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**NEWSMAKERS**

## Bid preferences help veteran-owned businesses compete

By Denise Perreault  
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*Arthur N. Mabbett remembers well returning from active duty during the Vietnam War, the snide comments and criticism he was subjected to more than 30 years ago. Now, the founder of a successful environmental consulting and engineering firm, he wants to assist veterans returning home today who want to start their own businesses and, in particular, do business with the federal government. As of late June, 31,368 American soldiers in the Iraq War had been seriously wounded.*



PHOTO COURTESY MABBETT & ASSOCIATES

**PBN:** Tell us about your Army duty during the Vietnam War.

**MABBETT:** I was on active duty in the Army, yes, from 1970 to 1976. When I got off active duty, I was a captain and then I stayed in the Army Reserves until 1989 and was discharged as a major.

I did not serve in Vietnam. I ended up serving in a number of different locations, primarily in the Pacific, from a base in Hawaii. ... I was one of the first environmental science officers brought onto active duty in the Army. ...

**INDUSTRY VETERAN:** Mabbett & Associates President Arthur Mabbett is eager to help other military veterans start their own businesses.

[His assignment in Hawaii was to relocate over 12 months the 25th Infantry Division, 200 aircraft and about 50,000 dependents to Oahu, without causing an impact on the Hawaiian environment or tourism.] It would be like taking 70,000 people and say we're going to put them in the middle of Providence. ... I ended up over my military career suffering some arthritic injuries and disabilities.

**PBN:** How does the government help veterans in business?

**MABBETT:** President Bush signed executive order No. 13360 [in 2004] establishing priority hiring preference for veteran-owned small businesses bidding for government contracts. ... We established a federal services group and we began to pursue federal government work. ...

Until the executive order really implemented preferences for veterans and disabled veterans, with the disabled veteran getting the priority, veterans had an extremely difficult time, if not an impossible time, to compete for federal work. ... Many veterans still are not aware that these laws exist. It would be nice to be able to see more veterans in Rhode Island and the [southeastern Massachusetts] pursue business with the federal government.

**PBN:** How does the preference provision work?

**MABBETT:** The preference is for anyone, from a contractor to an engineer to an accountant, any service provider, anyone who has any product that the federal government buys, but the business must become certified as a veteran-owned small business or a service-disabled, veteran-owned small business.

You can now more effectively compete for federal work, so we've gone from less than 2 percent of our sales in the federal sector to more than 35 percent.

There are opportunities to compete for federal government projects where the federal government actually can say, "This project is going to be set aside." It's set aside only for veteran-owned or service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses.

**PBN:** What other provisions are there to help veterans obtain business from the federal government?

**MABBETT:** For service-disabled veterans, the U.S. government has established a goal whereby every year 3 percent of the total federal government budget should be contracted to service-disabled, veteran-owned small business. That's an awful lot of money. ...

There's also a provision in the federal law that says a government-contracting officer can award what are called "sole-source contracts," which are contracts that are not competitive and can be awarded directly to service-disabled, veteran-owned or [just] veteran-owned small businesses. Generally speaking, they can be awarded for \$3 million to \$5 million, if the firm has the appropriate experience, qualifications and offers a fair and reasonable price.

**PBN:** Why do you want to help veterans?

**MABBETT:** I believe, quite frankly, that you owe people. You should give something back.

I had a great opportunity, for example, when I went to the University of Massachusetts. I had a professor there who guided me into the environmental field. When I was in the Army, my generals actually told me to get out and open my own business. So, I've had people who all along have helped me and I owe something, not only to those people's memories, but to others, to help them. That's why I'm active at the University of Massachusetts. ... I'm helping the university set up some international exchange programs, with Scotland. I'm active in the Scottish government, helping the Scottish economy grow.

With veterans, I went through the Vietnam era. That was a difficult era for us. The military, and the Army in particular, took the brunt of all of the negative comments and innuendoes and snide remarks for years, for decades. We blamed it all on the Army. I can remember when my sister got married and I gave her away. I was on active duty, I was a captain ... I came to the wedding and because I was on active duty, I had to wear my uniform. I wore my officer's dress uniform. I had someone come up to me when I was at the event, and look at me and say, "What kind of a monkey suit is that?"

As a businessman, I would be more than willing – and I've done this for a number of veterans already – to provide some advice and counsel based upon our experiences.

The biggest hurdle in doing work with the federal government is just knowing what you need to do and where you get the information from. And I would help with the private sector, too. I've done work in the private sector for 30 years now. ... I'm honored to help others. •**INTERVIEW**

### **Arthur N. Mabbett**

**POSITION:** President and CEO of Mabbett & Associates Inc.

**BACKGROUND:** Mabbett, an environmental scientist and engineer, established his consulting firm in 1980. The company, headquartered in Bedford, Mass., has a southern New England office in Pawtucket and a mid-Atlantic office in Reston, Va. A similar affiliate he also owns, Mabbett & Associates Ltd., has four offices in the United Kingdom. The two companies combined employ 55 people and have annual sales of more than \$5 million. He is an Army veteran.

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry, University of Massachusetts Boston, 1969; master's degree in environmental science, Rutgers University in New Jersey, 1970.

**FIRST JOB:** As a teenager, he was a handyman, custodian and short-order cook at the Medford Boat Club.

**RESIDENCE:** Medford, Mass.

**AGE:** 62