A New Way to Keep Serving

Buck Chambers found a place for his military experience in public safety, business, and the Vets to Drones Community

By Andrew Langholf, Vets to Drones Public Affairs

VETS TO DRONES

Buck Chambers remembers looking up during a class he was teaching on maps and modeling. Law enforcement officers and emergency management personnel were taking notes. Their interest helped settle a question he had carried into civilian life: whether the knowledge he had gained in the military would still be useful.



The group poses beneath Vets to Drones tents at Central Carolina Community College in Sanford, North Carolina, in August 2025. The gathering included Buck Chambers' donation of a drone to U.S. Army veteran Gibril: Courtesy Vets to Drones.

"They need what we know in our minds," Chambers explained. "We can give that information to them."

Supporting his family was the immediate concern when Chambers left the military. After seven deployments and years apart, he also needed to reconnect with them. He was trying to figure out what a civilian career could look like while finding his place at home.

He heard about Vets to Drones while learning to fly drones in a Wounded Warrior Project cohort. A VTD member suggested he look into the organization. Chambers signed up, met founder Chris Lewis, and began a friendship that grew from their shared interest in the work.

For Chambers, VTD offers a community where he can put continued purpose into practice. In the mountains of Montana, he found that purpose in connection with God, his family, nature and the future generations of America through a community of veterans helping veterans. He sees VTD as central to how he lives out service after service.

Workforce development is one way he can contribute. Chambers also sees opportunities for veterans to find purpose through STEM education, conservation, recreational therapy, and disaster response and recovery. Meaningful work gives veterans a reason to stay connected, support one another and contribute to their communities, he said.

Lewis traces VTD's origins to the need for community. After struggling to find camaraderie in civilian life, he wanted a place for veterans to land. The workforce-development program followed as members began asking how they could turn drone flying into a career.

VTD's partnership with the Midwest Microelectronics Consortium (MMEC) connects that workforce mission to the technology powering the aircraft. MMEC brings industry, academia and government together to strengthen U.S. microelectronics capabilities. Through its work with VTD, MMEC introduces veterans to the sector via drones and autonomous systems.

For Chambers, MMEC's contribution has been to his technical education. His work as an MMEC intern helped him consolidate and deepen his understanding of uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) components, down to the microelectronic level. That experience complements his studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where he is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Uncrewed and Autonomous Systems and expects to graduate in early 2027.

VTD's reporting for the MMEC project lists 110 job placements, 28 workshops and 36 veteran startups supported from October 1, 2024, through September 2026.

For MMEC CEO Dr. Matt Casto, preparing that workforce includes "maximizing the amazing skills our military brings."

Chambers had already founded Heightened Senses before receiving support from VTD or MMEC. Neither organization helped establish the company. He describes Heightened Senses as an SBA-certified service-disabled veteran-owned small business focused on UAS and counter-UAS integration, reselling, federal fulfillment, training and advisory services.

Moving into business meant reconsidering how Chambers saw the people around him.

"At first, I got into the space thinking that I needed to be competitive," he recalled, "and everybody was a competitor."

Then he recognized something familiar from his military service: people helping one another get the job done. He began asking others about their work and acknowledging what they did well. Working together proved more effective than treating everyone as a rival.

"Everything really opened up for me," he added.

The habits he relies on now are familiar, too: discipline, planning, and a network of people he can count on. VTD helped him recognize how many veterans within the organization want to enter the uncrewed systems industry and need help finding a path. His goal is to secure contracts through Heightened Senses that create jobs and connect qualified veterans with those opportunities.

He is also exploring how drones and robotics can be applied in public-sector organizations. His goal is to make communities safer while providing veterans with ways to continue contributing.

Casto described practical knowledge as an asset for the industries MMEC serves. Veterans bring experience with how technology is used outside a laboratory, he noted, including the operations, logistics and support needed to make it work. MMEC's collaboration with VTD starts with problems veterans recognize and then examines the components and capabilities that make a solution possible.

MMEC's contribution also includes helping make technical material understandable. April Vanover, MMEC's Workforce Development Director, described a STEM drone kit the organizations are developing together. VTD is building the technical content and platforms, while Vanover contributes feedback on how to explain the material to different audiences.

As technology advances, she stressed, the people expected to work with it need preparation as well.

"We need to have the talent," Vanover said, "walking alongside it."

Chambers encourages other veterans to consider what they already know, what they have done, and whom they can turn to for help. There is no need to take on every aspect of the drone industry at once.

"Start small," he advised, "but don't limit yourself."

He urges veterans to reflect on their prior work and build on it. His experience teaching public safety professionals showed him that skills he once questioned could be useful beyond the military.

After leaving service, Chambers felt his chance to make an impact might be over. When asked what feels possible now, he spoke about the people he can help through the drone community.

"I think this is a continuing purpose," he said.