

'To Serve Is In My Blood'

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Col. Inger Nilsson is **#StillServing**.

A VFW Life member who retired in 2015, Nilsson felt the call of duty as soon as COVID-19 began to spread. She immediately volunteered for the Virginia Medical Reserve Corps and worked briefly with the Alexandria Public Health Department. She's now spent nearly a year with the U.S. Army Regional Health Command-Atlantic (RHC-A).

"As the pandemic continued, I responded when the Army called out to their retirees to join the fight. I jumped at the opportunity to serve again! I was activated at the end of April 2020," recalled Nilsson, Deputy Chief, Public Health, COVID Response for RHC-A.

The RHC-A is the largest health command in Army Medicine. The region stretches from Maine to Puerto Rico and as far west as the Mississippi River. Within this area, there are 14 military treatment facilities and 30 smaller clinics and stand-alone installations, and they all deal with public health.

"My responsibilities include assisting these public health leaders in achieving military medical readiness in a COVID-19 environment through health risk communication, medical surveillance and disease reporting," Nilsson said.

"I'm currently overseeing the Region's overall COVID-19 vaccination operations."

Nilsson is drawing on her military background to meet the challenge. She was commissioned into the Medical Service Corps via the Reserve Officers Training Corps and served in the Army Reserves and National Guard for 30 years. While stationed around the world, including tours in the Asia Pacific realm and a deployment to Iraq, she gained experience in medical operations and planning, intelligence and diplomacy.

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Today, Nilsson feels it's a privilege to use her expertise to help the Region battle a virus. And she's leading by example in hopes of making a difference during the pandemic and getting more people back to activities they enjoy.

"I am responsible for tracking the number of military and civilian personnel and Tricare beneficiaries who have received the COVID-19 vaccine at all the installations in our Region," stated Nilsson.

"When I was offered the vaccine I gladly accepted...I was happy to be a part of the solution to bring this pandemic in our great nation to an end. Until then, I remain committed to masking, handwashing and other public health measures within my control to help stop the spread of infection."

Nilsson also serves on the board of WISE Zambia, a nonprofit empowering women and children in one of the poorest provinces in Zambia through educational and agricultural programs. She's looking forward to the time when COVID-19 is no longer a threat in the U.S. and abroad – and she's dedicated to seeing that happen, even if it means giving up retirement a bit longer.

"Why do it? Simple. To help my community," Nilsson said.

"To serve is in my blood. It has been an honor to return to active duty in the Army and to serve my country in this capacity; I have learned so much along the way."

To find out more about the VFW's #StillServing campaign or to share your story, visit vfw.org/StillServing.