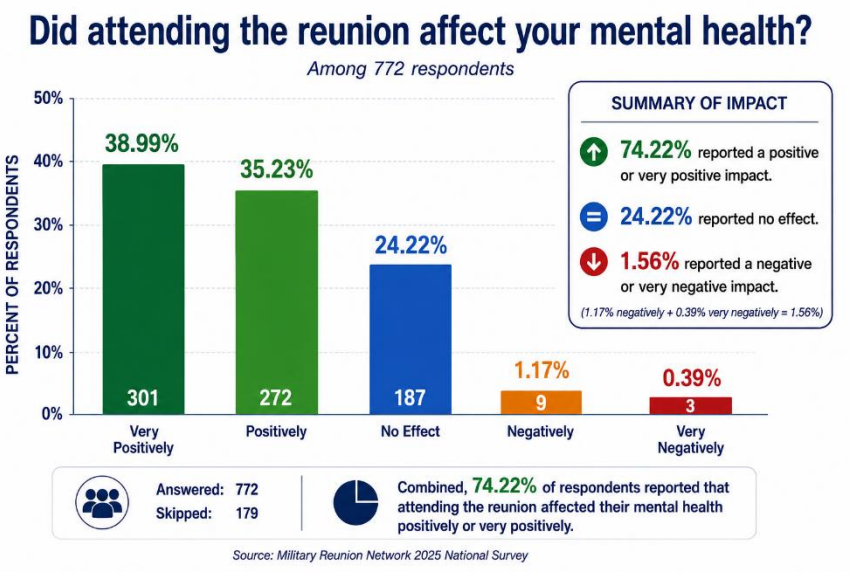
Most notably, the percentage of respondents reporting **no ongoing connection** with fellow Veterans declined from **17.6% before the reunion** to **6.1% after the reunion**.



These findings suggest that military reunions are associated with renewed communication among Veterans and the continuation of relationships beyond the reunion itself.
While the survey cannot determine whether reunions alone caused these increases, respondents consistently reported maintaining stronger and more frequent communication **after** attending reunion events.

8. Participant Perceptions of Well-Being

Participants who had attended military reunions were asked to evaluate the overall effect reunion participation had on their mental health.



The predominance of positive responses suggests that participants generally associate reunion attendance with improvements in their overall sense of well-being.

It is important to note that these responses represent participant perceptions rather than clinical evaluations. The survey did not include standardized psychological assessments or diagnostic instruments. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as self-reported experiences rather than medical outcomes. Nevertheless, the consistency of responses indicates that many Veterans perceive military reunions as beneficial to their emotional well-being.

9. The Continuation of Veteran Connectedness

The survey findings indicate that Veteran-to-Veteran connection frequently continued beyond the reunion itself. As detailed in Section 7, respondents reported increased communication with those they served with following reunion attendance through email, telephone, social media groups, and one-to-one social media communication.

Participants who indicated that military reunions positively affected their mental well-being were asked an additional open-ended question:

> “If you felt better, how long did this last after the reunion?”

Rather than selecting from predetermined answers, respondents were invited to describe their individual experiences. Responses varied considerably, but several recurring descriptions of duration appeared. Respondents reported positive effects lasting:

Several weeks
Several months
Until the next reunion
Ongoing or indefinitely, often in connection with continued communication with fellow Veterans

Some respondents specifically described continued contact and friendships after returning home. Others connected the duration of the positive feelings they experienced with looking forward to the next reunion or remembering the reunion afterward.

Representative responses included:

“Looking forward to the next reunion.”
“Till the next one.”
“Several weeks…always when I see the pics from that day.”

These qualitative responses complement the communication findings presented in Section 7. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that Veteran-to-Veteran connection frequently continued beyond the reunion itself, and respondents described positive effects associated with reunion attendance that extended well beyond the event.

Unlike numerical survey responses, these comments provide insight into how Veterans interpreted their reunion experiences. Although individual responses varied considerably, recurring themes emerged throughout the data.

Theme 1 — Reconnecting with Those Who Shared the Experience

Many respondents emphasized that military reunions allowed them to reconnect with individuals who understood their military service without requiring explanation.

Comments frequently described fellow Veterans as people who "understood," "had been there," or "shared the same experiences."

This theme appeared consistently regardless of military branch or era of service.

Theme 2 — Renewed Friendships

Participants commonly described reunions as opportunities to renew friendships that had remained important despite years or decades of separation.

Many respondents reported that relationships resumed quickly, often describing interactions as though little time had passed since military service.

Theme 3 — Increased Communication

As discussed in Section 7, respondents reported increased Veteran-to-Veteran communication following reunion attendance across the communication methods measured by the survey. The findings presented in this section further examine continued Veteran connectedness after the reunion.

The open-ended responses presented here reinforce those findings by providing respondents' descriptions of continued communication after the reunion.

Theme 4 — Feeling Understood

Numerous respondents indicated that conversations with fellow Veterans differed from discussions with family members or friends who had not served.

Several participants described military reunions as environments where experiences could be discussed openly among individuals with similar backgrounds.

One respondent summarized this perspective by stating:

> *"Only my military shipmates understand the impact military service can have."*

The following comments are a selection of open-ended responses related to the theme of Veteran-to-Veteran understanding. Responses are presented verbatim except for minor corrections necessary to protect personally identifying information. They are provided to illustrate participant perspectives and should not be interpreted as representative of all survey respondents.

Theme 5 — Positive Emotional Experiences

Many responses described reunion participation using terms such as:

- enjoyable
- meaningful
- uplifting
- reassuring
- comforting

Others simply noted that reunions "made me smile" or left them looking forward to future gatherings.

Although these descriptions are subjective, they appeared consistently throughout the survey responses.

10. Discussion

The findings presented in this report suggest that military reunions may serve functions extending beyond social gatherings or commemorative events.

Participants consistently reported renewed communication, strengthened peer relationships, and positive perceptions regarding their overall well-being following reunion attendance.

Perhaps the most notable finding was the continuation of Veteran-to-Veteran communication after reunions concluded. Increased contact through telephone, email, and social media suggests that reunions frequently re-establish relationships that continue beyond the event itself.

These observations align with broader research emphasizing the importance of social connectedness and peer relationships among Veterans. However, this survey was not designed to determine whether reunion participation directly caused the reported improvements.

Consequently, findings should be interpreted as participant perceptions rather than evidence of clinical outcomes.

The consistency of responses nevertheless suggests that military reunions represent an area worthy of additional investigation by researchers interested in Veteran social connectedness, peer support, and community engagement.

11. Policy Considerations

The findings presented in this report suggest several considerations for organizations, researchers, and policymakers concerned with Veteran well-being and social connectedness.

First, the survey indicates that military reunions may serve as more than commemorative or social events. Respondents described military reunions as opportunities to renew relationships, strengthen communication, and reconnect with individuals who shared similar military experiences.

Second, the continuation of Veteran-to-Veteran communication following reunion attendance suggests that reunions may contribute to maintaining peer relationships over time. As discussed in Sections 7 and 9, respondents reported increased communication through telephone, email, social media groups, and one-to-one social media communication following reunion attendance.

Third, these findings identify military reunions as a community-based activity warranting additional study, particularly research that follows Veterans over time rather than measuring their experiences at a single point.

To begin addressing that need, the Reunion Assistance Fund (RAF) has established a four-part survey series for Veterans attending military reunions that receive RAF financial assistance. Participants will be surveyed at four points: prior to the reunion, immediately following the reunion, six months after the reunion, and one year after the reunion. The surveys are designed to measure changes over time in Veteran-to-Veteran connection and self-reported mental well-being.

This approach will allow RAF to compare responses from multiple points in time and examine whether changes reported immediately following a reunion are maintained six months and one year later. The resulting data may also provide a foundation for future research into the relationship between military reunion participation, Veteran connectedness, and self-reported well-being.

While substantial research has examined formal clinical interventions, comparatively little attention has been directed toward naturally occurring Veteran support systems developed and maintained by Veterans themselves. This report does not establish how military reunions compare with those interventions, but its findings support further examination of Veteran-to-Veteran connection within the military reunion setting.

The results of this study should not be interpreted as evidence that military reunions replace professional mental health services or other established support programs. Rather, the findings indicate that reunion attendance is associated with renewed Veteran relationships and increased communication among respondents.

Future policy discussions concerning Veteran social connectedness may benefit from considering the role military reunions play in maintaining long-term Veteran relationships and from supporting additional research capable of measuring those relationships over time.

12. Study Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be considered within several limitations. Participation was voluntary, resulting in a self-selected sample that may not be representative of the broader U.S. Veteran population.

The findings are based on respondents' self-reported perceptions and experiences. The survey did not use standardized mental health assessment instruments and was not designed to diagnose mental health conditions, evaluate treatment effectiveness, or establish a causal relationship between military reunion attendance and mental health outcomes.
The survey also captured respondents with different military backgrounds, levels of reunion participation, and individual experiences, all of which may influence their responses.
Accordingly, the findings should be understood as descriptive of the Veterans who participated in this survey and should not be generalized to the entire Veteran population.

13. Conclusion

Military reunions have traditionally been viewed as opportunities to preserve military history, renew friendships, and honor shared service. The findings presented in this report suggest they may also serve a broader role in sustaining Veteran relationships and strengthening social connectedness.

Across multiple survey questions, respondents consistently reported that military reunions renewed communication with fellow Veterans, strengthened peer relationships, and contributed positively to their overall sense of well-being. Participants also reported that these connections frequently continued after the reunion through increased communication and ongoing interaction with those who served beside them.

Although the study was not designed to establish clinical outcomes or causal relationships, the consistency of participant responses indicates that military reunions represent an important aspect of many Veterans' lives and may contribute to maintaining enduring Veteran-to-Veteran support networks.

These findings suggest that military reunions warrant additional scholarly attention. Further research conducted in collaboration with academic institutions, healthcare researchers, Veteran organizations, and government agencies could expand understanding of the role military reunions play in supporting Veteran social connectedness and overall well-being.
As with all research, the purpose of this report is not to provide the final answer, but to contribute objective findings that inform future discussion and encourage continued investigation.

For More Information

The Military Reunion Network (MRN) and the Reunion Assistance Fund (RAF) are separate organizations with a shared commitment to strengthening Veteran connection through military reunions. MRN provides the education, resources, and guidance needed to help Veterans organize and sustain reunions, while RAF provides financial assistance to help military reunions start, survive, and thrive.
Together, the organizations are also working to expand understanding of the relationship between military reunion participation, Veteran-to-Veteran connectedness, and self-reported well-being.
For additional information about this report, the ongoing survey, the RAF longitudinal survey initiative, or the work of either organization, please contact:

Sharon Danitschek
President & CEO, The Military Reunion Network
Executive Director, Reunion Assistance Fund
sharon@militaryreunionnetwork.com
452-501-1430
militaryreunionnetwork.com
reunionassistancefund.org