



## **2026 Parent/Guardian & Camper Handbook**

Sessions: July 5 – August 8, 2026 · Five one-week sessions  
Ages 7–12 · Co-ed Residential · \$475/week · Scholarships Available

**Garrett Sieloff, Camp Director**

camptrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet · (231) 519-4215

[www.vfwcamptrotter.org](http://www.vfwcamptrotter.org)

## A Note from the Director

Welcome to VFW Camp Trotter. I'm Garrett Sieloff — U.S. Coast Guard veteran, Eagle Scout, and new Director of our camp.

Camp Trotter was established in 1949 by the generous land donation of a war time poultry farm by VFW member, Ralph W. Trotter. It is now owned and operated by the Michigan Veterans of Foreign Wars. This summer we are reopening the updated facilities with a new and exciting camp program which fosters courage, community, and curiosity. I want every family to feel reassured and comfortable in sending their child, as I would as a father of two young children, would also want.

Our staff and I will be caring for your child this summer, and it is a responsibility we take seriously. This handbook covers the practical necessities: drop-off, pickup, packing, health care, our staff training standards, communication, and our camp policies. If something in here is unclear, please call or email me directly at the contact below on each page

Camp is one week. It goes fast. However, I know the confidence, friendships, and memories your child builds here will last a lifetime.

*See you at camp,*

**Garrett Sieloff** — Camp Director, VFW Camp Trotter

## Camp Trotter at a Glance

### 2026 Quick Reference

Location: 5566 E 86th St, Newaygo, MI 49337

Sessions: Five one-week sessions | July 5 – August 8, 2026

Week 1: July 5–11      Week 4: July 26 – Aug 1

Week 2: July 12–18      Week 5: Aug 2–8

Week 3: July 19–25

Ages: 7–12 years old (co-ed)

Campers: Approximately 88 campers per session

Tuition: \$475 per week | Full-to-partial scholarships available

Director: Garrett Sieloff | [camptrrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet](mailto:camptrrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet) | (231) 519-4215

VFW State HQ: (517) 485-9456 | 924 N. Washington Ave, Lansing, MI 48906

## Who We Are

VFW Camp Trotter is a non-profit residential camp wholly owned and operated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of Michigan. Our mission is to cultivate Courage, Community, and Curiosity in

children and youth through accessible outdoor programs that build resilience, foster belonging, and inspire life-long learning.

We proudly prioritize military-connected families, and we welcome all young people who share a spirit of service and curiosity. Camp is not just a summer activity, but a community. One where your child will be known by name, pushed to try things they thought they couldn't do, and will go home asking to come back next summer.

**Courage** — to stay true to self, to speak up, to try new things, to remain resilient.

**Community** — to belong, to contribute, to connect, to receive.

**Curiosity** — to question, to experiment, to explore, to improve.

## Preparing for Camp

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### Drop-Off – 1:00 PM Sunday

Drop-off is Sunday. Plan to arrive between 1:00 and 2:00 PM. A staff member will greet you when you arrive and assist in directing you where to park. Bring luggage to the pavilion where check-in is being conducted.

At the pavilion check-in, your camper will go through a brief health screening with our Camp Medical Officer. All medications will be collected and logged, and you'll confirm emergency contact information. Your camper will then receive their cabin assignment.

A counselor will greet your camper at the cabin where families can say a quick goodbye, and afterwards, your camper will head to the baseball field where the rest of growing crowd is playing field games.

**Pro tip:** Keep your goodbyes warm but brief. A quick, confident send-off is genuinely easier on your camper than a drawn-out departure. Within 20 minutes they'll be too busy to miss you.

### Pick-Up - 10:00 AM Saturday

Pick-up is Saturday. Campers will have packed their belongings by 9:00 AM and will be available for pickup beginning at 10:00 AM. Camp officially closes once the final camper has departed. Please be on time — our staff has worked a full week and they're counting on your punctuality.

Only individuals listed on your enrollment form as authorized for pickup will be released with your camper. **Bring a photo ID. No exceptions, no workarounds — this is one of the places where we are completely inflexible, and we're proud of it.**

## What to Pack

A week at an outdoor camp in Michigan in July means layers, rain gear, and shoes that can get wet. **Label everything with your child's first and last name** (not just their initials). Lost-and-found reunions are much smoother that way.

## Clothing

- 6–8 t-shirts (including 1–2 you don't mind getting paint or tie-dye on)
- 2-3 pairs of long pants or jeans
- 3-4 pairs of shorts
- 2 sweatshirts or fleece layers — Michigan nights can be cool even in July
- 1 rain jacket or poncho
- 8 pairs of underwear and socks
- Pajamas
- 2 swimsuits
- Sturdy closed-toe shoes for activities (required)
- Sandals or flip-flops for around waterfront and shower use
- Optional: hat or baseball cap

## Bedding

- Twin-size sleeping bag *or* twin sheets + blanket
- Pillow with pillowcase

## Toiletries & Personal Items

- Toothbrush, toothpaste, floss
- Shampoo, conditioner, body wash
- 1 bath towels + 1 beach towel + wash cloth
- Deodorant
- Sunscreen — bring enough for the week (non-aerosol preferred)
- Insect repellent — non-aerosol
- Shower sandals
- Brush or comb

## Gear & Extras

- Reusable water bottle (labeled)
- Flashlight or headlamp with fresh batteries
- Small backpack or drawstring bag for activities
- Mesh laundry bag for dirty clothes (optional)
- Sunglasses
- Disposable camera (optional but fun)
- Stationery, stamps, and envelopes if your camper wants to write home

## What Not to Bring

- Cell phones, tablets, gaming devices, smart watches, or any other personal electronics — these will be stored and returned at pickup
- Expensive jewelry, watches, or anything irreplaceable

- Food, candy, gum, or snacks in the cabin — outside food creates issues with allergies and uninvited wildlife (we provide snacks from our Mess Hall in the afternoons and evenings)
- Weapons of any kind, including pocket knives
- Alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, vaping products, or illegal substances — possession results in immediate dismissal, no exceptions
- Pets — we love animals too, but not at check-in

## A Day at Camp Trotter

Here's what a typical day looks like. Sunday and Saturday have their own rhythm (drop-off and pick-up days), but Monday through Friday generally flows like this:

**Summer 2026**

# **A Day at VFW Camp Trotter**

**Morning**

7:00 **Early Risers Club**

7:15 **Wake Up**

7:50 **Flag Raising**

8:00 **Breakfast**

9:15 **1<sup>st</sup> Program**

10:30 **2<sup>nd</sup> Program**

11:30 **Community Care**

12:00 **Lunch!**

**Afternoon**

13:00 **Afternoon Siesta**

14:00 **3<sup>rd</sup> Program**

15:30 **Free Choice!**

17:00 **Community Care**

17:50 **Flag Lowering**

18:00 **Dinner**

19:00 **Evening Program**

20:30 **Campfire**

**Cabin Time at 21:00 & Lights Out by 22:00**

## Evening & Special Programs

No two nights at camp are the same. Each week includes a mix of camp-wide quest activity games, outdoor skill-building evenings, cabin choice nights, a big mid-week event, and a Friday camper showcase

## Community Care

Every day at Camp Trotter includes intentional Community Care time, which is the brief window before lunch and dinner where we pause the activity schedule and do something that matters beyond ourselves. This might be writing care packages to deployed service members, sending letters to senior centers, picking up litter on trail, or taking on a camp improvement project together. It's a small thing, but it's how we make sure camp isn't just a fun week — it's a week with meaning.

## Activities & Program

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Every cabin group rotates through structured activity blocks each day. Activities are led by trained staff and designed for kids ages 7–12, regardless of experience level. The goal is to try things — not to be perfect at them.

### On Land

**Archery** — Certified instructors teach proper form, safety, and technique. There is something genuinely satisfying about that first time an arrow hits the target — ask any camper.

**Arts & Crafts** — Tie-dye a camp shirt, build something, paint something, make a project you'll actually want to take home. No artistic experience required — just a tolerance for mess and an appreciation for the creative process.

**Sports & Games** — Capture the Flag, kickball, basketball, volleyball, Four Square, Camp Olympics, and more. If it involves moving, competing, and cheering for your cabin crew, we're playing it.

**Geocaching & Orienteering** — Navigate the campgrounds using coordinates, landmarks, and good old-fashioned problem solving. Part treasure hunt, part skill-builder — entirely worth it when your cabin finds the cache.

### At Sea

Swimming, canoeing, fishing, and water games on the shores of Bills Lake are core parts of the week. All waterfront activity is supervised by a certified lifeguard and assisting aquatic staff.

Every camper completes a swim assessment on Sunday after arrival to determine their swim zone designation. This is how we assign appropriate safe zones based on current swimming ability. Campers have all week to practice and may retest to advance to the next zone. Campers who are not *yet* strong swimmers are welcomed and fully supported at the waterfront throughout their week.

**Red** — Beginner. Shallow water only, highest supervision.

**White** — Intermediate. Limited depth, moderate supervision. \*Required for canoes and paddle boats.

**Blue** — Strong swimmer. Full access, standard supervision.

## In the Air

**Rocketry** — Campers design, build, and launch their own stomp rockets. Engineering, physics, and a healthy amount of “let’s see how high that goes” — all in one activity.

**Stargazing & Astronomy** — When the sun goes down, the program doesn’t stop. Campers have the opportunity to read the night sky, identify constellations, and get a sense of just how big the universe actually is. Best viewed from the field on a clear Michigan night with no screens in sight.

**Nature & Bird Study** — Eyes up. Michigan summers are full of wildlife worth finding if you know how to look. Identifying birds by sight and sound is quieter than rocketry — but the payoff when you spot something rare is just as good.

## Communication

### During the Week

Camp is designed to be a screen-free experience. Kids who are not checking their phones are actually talking to each other, looking at the sky, and figuring out who they are without an audience. It works.

Campers do not have access to cell phones or personal electronics during the session. These will be collected at check-in and returned at pickup. We know this might feel uncomfortable for both you and your camper heading into the week. That discomfort usually resolves by Tuesday.

*\*We will provide a means of accessing a mid-week update on the camp, along with access to an online folder of pictures from your camper’s session.*

### Letters & Care Packages

Old-fashioned mail is alive and well at Camp Trotter. However, postage can take time, so letters sent from home during the beginning of the week may arrive after your camper has left. We suggest leaving your letters (with your campers name clearly written on it) with a staff member at drop-off. You can leave as many as you like. We will also have a booth at drop-off for any lastminute notes you may wish to have delivered later in the week.

**Please do not send care packages.** If you choose to post a letter (accepting it may not arrive in time before departure) they may be mailed here:

#### Mailing Address During Session

[Camper’s Full Name], Cabin [#]  
VFW Camp Trotter  
5566 E 86th St  
Newaygo, MI 49337

*Mail a letter by Tuesday to better ensure it arrives before end of week.*

## Contacting Camp

If you have a concern, need an update, or just want to check in, contact the director directly. We will always pick up or call you back the same day.

**Garrett Sieloff, Camp Director** | [camptrrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet](mailto:camptrrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet) | (231) 519-4215

**VFW State Headquarters** | [adjutant@vfwmi.vet](mailto:adjutant@vfwmi.vet) | (517) 485-9456

## When We Will Contact You

We communicate with families about health and medical matters based on the nature of the situation.

**Minor incidents:** small scrapes, bruises, blisters, brief headaches, or mild stomach upset that resolved quickly are handled by our Medical Officer, documented in our internal care log, and communicated to you via a written note sent home with your camper at Saturday pickup.

**Moderate situations:** anything requiring a physician consultation, an injury that kept your camper out of activities for more than half a day, or any situation we'd want to know about immediately if our own child were involved — we will call you the same day.

**Serious incidents:** hospitalization, broken bones, significant illness, or anything life-threatening — we call you immediately, without exception.

If you ever have questions about your camper's health or wellbeing during the session, you are always welcome to call the director at (231) 519-4215.

## Health & Medical Care

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VFW Camp Trotter maintains a staffed medical station — our Aid Station — for the duration of every session. We operate under Michigan state licensing requirements and in consultation with a licensed physician.

### Our Medical Officer

Our Medical Officer is a prior U.S. Army Health Specialist and licensed healthcare professional (Licensed Camp Medical Officer) who lives on the campgrounds for the duration of each session. The Aid Station is open Sunday at drop-off and remains open till Saturday at pick-up. Medical coverage is 24 hours a day while campers are on site.

If the Medical Officer needs to leave camp in event of an emergency, a designated administrative staff member with CPR/First Aid certification assumes temporary coverage.

### Health Screening at Arrival

Every camper goes through a health screening within the first few hours of arrival. This includes:

- Review of health history and medical forms

- Collection and logging of all medications – campers are not allowed to hold on to their medication (including tylenol, motrin, benadryl, melatonin, rash creams, eye drops, etc)
- A brief physical observation — we're looking for signs of illness, injury, or anything that might affect your camper's participation or the health of the larger group
- A direct conversation with your camper about any current health needs

Accurate health information on your enrollment forms is essential to this process. Please be thorough. Information shared with our Medical Officer is treated as confidential and shared with staff *only on a need-to-know basis*.

## Medications

All medications — prescription and over-the-counter — must be turned in to the Medical Officer at check-in. No exceptions. Medications must be in their original containers with the prescribed dosage and frequency clearly labeled.

Scheduled medication is administered at the following times unless a physician specifies otherwise:

### Standard Medication Times

9:00 AM · 1:00 PM · 7:00 PM · 9:30 PM

All medications are stored under lock and key. Cabin counselors will direct campers to the Aid Station at scheduled medication times.

**Epi-pens and inhalers:** These should be labeled and turned into the Medical Officer. Staff will ensure they are accessible in the appropriate emergency scenarios.

**If your camper is found with undisclosed medication,** it will be collected and reported to the director. We take this seriously because the safety of your child, *and others*, depends on us knowing exactly what medications are present.

## Emergency Care

In the event of a medical emergency, a designated camp vehicle is on site and ready to depart at all times. Emergency transportation is coordinated through Life EMS, dispatched via 911. Campers requiring hospital care are transported to Spectrum Health Gerber Memorial Emergency Room, located at 212 S Sullivan Ave, Fremont, MI — approximately 25 minutes from camp. Emergency contact information is posted at the Aid Station, the dining hall, and the director's office.

## Illness at Camp

Campers showing signs of contagious illness will be evaluated by the Medical Officer, parents/guardians notified, and safely quarantined as necessary to protect the broader camp community. If your camper is deemed necessary to send home due to illness, you will be notified immediately and expected to arrange pickup. We will not ask families to pick up campers for minor ailments — *only situations where continued participation poses a genuine health risk*.

Signs we take seriously and will call you about: fever over 100.4°F, vomiting, significant rash, severe abdominal pain, and any confirmed or suspected communicable disease.

## Before You Drop Off

Please do not send a camper to camp who is currently ill. If your child develops symptoms in the days immediately before their session, call us before arriving. We would rather help you sort it out in advance than have a sick camper on our hands an hour after drop-off.

## Hygiene

A week at an outdoor camp in the summer means your child will come home with stories, friendships, and — let's be honest — a fair amount of dirt. Please pack enough soap, shampoo, and hygiene supplies for the full week. Shower facilities are available to campers every morning, afternoon, and evening. We'll remind them to brush their teeth twice daily too.

## Homesickness

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Homesickness is normal. It is not a sign that something is wrong with your child, that you made a bad decision, or that camp is failing them. It's a sign that your kid is attached to people they love — which is a good thing.

Most homesickness at Camp Trotter peaks on Sunday night or Monday morning and resolves significantly by Tuesday. Campers who are kept busy, given meaningful tasks, and supported by caring counselors almost always turn the corner quickly.

## What We Do

Our counselors are trained to recognize and respond to homesickness. They will acknowledge your camper's feelings, keep them engaged in activities and cabin life, give them connection and purpose during Community Care time, and check in regularly throughout the week. If a camper's homesickness is persistent and significantly affecting their ability to participate, we will contact you to discuss options.

## What You Can Do

The most helpful thing you can do before camp is talk about it directly — not to promise it won't happen, but to prepare your camper for the feeling. Something like: *"You might miss home this week. That's completely normal. It usually goes away fast, and when it does, camp gets really good."*

Do not promise to pick them up if they don't like it. Children given an easy exit rarely push through the discomfort that leads to growth. If you get a difficult call from a homesick camper, stay calm, keep the conversation brief and upbeat, and let your camper know you'll be there Saturday.

If you have significant concerns about your child's ability to manage separation, please note this on your enrollment forms and contact me before the session begins. We can prepare accordingly.

## Behavior, Community Standards & Discipline

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Camp Trotter operates on a simple principle: every camper deserves to feel safe, included, and respected. The rules we enforce exist to protect that standard for everyone — not to make life harder for individual campers.

## Camper Code of Conduct

- Respect staff and fellow campers
- Follow safety rules and instructions the first time
- Care for camp property and the natural environment
- No bullying, harassment, or exclusionary behavior
- Practice honesty and take accountability for your actions

## How We Handle Behavioral Issues

Our approach is progressive, not punitive. We want campers to correct course and stay — not to have an excuse to send them home. The general progression looks like this:

- Counselor-level conversation: direct, private, respectful. We tell the camper what happened, why it matters, and what we expect instead.
- Director involvement: if the behavior continues or is more serious, the director has a direct conversation with the camper. Parents may be notified depending on the situation.
- Parent contact: for persistent, serious, or safety-related behavior, we will call you to discuss a plan.
- Dismissal: reserved for situations involving the safety or wellbeing of the broader camp community, or clear violations of the Code of Conduct. There is no refund for dismissal.

## Bullying & Harassment

Bullying — physical, verbal, or social — will not be tolerated. We take every report seriously. Counselors are trained to identify bullying behavior, intervene promptly, and report to the director. Campers are encouraged to speak to any staff member if they feel targeted, excluded, or unsafe.

We don't just respond to bullying — we actively build a culture where it's less likely to occur. Community Care, cabin crew bonding, facilitated group games, and our Courage, Community, Curiosity framework all serve that purpose.

## Electronics & Prohibited Items

Cell phones and electronics collected at check-in will be returned at checkout. If a camper is found with a prohibited item during the session, it will be confiscated and returned at pickup. Repeat violations escalate to director involvement.

Possession of alcohol, tobacco, vaping products, weapons, or illegal substances results in immediate dismissal. We don't negotiate on this. It protects everyone.

## Safety

Safety at Camp Trotter is not a checkbox — it's the foundation that makes everything else possible. Here's what you should know about how we operate.

## Staff Qualifications & Background Checks

All Camp Trotter staff are background-checked prior to employment. Counselors and program staff receive training in child supervision, behavior management, emergency procedures, CPR and First Aid certified, and child protection laws prior to the first session. Our Waterfront Director holds current lifeguard certifications.

## Supervision

Campers are under adult supervision and accounted for at all times. Cabin counselors are responsible for their assigned cabin group throughout the day and night. Activity area staff provide additional supervision during structured programs. Our director and administrative staff provide oversight of the full camp operation and are available 24 hours a day during sessions.

## Camper Release Policy

Your camper will only be released to individuals listed as authorized on your enrollment form. A photo ID is required at pickup. If you need to add or remove an authorized individual, contact the director in advance of the session — changes cannot be made at the gate on pickup day.

If there are custody or legal restrictions governing your child's release, provide documentation with your enrollment packet. We will honor those restrictions strictly.

## Emergency Procedures

Camp Trotter maintains written emergency action plans for severe weather, fire, waterfront emergencies, missing camper protocols, and medical emergencies. All staff are trained on these procedures before the first session.

In the event of an emergency requiring parent notification, you will be contacted by phone as quickly as possible. Social media is not a reliable source for information during an emergency — call us directly.

## Child Protection

All Camp Trotter staff are mandatory reporters under Michigan law. Any suspected abuse, neglect, or maltreatment observed during camp will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Staff are trained to recognize indicators of abuse and follow proper reporting protocols. This is not negotiable and is not subject to parental preferences.

Camp policy prohibits one-on-one situations between staff and campers outside of the view of other staff or campers. This protects both children and staff.

## Tuition, Scholarships & Financial Assistance

### 2026 Tuition

One week session: \$475

Full payment due: July 1, 2026 (unless scholarship assistance is approved)

Payment options: Check payable to VFW Camp Trotter

Debit/credit card by phone: (517) 485-9456

Secure invoice by email request

VFW Post/Auxiliary Sponsorship

## Scholarships

Cost should not be the reason a child doesn't come to camp. We mean that. Full and partial scholarships are available and we encourage families who need assistance to apply without hesitation — there's no stigma in asking, and your camper's experience at camp will be identical regardless of how tuition is covered.

Scholarship applications are available at [vfwcamptrrotter.org](http://vfwcamptrrotter.org) under the *Camp Information > Camper Applications* section. Submit your scholarship application along with your enrollment form.

## VFW Post Sponsorships

Local VFW Posts and Auxiliaries can sponsor campers in their community. If your family is connected to a VFW/ Auxiliary Post, ask your Post Commander about sponsorship. Sponsorship forms are included in the enrollment packet and available on our website.

## Enrollment

Enrollment for the 2026 season is open now. Enrollment forms, scholarship applications, and VFW Post sponsorship forms are all available at [vfwcamptrrotter.org](http://vfwcamptrrotter.org).

### How to Enroll

We have yet to adopt an expensive Customer Relation Management (CRM) software to conduct enrollment through, and intend to remedy it within the coming years without deviating from our core values of affordability and access for families. In the interim, we ask that forms be mailed to our VFW Headquarters:

#### Return Enrollment Packet To

VFW Department of Michigan

ATTN: Camp Trotter

924 N. Washington Avenue

Lansing, MI 48906

Questions? Contact Garrett Sieloff:  
camptrrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet | (231) 519-4215

\*In the interest of protecting your child's personal information, we ask that completed forms not be sent as unencrypted email attachments.

We encourage you keep a copy of everything you submit.

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Can my child call home during the week?**

Camp Trotter is a phone-free experience. Campers do not have access to personal phones during the session. In a genuine family emergency, you can always call us and we will connect you directly with your child. For everything else — it can wait until Saturday. Your camper will be fine.

### **What if my child has dietary restrictions or food allergies?**

Our Food Services Director holds a culinary degree and has significant experience accommodating dietary needs. Please document all dietary restrictions and food allergies thoroughly on your enrollment form. Our food service team reviews this information before each session. For severe allergies, contact the director before your camper's session to confirm accommodation.

### **What if my child has never been away from home before?**

Many of our campers fall into this category. Our staff are trained to help kids transition, our cabin structure creates instant community, and our program keeps everyone too engaged in having fun and learning to dwell on anxiety. Review the Homesickness section of this handbook and call us if you have concerns before the session.

### **Is there really a 7-foot Walleye in Bills Lake?**

Ah, yes. You must have heard about Billy the Walleye. Legend has it, he's out there. He's friendly though, and will not interfere with swim or water activities. You'll have to ask your camper at pick-up for the full story.

### **What if my camper needs to leave early?**

Early departures are discouraged and can significantly affect your camper's experience and that of their cabin. If a genuine emergency requires early pickup, contact the director immediately. Early departure must be arranged in advance with the director — we will not release a camper to anyone not on the authorized pickup list, regardless of the reason given at arrival.

## Can I visit during the week?

Visits during the session are not permitted. This is standard practice across residential camps and it's not about keeping families away — it's about allowing campers to fully settle into the camp community. Family visits interrupt that process and, in our experience, consistently make homesickness worse for the camper.

## One More Thing

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Camp Trotter is a place with legacy. The cabins have history. The lake has character. The traditions are from seven decades of summers. We are remaining true to the spirit and character of summer growth through nurturing your child's courage to try something new, providing a community to share the experience with, and fueling their spark of curiosity that will drive their engagement and exploration long after pick-day at camp.

Your child is going to do things at camp that surprises you in the best way possible. They're going to struggle with something and push through it. They're going to make a friend they didn't expect. They're going to come home a little sunburned, a little tired, and a lot more confident than they left. That's the whole deal.

*Thank you for trusting us with your camper. We'll take great care of them!*

**Garrett Sieloff** — Camp Director, VFW Camp Trotter

camptrrotterdirector@vfwmi.vet · (231) 519-4215 · [www.vfwcamptrrotter.org](http://www.vfwcamptrrotter.org)

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*VFW Camp Trotter · A program of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of Michigan · Established 1949*